

January 17, 2005

Reynold Levy
President
Lincoln Center for the Performing Arts
70 Lincoln Center Plaza
New York, New York 10023

Dear Ren:

Thank you and the rest of the Lincoln Center team for meeting with LANDMARK WEST! on Tuesday, January 11, to review your redevelopment plans, particularly in light of the discretionary actions requested by Lincoln Center and subject to public review through the Uniform Land Use Review Procedure (ULURP), currently underway.

This letter presents a detailed response to the plans presented on January 11. Because Lincoln Center's plans have changed relatively little with regard to several major issues since our briefing last spring, we have included relevant portions of our April 28, 2004, letter to you **in bold** below.

First, with regard to future changes to the Lincoln Center campus not included in this ULURP:

...we would like to participate in a briefing similar to our April 19th conversation once Lincoln Center begins to formulate its approach to Josie Robertson Plaza, Damrosch Park, and the other buildings that make up the campus.

The time for such a briefing is now. As you know, the entire Lincoln Center campus – its buildings, interiors, and outdoor public spaces – has been determined to be eligible for listing on the National Register of Historic Places. Given the sensitive historic and architectural character of these public spaces, it is essential that LW! have the opportunity to provide input as early as possible in the programming, planning and design process.

We applaud the goal to enliven West 65th Street, remove the overhead bridge, create more generous sidewalks for pedestrians...Of course, so much of the project's aesthetic – and ultimately functional – success will depend on the materials, construction, and detailing...

Maintenance

As we discussed last week, maintenance is vitally important to the ongoing success of this project. To date Lincoln Center's maintenance has been less than stellar. Because the original design relied on the visual continuity of exterior and interior spaces, it placed a great deal of pressure on the interior spaces to be maintained in a pristine state, commensurate with their role as civic spaces open to the public. Too often, the public sees cluttered desks, stacked chairs and garbage cans next to monumental glass walls, as well as the manifestations of general wear and tear, not always well-tended.

ULURP approvals should be contingent on a strictly enforceable, adequately funded maintenance plan with a monitoring mechanism.

The present proposal includes a number of features that depend on a commitment to world-class daily maintenance. They are:

Triangular overhang at northwest corner of 65th Street and Broadway (proposed Juilliard addition): The inclined travertine soffit would very quickly collect black deposits from car exhausts and become further marred by patterns of water rivulets. In order to ensure the continuity of appearance between the exterior soffit and the interior ceiling of the Alice Tully Hall depicted by the drawings (a simple glass line separates them) Lincoln Center would need to plan a program of frequent cleaning and resurfacing of the travertine-clad lobby ceiling and exterior soffit.

Large glazed area on upper floors of proposed Juilliard addition: Here as in other parts of Lincoln Center interior spaces are open to public view – ceilings near the glass would become facades as they are visible from below. Ceilings, glazing and areas immediately near the glass would require control and maintenance commensurate with their public exposure.

Electronically programmed signs along 65th street: These would also require ongoing, meticulous maintenance, since nothing could be less attractive – and more frustrating to patrons seeking information – than signs with missing lights, out-of-sequence animation, and non-functional touch-screen monitors.

Benches along 65th Street, with under-bench lights and glass floor reflecting the lights: These require daily maintenance to check for lights needing bulb replacement and to ensure the cleanliness of the glass floor underneath. The illumination would immediately draw attention to any refuse, spills or gum.

Bridge over 65th Street and glazed escalator enclosure on the north side of 65th Street: Both of these structure would incorporate a significant amount of clear glass, requiring daily – or at the very least weekly – maintenance to keep the glass in the clear, crisp condition shown in the drawings

Glazed entry to Alice Tully Hall (some drawings indicated a different configuration with a separate all glass vestibule at the northwest corner of 65th Street and Broadway): Same as above.

Plaza North: The hyperbolic paraboloid roof of the proposed restaurant is not only ground but also a façade. It would require ongoing treatment to ensure that evenness of appearance is maintained, with no bare patches, no refuse, etc.

Also with regard to the public space of Plaza North: Donor and other similar events often require waiters' stations, chairs, stage equipment, etc., which should not become permanent features of the space to save the time and effort of moving them in and out of doors.

Whether in the new spaces or in the original interior balconies, foyers, walkways, outdoor spaces and other public areas, Lincoln Center must be committed to a program of maintenance and visual control of the exterior and interior spaces that are key to its architectural qualities as a civic monument.

Streetscape

A widened sidewalk, minus garage entrances and curb cuts, are important steps towards enhancing the pedestrian environment along 65th Street. The design and configuration of street furniture, lighting, and signage are just as essential.

Benches: Subject to the above maintenance contingency, the proposed illuminated benches are welcome additions.

Signage: Additional signage might also be welcome. However, the current plan is overkill, especially with regard to the vertical blade signs spaced at approximately 50-foot intervals along 65th Street, forming what the Environmental Assessment Statement refers to as a “dynamic, 700-foot-long signage system.” The ULURP application indicates that these signs would be “informational.” But, the animated visuals in Liz Diller’s presentation last Tuesday demonstrated that the primary purpose of these signs would be to broadcast commercial-like advertising for Lincoln Center. Such advertising is an inappropriate use of public space.

Any amendment to the zoning text of the Special Lincoln Square District to allow signage at heights more than 20 feet above curb level must place additional restrictions on the size, projection, illumination, and animation of those signs. Although Lincoln Center’s current proposal does not appear to incorporate outsized, flashing, or projecting signage, the zoning text must be written in such a way as to prohibit this type of signage in future.

Sidewalk: The conveyance of 12 feet of public sidewalk to Lincoln Center would increase the size of adjacent zoning lot(s), thereby generating additional allowable floor area. How does Lincoln Center contemplate using this floor area in current or future plans? The Environmental Assessment Statement does not appear to address this contingency.

We have somewhat more difficulty with the proposed addition to the Juilliard School. Architecture critics unanimously endorsed Pietro Belluschi’s Brutalist-style building when it opened in 1969; Ada Louise Huxtable called its design “timeless.”

Juilliard Building

It is our understanding that, while altering the Juilliard Building may be “as of right” in terms of the underlying zoning, it requires special permission since the building is part of a merged zoning lot with the Rose Building, which received a series of special permits in 1986.

In April, we expressed concern that the proposed design would **utterly transform** the Broadway façade of the Juilliard Building and asked Lincoln Center to explore alternative solutions, such as a sensitive roof-top addition. However, Lincoln Center has opted not to pursue any alternative designs, placing this historic building very much at risk.

According to the New York State Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation's "Resource Evaluation," which demonstrates that Lincoln Center meets the eligibility criteria for the National Register of Historic Places, "the Juilliard School is a unique expression of a late-Modern style not otherwise well represented in New York City." The LANDMARK WEST! report that led to the determination of eligibility also emphasizes the importance of the building's design as a rectangular block. The proposed street-hugging intervention (following the diagonal of Broadway) would detract from the inherent qualities of the original design and remove all of the significant features of the Broadway façade – the most familiar façade to members of the general public who experience Lincoln Center most frequently from the outside – including its travertine paneling and symmetrical configuration of rectangular windows.

Furthermore, as described above, it is evident that the proposed design poses many maintenance dilemmas, particularly the exposed travertine soffit, which will inevitably suffer from staining due to water run-off and pollution.

Lincoln Center's stated reasons for not pursuing a rooftop addition include the concern that this kind of major construction would interfere with the operations of the school and require structural reinforcement of the building. Any expansion project is bound to place temporary burdens on the school and require extensive re-engineering. A key – unstated – explanation for Lincoln Center's resistance to building on top of Juilliard is perhaps its unwillingness to block costly views from the Rose Building.

[Ada Louise] Huxtable poetically described Plaza North as "the sole moment [in Lincoln Center] that lifts the spirit of those to whom the 20th century is a very exciting time to be alive." Although sadly altered today, Dan Kiley's carefully orchestrated, minimalist geometry was integral to the original success of this space and still suggests the landscape design that gave "a sense of order and continuity to the complex as a whole," according to landscape architect Ken Smith.

Plaza North

In our minds, the proposed alterations to the historic landscape design for Plaza North are the most destructive and least necessary change. As Ken Smith, a Dan Kiley scholar and acclaimed landscape architect in his own right, and others have pointed out, essential elements of the original Kiley landscape can and should be restored.

Trees: Trees are a critical element in preserving the peaceful serenity of the Plaza. Lincoln Center's decision to alter the shape of the reflecting pool and remove the trees lining the eastern edge of the pool is driven by the desire to create a restaurant – the footprint of which would occupy space now designated as a public place. Yet, as we discussed on January 11, the restaurant can be built while still maintaining the spirit of the Kiley scheme, which included a U-shaped "urban orchard" of trees around the pool. The proposed placement of the restaurant would require the pool to be narrowed, but not necessarily lengthened, thus allowing the row of trees to the east to be retained. Although the construction of the Milstein Bridge forced the removal of the northern edge of trees, the green-lawn roof of the restaurant together with the remaining L-shaped orchard would re-create the original U-shaped ensemble surrounding the pool.

(We are in the process of developing a sketch to illustrate these ideas, which we look forward to discussing further with you.)

We also have reservations about removing the travertine planters from Plaza North. Kiley purposefully used these well-proportioned, architectural elements to create a balanced relationship between the open plazas and tree-shaded areas. By using travertine, Kiley also established a visual link between the landscape design and that of the surrounding buildings.

Kiley designed each planter to contain a “quartet” of London plane trees, which he called “essential to achieve the necessary mass and density for the plaza.” Ken Smith noted that there is no logistical reason why four healthy trees cannot be sustained in each planter – again, with proper maintenance. Replacing the planters with trees set into a gravel surface to create more flexible seating – the only other stated rationale for removing the planters – would create its own inconveniences: as a walking surface, it would be noisy during events and uncomfortable for wearers of high-heeled shoes.

Paving: It is imperative that the rough concrete-aggregate paving be re-installed as the main surfacing material for Plaza North. The design of the plaza by Gordon Bunshaft of Skidmore Owings and Merrill and by Eero Saarinen depends on retaining the integrity of the original palette of materials, which included paving of a light-buff color, ensuring the continuity between the buildings' tone and the surface on which they rested. The proposed gray-granite paving would undermine this unity.

Restaurant: It is our understanding that the footprint of the restaurant, which along with the rest of the Plaza is a “Designated Public Place” on the City, would be de-designated as such, but that unobstructed public access to the tilted, lawn-like roof of the restaurant would continue to be guaranteed via covenants. In order to ensure that the roof functions as a usable public space, we recommend that Lincoln Center construct a full-scale mock-up to test the comfort of the grades. This type of mock-up is very common when designing new types and forms in landscape architecture.

We concluded our April 28th letter stating that we felt very positive about the general approach adopted by Lincoln Center. We feel somewhat less optimistic at present since so many of our comments seem to have gone unheeded. As ULURP proceeds, we hope to regain some of the **spirit of constructive collaboration** with which we, at least, began this process.

Sincerely,

Arlene Simon
President

Kate Wood
Executive Director

cc. Community Board 7