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HISTORIC PRESERVATION

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December 1, 2005

Hon. Meenakshi Srinivasan
Chair, New York City Board of Standards and Appeals
40 Rector Street
New York, NY 10006
Via mail and fax: 212-788-8769

Re: Variance Application for 469 West Street, # 48-05-BZ

Dear Chair Srinivasan:

I write to provide additional follow up and input regarding the above-referenced variance application, particularly regarding issues discussed at the end of the November 29th hearing.

I Floor-to-Ceiling Heights

I strongly urge the Board to consider requiring a reduction in the floor-to-ceiling heights of the proposed building, which by far a majority of those who testified at the November 29th hearing and all of the elected officials represented expressed a preference for. A variance must meet the finding of the “minimum necessary,” and the applicant is seeking a variance for the height of the building. Therefore unless the applicant can substantiate why floor heights of no less than those proposed are economically necessary, a reduction to a reasonable but more limited floor height would be not only warranted but absolutely necessary. GVSHP would urge a reduced floor height for either the “Plan A” or “Plan B” submissions, though we made clear our preference for the “Plan B” scheme. Both plans appear to have similar overall and floor-to-floor heights, and GVSHP would urge reasonable reduction in floor heights for any scheme that exceeds the currently allowable building height. The mere fact that the floor heights in the current plan are “common” in luxury apartment buildings does not seem to meet the test necessary to justify a variance for that particular height (a similar luxury building planned at 150 Charles Street, for instance, is also 15 stories but with a lower overall height).

Additionally, I would also strongly urge you to examine the applicant’s submission to see whether or not the heights they cited at the hearing – 10’ 8” for floor-to-floor and 10’ for floor-to-ceiling – are accurate. A cursory reading of the plans submitted casts doubt upon this figure. While no clear floor-to-ceiling heights are given in the plans, division of the distances between different floors shown in the plans by the number of floors, even while excluding the typically higher commercial ground floor, show floor-to-floor heights of closer to or over 11 feet. Beyond this, the applicant’s assertion that 8 inches of the floor-to-floor heights will be given over to mechanicals should not simply be accepted, but should require substantiation. Regardless, however, even if the heights are 10’ 8” and 10’, I would argue strongly that the findings for the variance should still require that these heights be reduced.

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II Façade Design and Materials

While I understand and respect the Board's aversion to attempting to design this building for the applicant, the Greenwich Village Society for Historic Preservation feels strongly that the choice of façade design and materials relates directly to the issue of neighborhood character, which is germane to the issuance of the variance. A glass curtain-wall façade is entirely inappropriate for this neighborhood, and will in fact alter the neighborhood character. Given that the applicant had submitted a façade design in September without the glass curtain walls and with a more appropriate masonry, recessed window façade, it is clear that such a design is consistent with what both the applicant and the architect have felt is possible for the project. Therefore I strongly urge the Board to require the applicant to change the design to eliminate the glass curtain walls and to utilize masonry and recessed windows throughout the façade.

Thank you again for your attention to this matter. The outcome of this application will have a tremendous impact upon the Far West Village and especially its immediate neighbors, including the Westbeth complex, part of which is a designated National Historic Landmark. I look forward to the Board's continued careful consideration of this application.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Andrew Berman", followed by a long horizontal line extending to the right.

Andrew Berman
Executive Director

Cc: Borough President-elect Scott Stronger
State Senator Tom Duane
City Councilmember Christine Quinn
Assemblymember Deborah Glick
Community Board #2, Manhattan
Greenwich Village Community Task Force
Westbeth Artists Residents Council
Board of Directors, Westbeth
Board of Directors, 380 West 12th Street
Board of Directors, 495 West Street
Board of Directors, 130 Jane Street