



**Greenwich
Village
Society for
Historic
Preservation**

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June 18, 2009

Alicia Hurley
NYU Vice-President for Government Affairs and Community Engagement
70 Washington Square South, rm. 12
New York, NY 10012

**Re: Plans for NYU Academic and Spiritual Center,
58 Washington Square South**

Dear Ms. Hurley:

On June 16, members of the Greenwich Village Society for Historic Preservation (GVSHP) staff and board viewed the proposed designs for the new NYU Academic and Spiritual Center, which requires a zoning variance and must go through a public hearing process. We would like to share with you some comments and concerns we have regarding the proposal.

First we would like to address the extent to which the proposed project conforms to the 'Planning Principles' NYU agreed to with the Manhattan Borough President's NYU Community Task Force, of which GVSHP is a member. Among the most prominent principles are that the university should "prioritize...identifying opportunities to decentralize facilities and actively pursuing these opportunities"; "consulting with the community on the types of facilities that can be decentralized from the Village campus core"; and "reuse before new development". To date, we have seen little evidence that NYU has abided by these principles, and this case is no exception. When planning for the new Center for Academic and Spiritual Life, NYU neither pursued options outside the core area nor consulted the community or the Task Force before demolition of the building.

In recent months, NYU has also demolished the Provincetown Playhouse and Apartments at 133-139 MacDougal Street, proposed a new tower on Bleecker Street and a new building East 4th and Lafayette Streets within the core campus area. In each of these cases, including the new Spiritual Center, NYU has made no convincing argument as to why the building must be located in the core, has not engaged in any serious discussion about re-use of the existing building, and has offered no additional information about facilities it does plan to locate outside of the core. Any consideration of the relative merits or drawbacks of this individual proposal must be considered within the context of the failure of the university to live up to these primary planning principles in this or any other recent project or proposal.

Additionally, this site is also within the proposed South Village Historic District, which NYU pledged to support. It is hard to know what, if any, meaning that pledge has now that NYU has demolished a second building within that

proposed district (the former Catholic Center which occupied this site, and the Provincetown Playhouse and Apartments at 133-139 MacDougal Street).

GVSHP also has some concerns with the proposed design of the new building. The site is on a prominent corner adjacent to the iconic Judson Memorial Church, and is visible through the Washington Square Arch from lower Fifth Avenue. Given that the existing building has been demolished, it is critical that any new building consider the site's historic context. One of the many serious problems with the design of NYU's Kimmel Center is that its similarity in color to Washington Square Arch means that it can seem to engulf and obliterate the view through the arch, eliminating the visual distinction between the arch itself and its surroundings. We would not want this new building to compound this problem. Thus while we believe the building should relate to the colors of its neighbors, the Kimmel Center and Judson Memorial Church, we think it should take its cues from Judson's use of darker hues mixed with lighter ones, which is one of many ways in which that structure does not share the same visual problems that Kimmel does in relation to the arch.

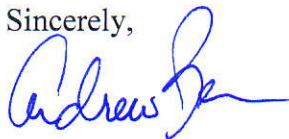
While somewhat detailed drawings for the proposed design as seen from the north have been provided, no images of the building from West 3rd Street, as it faces the South Village, or Thompson Street, have been provided. Such images must be provided in order for the proposed design to truly be evaluated, as we consider the visual impact of the building upon its surrounding neighborhood equally important to that which it will have upon the park and the view to the north.

While the design seeks to create a shorter and squatter building than the zoning allows, which we believe has its advantages, we are concerned that the proposed boxy design will appear monolithic on narrow Thompson Street. We therefore suggest setting back the uppermost floors and otherwise varying and breaking up the Thompson Street façade further.

Finally, while NYU has said that it will forgo use of a small percentage of the allowable bulk in this development as part of its request for exemptions from zoning rules, the university has not supplied any guarantees that it will not seek to use the unused bulk at some point in the future. We urge the university to provide guarantees that any bulk it claims it is forgoing with this development cannot be used or accessed in the future.

We look forward to reviewing any revisions to the proposed design or additional materials NYU provides..

Sincerely,



Andrew Berman
Executive Director

Cc: Members of the NYU Community Task Force