

TESTIMONY BY NEW YORK STATE SENATOR THOMAS K. DUANE
BEFORE THE NEW YORK CITY LANDMARKS PRESERVATION COMMISSION
REGARDING THE APPLICATION FOR FAÇADE RENOVATION
AT 170 CENTRAL PARK WEST

March 20, 2007

My name is Thomas K. Duane and I represent New York State's 29th Senate District, which includes 170 Central Park West in Manhattan, where the New York Historical Society (N-YHS) is located. N-YHS is seeking a certificate of appropriateness to alter the facade of its Landmark building, which is protected as an individual Landmark as well as part of the Central Park West–West 76th Street Historic District and the Upper West Side/Central Park West Historic District.

The plan before the New York City Landmarks Preservation Commission (LPC) today includes widening the entrance portal, enlarging the windows, and adding a ramp for disabled access. However, N-YHS has submitted this application at a time when it is also openly contemplating replacing the current stack building behind the museum with a high-rise residential tower. In fact, N-YHS informed us that a request for proposals for development of the apartment tower was issued last fall. Given these facts, I urge LPC to refrain from taking a position on the current application.

Paradoxically, decisions concerning landmarks are as much about the future as they are about the past. As I have just noted, the façade renovations before LPC today do not tell the whole story of N-YHS' plans. While N-YHS characterizes today's application as "separate" from any potential residential tower, it is impossible to evaluate the proposed façade renovation without knowing what it would look like in the context of the building immediately to the west.

Even if these façade renovations were deemed by LPC to be appropriate now, that may not be the case if a tower is constructed that overshadows the historic nature of the renovated building. While I appreciate that N-YHS disclosed its looming plans for an apartment tower, sadly that is not enough. An informed, prudent decision on this application requires knowledge of all details of the plan, not just those that N-YHS has chosen to show.

Despite these misgivings, I understand N-YHS' need to accommodate its growing number of visitors and improve access for people with disabilities and/or impaired mobility. I can't

imagine that under normal circumstances I wouldn't support an accessible, historically appropriate façade renovation. However it is impossible to do so in this case, given the potential impact the prospective tower would have on the façade and indeed, the entirety of this historic gem in our City.

There are still far too many questions to be answered. I am hopeful that with a future candid and forthright presentation of an entire proposal, which takes into consideration input from the community, LPC will be able to approve of N-YHS's plans. I ask that LPC provide N-YHS the opportunity to do so by withholding a vote on today's application.

Thank you for allowing me to testify before LPC today and for your consideration.