



LANDMARKS PRESERVATION COMMISSION

20 VESEY STREET, NEW YORK, NEW YORK 10007

566-7577

Gene A. Norman
CHAIRMAN

July 2, 1984

Mr. Robert Goelet, President
Board of Trustees
New York Historical Society
170 Central Park West
New York, New York 10024

LPC 840755 (New Building)
LPC 840756 (Modification to Zoning Resolution)
New-York Historical Society (LP-0281)
Central Park West-West 76th Street
Historic District
Block 1129, lots 21 and 29
Borough of Manhattan

Dear Mr. Goelet:

Pursuant to Section 207-6.0 of the Administrative Code of the City of New York, the Landmarks Preservation Commission, at the Executive Session of June 12, 1984, following the Public Hearing of January 24, 1984 and subsequent Executive Sessions of May 9, 1984 and June 5, 1984, voted not to grant a Certificate of Appropriateness for the construction of a 23 story tower on top of the New-York Historical Society and on a portion of the rear lot; the construction of two 60 foot tall rowhouses on W. 76th St; the reconstruction of the existing entrance to the library stacks on West 76 Street to provide an entrance pavilion for the proposed new apartment tower; and the rehabilitation of an existing townhouse at 15 West 76th Street, as put forward in your application completed on December 30, 1983. At the request of the applicant, the Landmarks Preservation Commission held open the record of the public hearing to March 20, 1984, and the applicant accordingly agreed to extend the Commission's time to reach a determination until June 16, 1984.

The application also included a request that the Landmarks Preservation Commission apply on behalf of the applicant to the City Planning Commission for a special permit pursuant to section 74-711 of the Zoning Resolution for modification of site coverage, rear yard requirements, open space, street wall

requirements, and height and setback. The Commission noted that during the course of the application the zoning for the subject site was changed; therefore the application for the requested special permit would have to be amended to reflect these changes. The portion of the application requesting that the Commission apply for a special permit included a proposed preservation plan for the museum. In support of the application, material was submitted on the financial and programmatic needs of the Historical Society.

The work proposed in the application is shown on the models, drawings and photographs submitted as part of the application. The proposed new 23 story tower would contain apartments in the upper floors and additional museum space in the portion directly above the museum. The tower would rest on a platform of steel girders. Existing columns within the museum would be strengthened and new columns would be introduced to support the new platform.

The tower, which would be topped by triangular masonry pediments and a pyramidal roof, would be highly articulated on the north, east and south facades, and rise from the top of the museum in a series of setbacks located at the 4th, 6th, 10th, 13th, and 23rd floors. The setbacks would feature hipped roofs sheathed in standing seam copper. The exterior walls would be clad in limestone in three different finishes--rough, honed and drilled-- and trimmed in bands of black and pink granite. The windows would be framed in aluminium with a baked enamel finish in two shades of brown and three shades of green, corresponding to their location on different sections of the tower. The elevator bank for the new building would be located at the rear of the structure; as a result, the west facade of the tower, facing the Historic District, would rise sheer from the ground to the 23rd floor, would be less articulated and would contain fewer masonry openings than the other three facades. An ornamental pergola, constructed of granite columns and aluminium trellis beams, would be located at the base of the east facade of the tower and extend further east on the roof of the museum.

Two new rowhouses proposed to be constructed on West 76th Street would be located on the vacant lot at the rear of the museum. Their design is derived from that of two late 19th century rowhouses which formerly existed on the site. Faced in brick and cast stone, the new buildings would be 60 feet tall, the same height as the neighboring rowhouses of the historic district. Both would feature bay windows, stoops and cornices. Number 15 West 76 Street, an existing rowhouse immediately to the west of the proposed new rowhouse buildings, would have its facade cleaned and repointed. The existing entrance to the museum stacks, located at the west end of the south facade of the museum, adjoining the site of the proposed new rowhouses, would be reconstructed, widened, and refaced in limestone and granite to provide an entrance pavilion for the new apartment tower. The entrance pavilion would be topped by a triangular masonry pediment and a standing seam copper clad hipped roof.

The Commission noted that the Designation Report for the New-York Historical Society states that the museum, designed in the Roman Eclectic style, was constructed in two stages. The central portion of the museum, faced in gray

granite, was constructed in 1933-8 and designed by the firm of Vork and Sawyer. The end pavilions, faced in granite which matches the central portion, were constructed in 1937-38 and designed by the firm of Walker and Gillette. The museum is topped by a low hipped roof clad in copper. The structure has undergone little alteration, with the exception of the removal of a portion of its original glazing and its replacement with glass block; new library stacks were added across the rear of the building, opening onto West 76th Street, in 1937. The museum is classical in feeling and austere formal in its composition.

When the Central Park West-West 76th Street Historic District was designated, the New-York Historical Society, which had been previously designated as an individual landmark, was included within the boundaries of the Historic District. The district consists primarily of four and five story rowhouses built at the end of the 19th century. Faced in limestone, brownstone and brick, the buildings represent the Renaissance Revival, Romanesque Revival and Beaux-Arts styles. At Central Park West, the district is comprised of three buildings; the Historical Society, a 12 story Beaux Arts style apartment House and a Gothic Revival Style Church. The Historical Society is separated from the adjacent townhouses to the west on 76th Street by a vacant lot.

With regard to the application, the Commission noted that because the Historical Society is both a designated landmark and included in a historic district, the effect of the proposed new tower and rowhouses with respect to both the individual landmark and the historic district would have to be considered. With this in mind, the Commission found that the proposed rehabilitation of 15 West 76th Street would enhance the appearance of that building; that the construction of two new townhouses on West 76th Street would fill in a presently vacant space and strengthen the continuity of the blockfront; and that the design of the two new rowhouses was supportive in scale, materials, and articulation of the surrounding buildings in the Historic District. However, the Commission found that the proposed new tower over the museum would trivialize the landmark; that the tower as designed, would reduce the landmark to a base, causing it to function architecturally as a "pedestal" or "plinth"; that the tower would subsume and engulf the landmark, making it difficult to differentiate visually between the landmark and the new construction; and that the tower, through its use of materials and its articulation and configuration, would become unified with the landmark in a way which would cause the landmark to lose its visual integrity as an individual building.

In summary, notwithstanding the successful design of the proposed new townhouses on West 76th Street, and the enhancement of 15 West 76th Street through its exterior refurbishment, the Commission found that the proposed new tower, because of its mass and size, would fundamentally change the landmark, and that the project as a whole would not therefore enhance or protect the exterior architectural features which cause the landmark to possess a special aesthetic and historic interest and value. On this basis, the Commission determined the proposal to be inappropriate, by a vote of six in favor, two opposed. Both the Commissioners in favor of the motion and those dissenting

joined in commending the architects for the skillfulness of their design. Having voted not to grant a Certificate of Appropriateness for the proposed work, the applicant's request for the Commission to apply to the City Planning Commission for a special permit was moot.

Sincerely



Gene A. Forman
Chairman

cc: Robert C. Quinlan
Hardy, Holzman, Pfeiffer Associates
Community Board #7
Tufo and Zuccotti, Esqs.