

Chair Margery Perlmutter
NYC Board of Standards and Appeals
250 Broadway
New York, NY 10007

October 14, 2016

Dear Chair Perlmutter,

To briefly introduce myself, my name is Craig Morrison. Like you, I am an architect and I have worked with several firms from Philadelphia to Albany and even Detroit before entering my own practice in Philadelphia and New York in 1984. Working on signature projects such as the Senate Chamber in Albany and the Academy of Music in Philadelphia I was able to put into practice philosophies and policies that I was able to advocate as an appointed member of the Board of Architectural Review in Alexandria, Virginia and as the first chairperson of the Historic Designation Advisory Board in Detroit, essential the Historical Commissions of both cities.

As a longtime friend of the Upper West Side, I have followed the evolution of Congregation Shearith Israel's proposal and offer for your consideration the following comments on its latest iteration:

- The applicant seeks to construct a nine-story mixed-use structure. While the five uppermost residential floors have not programmatically changed, the base has. Although CSI requested 18 classrooms, your board approved 15. Yet, a set of construction documents that were filed with the Department of Buildings in 2014 had a mere three classrooms, with the balance replaced by office use. In the interim, their school tenant has relocated. Should the literal "change of plans" not warrant a reconsideration of the programmatic needs that substantiated their original "hardship" claim?
- The applicant calls their changes "minor modifications". Extending an event space by several hundred square feet under the sidewalk and effectively doubling the size of a kitchen suggests increased event capacity and mechanical needs. To me, these below grade changes alone are substantial. In reality, however, they are the least of the changes which include reconfiguring cores, circulation, egress, and envelope. By the same token, if a roof terrace and exhibition space were demonstrated needs in the original application but are later treated as expungable for other purposes, do not the other defined needs also warrant re-evaluation?
- The applicant seeks an extension of time to complete substantial construction. This would be their second extension since the original 2008 approval—by January 22, 2016 (the end of the first 4-year extension) construction had not yet begun. How was the intervening time spent? The applicant's own schedule has gaps between 2012 and mid 2014 although Construction Documents (CD's) were completed before 2012. What justification is there for further extension?
- The 2014 plans filed with DoB (with only three classrooms) were keyed, noted, and detailed in plan, section and axonometric representation; signed and sealed by a registered architect; and apparently intended for construction until the DoB revoked the permit in April 2016 after members of the public challenged DoB's approval of the altered plans. Are we to believe that

these plans were merely “mislabeled”? This filing alone calls for a re-examination of the programmatic hardship.

The defining features of the hardship, programmatic need and economic justification simply do not hold up to 2016 realities. I hope you consider these facts before the character of Central Park West is changed irrevocably.

Sincerely,

Craig Morrison, AIA