

WORKSHOP

KEN SMITH LANDSCAPE ARCHITECT

June 15, 2005

Tony Avella
Chair of the Subcommittee on Zoning and Franchises
City Hall
New York, New York 10007

Dear City Council,

I am writing about the Dan Kiley landscape at Lincoln Center. I have been active in advocating the preservation and restoration of the best examples of modern-era built landscapes. Several years ago I was the landscape architect for the restoration of the modern-era landscape at the Lever House. New York City has few modern-era landscapes. The best known, Paley Park, the MoMA sculpture garden, and Greenacre Park are well protected by non-profit patrons or foundations. I believe that Dan Kiley's design work at Lincoln Center belongs in this same group of the city's protected modern-era works.

Kiley, who passed away last year, was one of the foremost landscape architects of the twentieth century and his built works rank among the masterpieces of the modern-era. His work stands alongside that of architects Eero Saarinen, Philip Johnson, Wallace Harrison and Max Abramowitz as an integral part of the Lincoln Center campus. Kiley's work at Lincoln Center includes the North Court and Damrosch Park, both of which are considered prime examples of his mature style of work. Kiley's travertine planters with their tightly spaced tree bosques give a strong sense of order, extending the architecture of Lincoln Center into the landscape to create a unified campus space. His signature use of geometry, simple and well-proportioned planters and reflecting pool, created spatial containment and a balanced relationship between the series of open plazas, courts and shaded bosque areas. "Quartets" of plane trees were planted in twenty-foot square travertine planters that were recessed to minimize their scale. While the original plantings in the North Court were altered a decade ago, the plantings at Damrosch Park are relatively intact and could be easily restored to maintain Kiley's urban forest concept.

I have had several meetings in recent months with Lincoln Center Redevelopment Corporation and their design team in an effort to find ways of accommodating their programmatic and redevelopment needs, while preserving and restoring the Kiley designs at the North Court and Damrosch Park. I am convinced it is possible to achieve both goals, and that the redevelopment team could find ways of more effectively integrating the Kiley landscape into their master plan and preserving the most significant aspects of this important modern-era landscape.

Thanks,

Ken Smith