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Gale A. Brewer, Borough President

Manhattan Borough President Gale A. Brewer Testimony to the Board of Standards and Appeals

Re: 361 Central Park West, BSA #65-15-BZ and BSA #66-15-A
June 2, 2016

Thank you for the opportunity to testify today in regard to BSA # 65-15-BZ and BSA # 66-15-A, the request to convert the former First Church of Christ, Scientist at 361 Central Park West, aka 1 West 96th Street, to residential condominium use. I remain strongly opposed to this proposal, as the applicant's resubmission does not represent substantive new information in any way and the proposed use does not respect the significance of this building to the character of this neighborhood.

The building before you is a NYC Individual Landmark, not a vacant, irregular lot with split zoning districts, poor soil conditions or any of the other hosts of typical reasons one reads when reviewing BSA applications. This structure is considered to be in the finest tradition of Beaux Arts classicism and is one of a handful of churches designed by Carrere and Hastings. It was meant as a place of public assembly, and its design was and is meant to be enjoyed by many, not a few. The waivers requested will facilitate a residential condo project and I do not believe these waivers are the minimum necessary to achieve a financially viable project. However, I do believe community facility uses would be more appropriate to the building's stature, and if that use required waivers, would actually meet the finding of the minimum necessary. A dedicated grassroots effort continues to highlight ways in which the beloved building can still serve as a community resource and consideration should be paid to that view.

More importantly, I do not believe that the landmark status of a building constitutes a hardship. The special character of this building only enhances its value for boutique niche residential use, so I find the citation of hardship because of landmark status disingenuous.

In closing, I still do not see how the applicant has met the burden of proof for any of the findings required under Section 72-21 of the New York City Zoning Resolution or how this submission represents any significant new information or substance.

I truly appreciate your careful review of this application. Thank you for your time to this matter.