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Honorable Robert B. Tierney,
Chairman
The New York City Landmarks Preservation Commission
1 Center Street, Ninth Floor
New York, NY 10007

30 August 2004

Dear Chairman Tierney,

I write in behalf of calendaring a designation hearing on Two Columbus Circle. A designation I do not support—in relation to the architectural aesthetics of the edifice. But a hearing whose absence damages the name of the commission for responsible governance.

Simply, in the 26 years of my involvement in preservation matters, beginning with my appointment as a commissioner by Mayor Edward I. Koch in 1979, I have never seen the commission turn its back on such a widely supported and substantive argument for a hearing.

Myriad established experts and many hundreds of New Yorkers think this structure, located at one of the city's most important crossroads, should be considered for official protection. For several years they have sought to make this case to you in a duly constituted meeting. On the public record. Before the building is destroyed. Before the eleventh hour.

Yet the commission has not consented to listen. Is the judgment of the agency, of its staff and commissioners, so inflexible that a different opinion can't be considered? No matter how well founded that different opinion might be?

The express purpose of the Landmarks Law was to create a participatory forum in which New York could weight its communal welfare. That we might benefit from our assembled intelligence. Because the issues that come before you frequently involve complex qualitative findings subject to changing cultural perceptions.

In that regard, the collective scholarly knowledge of those who defend Two Columbus Circle is far in excess of any equitable test for calendaring. In fact, a sizeable percentage of the protected structures of New York, several thousand buildings, fail to have had been as thoroughly validated upon designation.

Taking into account the membership of the advisory panels of these organizations, the proponents for a designation hearing includes an assembly of distinguished scholars, distinguished architects, distinguished New Yorkers, distinguished Americans—many of these the same individuals whose testimony forms the basis in reason for countless other Landmarks Commission rulings.

Have all of these people suddenly grown ignorant? Entered senility? Gone blind? Or is the commission being arbitrary and capricious?

A Few of the Individuals in Support of a Hearing for Two Columbus Circle:

- Robert A.M. Stern, Dean of the Yale School of Architecture, author of *New York 1880*, *New York 1900*, *New York 1930* and *New York 1960*
- J. Carter Brown, former Director of the National Gallery of Art and the U.S. Commission of Fine Arts

- Barry Bergdoll, Chair of the Columbia University Department of Art History and Archaeology
- Witold Rybczynski, Professor of Urbanism at the University of Pennsylvania, author of *City Life*
- Giorgio Cavaglieri, award-winning New York-based conservation architect
- Tom Wolfe, author of *From Bauhaus to Our House*
- Elliott Sclar, Professor of Urban Planning at Columbia University Graduate School of Architecture, Planning and Preservation
- Thomas Mellins, author of *Gotham Restored*; and co-author *New York 1930* and *New York 1960*
- Stanislaus von Moos, Professor of Art History at Zurich University, author of *Le Corbusier*
- Dr. Jeffrey Kroessler, author of *New York, Year By Year*
- Herbert Muschamp, architectural critic for the *New York Times*
- Kyle Normandin, President, Northeast Chapter of the Association for Preservation Technology
- Michael Sorkin, Contributing Editor of *Architectural Record* and *Metropolis*
- James Zemaitis, Director of Sotheby's 20th Century Design Department

A Few of the Organizations in Support of a Hearing for Two Columbus Circle:

- National Trust for Historic Preservation: which has declared 2 Columbus Circle one of the "11 Most Endangered Historic Places" in the United States
- Preservation League of New York State
- Municipal Art Society of New York
- Historic Districts Council of New York
- Fine Arts Federation of New York
- Women's City Club of New York
- New York Landmarks Conservancy
- LANDMARK WEST!
- Coalition for a Livable Westside
- DOCOMOMO US

As a student of international urban preservation, it is my understanding that in contemporary democratic societies, by legal definition, *landmarks* are those structures protected forever by the reasoned consent of a city's inhabitants. But how may such reasoning occur when government rejects responsible debate?

At some point in the evolution of this matter, as the list of scholars and experts continued to mount, the Commission's refusal to calendar a hearing could no longer be convincingly ascribed to a difference of judgment, or deafness—but began to border on misfeasance. It is a fundamental statutory obligation that the Landmarks Preservation Commission not evade timely discussion of creditable and broadly supported candidates for designation.

Please reconsider your position.

Respectfully,

Anthony M. Tung