



THE CITY OF NEW YORK
OFFICE OF THE PRESIDENT
BOROUGH OF MANHATTAN

C. VIRGINIA FIELDS
BOROUGH PRESIDENT

TESTIMONY OF MANHATTAN BOROUGH PRESIDENT

C. VIRGINIA FIELDS
PUBLIC HEARING
CONGREGATION SHEARITH ISRAEL
LANDMARK PRESERVATION COMMISSION
November 26, 2002

Good afternoon, Chair Paulsen and Commissioners. My name is Jennifer Hoppa and I am here to read the testimony of the Manhattan Borough President, C. Virginia Fields.

Thank you for the opportunity to express my concerns regarding the Modification of Use and Bulk and the Certificate of Appropriateness applications of the Congregation Shearith Israel Synagogue.

An Academic Classical and Beaux-Arts style synagogue, designed by Brunner and Tryon and built in 1896-97, this individual landmark graces Central Park West at West 70th Street and has influenced the design of an abundance of synagogues nationwide. The synagogue is also within the Central Park West Historic District, known in part for its residential side streets of neo-Grec, Romanesque Revival, Queen Anne and neo-Renaissance row houses.

Congregation Shearith Israel now intends to transfer unused development rights to its property west of the synagogue to construct a 14 story residential and community services building. The transfer of development rights, the proposed demolition of the community house, and extensive changes to the site's zoning, results in an inappropriate 157ft. building. This high structure vastly compromises the individual landmark, and immensely detracts from it at numerous vantage points. As proposed, it jeopardizes the integrity of the Central Park Historic District, with its low-rise row houses on both the north and south side of W. 70th Street.

Given the extent of alterations to the site's zoning the Synagogue intends to secure to facilitate their development, the preservation purpose of this application is of particular importance. Unfortunately, the applicant has not been adequately clear on this front. I urge the Commission to secure a firm commitment from the synagogue to direct resources gained from any development towards preservation of the individual landmark synagogue, in addition to ensuring that any unused development rights are retained at the synagogue site.

The proposal before the Landmarks Preservation Commission today raises considerable concerns about the precedent this project will set for other institutions along Central Park West. Residents, preservationists, and the Landmarks Commission have worked diligently to bring about the Central Park West Historic District designation. Institutions should be directed to preserve its character and its iconic skyline.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify. I am hopeful that under the Commission's leadership, a low scale, contextual and historically appropriate project can be brought to fruition that aids the Synagogue in their on-site restoration work and helps meet their needs for a new school facility.

THE CITY OF NEW YORK
OFFICE OF THE COMMISSIONER
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Good afternoon, Chairman and Commissioners. It is a pleasure to testify before you today. I am grateful for the opportunity to discuss the proposed project for the restoration of the Central Park West Synagogue. The project is a low-scale, contextual and historically appropriate project that will aid the Synagogue in their on-site restoration work and help meet their needs for a new school facility.

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