

Public Affairs Television, Inc.

March 15, 2007

The Honorable Robert B. Tierney
Chair
New York City Landmarks Preservation Commission
1 Centre Street, 9th Floor
New York, NY 10007

Dear Mr. Tierney:

I am writing to express my opposition as a citizen and neighbor to the proposal of the New-York Historical Society to change the façade of its Landmark and to erect a high-rise luxury tower – first described in a lengthy *New York Times* article and drawing – that would permanently alter the skyline of Central Park West.

While I live one block from the Society, I do not have a view of its building, so its plans are no offense to my line of sight. It is as a citizen that the Society's intentions appall me. Central Park belongs to everyone. The skyline around it is part of our great commons. That skyline is under assault. Every tower erected near it diminishes its uniqueness, scale and scope. Once the skyline disappears, there is no way to get it back. No one should have the right to intrude on that space for any reason.

We are talking here about one of the most unique blends of architectural and historical legacies in New York and perhaps in the world. Here a great park and broad avenue converge with the American Museum of Natural History and the Society itself to form a vista from the park that is a source of beauty and inspiration to everyone who looks upon it. I can no more imagine the Society wanting to block that vista than I can the French wanting to erect a tower above the Place Concorde!

I value the work of the Society. It plays an important role in connecting us to our storied and amazing past. But I do not respect the ambitions the Society has set forth in this project. One should not obliterate history in order to save it.

This past January I attended a community meeting together with several hundred concerned citizens. I originally intended to support the Society's proposed façade alterations. After all, Landmark designation was never meant to preserve our historic resources in amber, but rather to ensure that changes occur in a thoughtful way.

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However, revelations by the Society's representatives that evening and subsequent developments caused many of us to realize that the changes in the proposed façade are indeed prelude to the building of a 280-foot tower where none exists or belongs. I was forced to withdraw my support of the initial phase of the proposed renovation because I would otherwise be complicit in a fundamental assault on the character of Central Park itself, one I would have a hard time explaining to my grandchildren and others 30 years from now if I were around. They would be the real losers if the Society goes ahead.

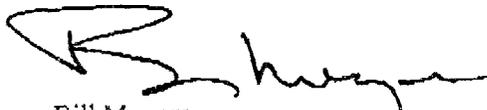
The Society, I am now convinced, is pursuing a "divide and conquer" strategy, splitting the project into what it hopes will be more palatable "phases". The "Phase 1" façade alterations, if approved, will create a wedge that the Society will use to leverage approval of the "Phase 2" tower.

As you know, Community Board 7 issued a strong resolution denying approval of the façade alterations both on the merits and on the basis of the Society's unwillingness to be upfront with the public. There also appear to be technical and procedural issues making the Society's proposed phasing untenable. I understand that the Society must file what is called a "74-711" special permit request to build its 280-foot tower in a zoning district that does not otherwise allow construction on such a scale. Under this provision, the Society would have to demonstrate that its tower would serve some kind of "preservation purpose," that there is some sort of even exchange between the negative impacts of the tower and any positive benefits for the Landmark. But without candor and the facts there is no way the public or the Commission can effectively evaluate the pros and cons of such a trade-off. If the Commission should approve one facet of the plan and later discover that those changes don't make sense in the context of the total project, it will be too late to reverse the decision. The Society's tactics remind me of the card shark in my home state of Texas who looks across the table at his mark and says, "Now play the cards fair, Reuben, I know what I dealt you."

Many of us look to the Landmark Commission to protect us against such tactics and in this case to preserve the integrity of the public review process and the integrity of Central Park's skyline. I urge you to vote "no" to this proposal.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,



Bill Moyers