

THE MUNICIPAL ART SOCIETY
OF NEW YORK

February 3, 2004

Hon. Robert Tierney
Chair, New York City Landmarks Preservation Commission
One Centre Street, 9th floor
New York, NY 10007

Dear Chair Tierney:

I am writing on behalf of the Municipal Art Society to express support for the consideration of Village/Silver Towers complex and superblock, 100 and 110 Bleecker Street and 505 LaGuardia Place in Greenwich Village as New York City landmarks. This complex is significant as an example of post-war renewal and university redevelopment and should be considered for New York City Landmark designation for its typological, canonic, historical, and technological merit.

Completed in 1966, the complex is an outstanding and rare example of post-war urban renewal, university planning, and public housing intersecting in a sculptural totality. The pinwheel arrangement of the three superblocks reflects a shift from the superblocks of the 1950s to the more context-sensitive designs of the later 60s and 70s. Despite the grand scale of the project, sensitivity to the immediate context and a human scale is achieved by interweaving nearby streets with pedestrian walkways. The sculptural concrete and glass facades are enhanced by the focal point of the plaza, *Portrait of Sylvette*, by Carl Nesjar, who collaborated with Pablo Picasso to reinterpret Picasso's original 2-foot tall sculpture into a thirty-six foot high, six-foot sculpture.

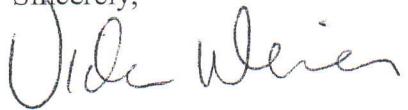
Designed by Pritzker prize-winning architect I.M. Pei, the superblock complex reflects development of sculptural expression and sensitivity to the user found in his later work, and was influential for pre-eminent architects such as Richard Meier and Peter Eisenmann. Upon its completion, University Village won several awards, including the American Institute of Architects National Honor Award and City Club of New York's Albert S. Bard Award. The complex was also included in Fortune Magazine's 1966 list of "Ten Buildings that Climax an Era."

Technologically, the three 30-story concrete and glass towers are one of New York's most outstanding examples of cast-in-place concrete architecture, a construction method that is rarely used today.

Designation of the entire site should be considered to preserve the integrity of Pei, Freed, Moor and Amberg's design. Landmarking the three towers, the landscaping, the outdoor furniture and sculpture and the contributing structures of the supermarket and Coles Sports and Recreation Center is essential to preserve the totality of the modern design.

The Society strongly urges the Commission to hold a public hearing on these properties to continue its good efforts to save the city's most exemplary modern architecture. Thank you for this opportunity for us to express the Society's views.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Vicki Weiner".

Vicki Weiner
Kress Fellow for Historic Preservation

CC: Greenwich Village Society for Historic Preservation
Modern Architecture Working Group

NORTHEAST
OFFICE



NATIONAL TRUST
for HISTORIC PRESERVATION

August 3, 2004

The Honorable Robert B. Tierney
Chair, Landmarks Preservation Commission of New York City
Municipal Building
1 Centre Street, 9th Floor North
New York, NY 10007

Re: The Silver Towers/University Village complex
Greenwich Village, New York City

Dear Commissioner Tierney:

The National Trust for Historic Preservation has become aware of the proposed nomination of the Silver Towers/University Village complex in Greenwich Village, as a New York City Landmark, and we are writing to express our support for this nomination.

The National Trust has a strong interest in having the Silver Towers designated as a New York City Landmark. Designed by leading architect I.M. Pei in 1964, the building is a striking example of modern design, including a large outdoor Picasso sculpture, landscaping and outdoor furniture. Equally important is its setting, as a "superblock" designed to be integrated with the surrounding streetscape yet meet the needs of an important urban institution, New York University. The structure is a model for context-sensitive yet innovative urban renewal.

We recognize the difficulty oftentimes experienced in classifying a "modern" structure as "historic". But the fabric of our culture is composed of many elements from many time periods, and each element contributes to our understanding of our country's growth and development. The National Trust has recognized the significance of buildings of the Recent Past, ~~naming a~~ series of iconic buildings to our annual list of America's 11 Most Endangered Historic Places over the last few years and supporting efforts to embrace these newer buildings as part of our collective history.

We understand that designation as a Local Landmark may facilitate continuing local efforts to improve, restore and preserve the Silver Towers, as well as encourage sensitive

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Mr. Robert B. Tierney
August 3, 2004
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development on the block. We note that a similar Pei complex, the Kips Bay Plaza, has already lost much of its integrity due to an unsympathetic and out-of-scale shopping center that overwhelms the site. It would be unfortunate to lose this Pei structure as well to inappropriate development or deferred maintenance. We therefore encourage your favorable review of this proposed nomination, and thank you for this opportunity to comment.

Very truly yours,


Marilyn M. Fenollosa
Senior Program Officer and Regional Attorney

Documentation and Conservation
of buildings, sites and neighborhoods of the
Modern Movement

P.O. Box 250532
New York, NY 10025
docomomo_ny@hotmail.com
www.docomomo-us.org



United States
New York/Tri-State

February 26, 2004

Robert B. Tierney, Chair
Landmarks Preservation Commission
1 Centre Street, 9th Fl.
New York, NY 10007

Dear Chairman Tierney:

Local members of DOCOMOMO met earlier this month to discuss New York City buildings from the Modern period warranting our attention and advocacy. It is with unanimous support that the group asks the Commission to consider the University Village/Silver Towers complex for New York City landmark designation. (100 and 110 Bleecker Street, 505 LaGuardia Place/Block 524)

The complex, designed by I.M. Pei (with James Freed, A. Preston Moore and Theodore Amberg) and completed in 1966, meets designation criteria on multiple counts. As part of the Washington Square Urban Renewal project, University Village/Silver Towers was born of Robert Moses's superblock principles of the 1950s. However, with design work started in 1961, the complex dramatically improved upon these tenets architecturally and in its overall planning. New York University was an enlightened client both for integrating city sponsored Mitchell-Lama housing within its campus development and for hiring an internationally recognized architect. Pei's superblock connects readily to the surrounding neighborhood by the visual continuation of Wooster and Greene Streets through the superblock via pedestrian walkways. The integrated public plaza and mews work together to define a central urban space enlivened by a mix of geometric forms and the strikingly appropriate outdoor sculpture, "Syllette" based on a Picasso drawing.

As architectural critics have noted, Pei's façade is "sculpturally vigorous" (Stern et al. New York 1960). It succeeds in using a bold structural grid and monumental scale to create high-rise housing that is far more interesting and less oppressive in look and feel than its standard predecessors around the city. Buff colored concrete, recessed windows, sloping sills and tapered piers soften the grid and generate a constantly changing play of shadows. The asymmetry of gridded window sections juxtaposed with the smooth shear walls avoids the monotony of planar elevations seen on many housing towers, while the pinwheel plan helps break the 30-story tower masses into smaller vertical elements. University Village/Silver Towers is also a perfect example of Pei's structural expressionism, as the blank walls are true shear walls, their 22-foot width articulating on the exterior the depth of the spaces within.

The towers are also technically important as examples of cast-in-place concrete residential construction. While Chatham Green (Gruzen & Partners, 1965) is another fine example of this type of construction, they are quite rare. For University Village/Silver Towers Pei used a system of reusable fiberglass forms to achieve 30 stories with the desired architectural complexity under the very strict budget constraints of the Mitchell-Lama housing program (all three buildings had to meet the city's cost-per-square-foot dictates.)

I.M. Pei was already a nationally acclaimed architect in the 1960s and in the years thereafter built his present internationally recognized practice. In 1983 he was awarded the Pritzker Prize for Architecture. "University Plaza"—the firm's name for University Village/Silver Towers—won several awards upon its completion, including an AIA National Honor Award in 1967. Pei himself has said that he considers the project one of the firm's most architecturally distinguished housing projects. The towers are an extraordinary example of Pei's structural and sculptural sensibilities meshed.

The University Village/Silver Towers superblock remains highly regarded as architecture and as housing because the complex works as designed and as an exciting whole. It has done so for nearly 40 years. Therefore, the contributing features that merit inclusion in a designation include the landscaping, site lighting fixtures, outdoor furniture and the sculpture "Sylvette." Additionally, the two structures that share the towers' site—the supermarket and sports complex—follow Pei's plan to develop the remaining parcels of the block with low, horizontally massed buildings that were deferential to the three towers and their connecting urban open space. This spatial composition of tall towers, low horizontal structures and open spaces is essential to the design's success. It is important that these relationships between buildings are maintained and thus, it would seem critical that the two low-rise buildings be included as "non-contributing" structures to the designation.

To summarize, University Village/Silver Towers is a pivotal work of architectural design by an architect of long-standing acclaim and professional recognition worldwide. It is an excellent example of enlightened university planning and design from the 1960s as well as one of the best designs in publicly supported housing of the same era in New York City. We are all quick to condemn urban renewal projects—some because they rightly warrant censure, others merely because they are big and raised difficult social issues. With University Village/Silver Towers we have an example that stands far above the negatives associated with superblock urban renewal development. For these reasons and more the site deserves landmark protection.

DOCOMOMO New York/Tri-State respectfully requests that the Commission hold a designation hearing to formally consider landmark designation of University Village/Silver Towers.

Thank you for considering our opinions on this matter.

Sincerely,



Kathleen Randall
For DOCOMOMO New York-Tri-State
Local advocacy group

MODERN ARCHITECTURE WORKING GROUP

John Jurayj, John Kriskiewicz; Co-Conveners Andrew Dolkart Franny Eberhart Michael Gotkin Ned Kaufman
Jeffery Kroessler Roger Lang Sandra Levine Christopher London Nina Rappaport Vicki Weiner Caroline Zaleski

Preservation and Advocacy of New York City's Modern Architectural Heritage

February 22, 2004

Hon. Robert Tierney
Chair, New York City Landmarks Preservation Commission
One Centre Street, 9th floor
New York, NY 10007

**Re: Silver Towers, 1966, I.M. Pei.
Landscape design, James I. Freed
Sculpture, Pablo Picasso, fabrication, Carl Nesjar**

Dear Chair Tierney:

On behalf the Modern Architecture Working Group, I am writing to urge the Commission to designate Silver Towers as a New York City Landmark. Located in the southern section of Greenwich Village on the super block bound by Bleecker, Houston, LaGuardia and Mercer streets, Silver Towers is a critical design by one of the late 20th century's most important architects.

Designed in 1966 by I.M. Pei, this complex of three cast concrete towers, central concrete sculpture, landscaping and two low horizontal non-contributing buildings, mark a high water mark in modernist design. Here is elegantly answered the question of how to create an environment for living simultaneously integrated and distinct from the surrounding 19th century cityscape. Pei did this by allowing the existing north south streets to stay open visually through the site, by subtle twisting the orientation of each tower to the other, by detailing the facades masterfully in concrete and glass, weaving a pattern of solids and voids and by providing a monumental plaza and an austere, thoughtful landscape design as a coherent setting.

Along with Chatham Towers, which we have already nominated and eagerly await, the designation of Silver Towers would immeasurably add to the portrait of modernism that the Landmarks Preservation Commission as already chosen to protect for the future of New York City

As always we thank you for the work that the commission does on behalf of our wonderful city.

Sincerely,

John S. Jurayj Co-chair of MAWG

cc Mary Beth Betts, Director of Research for LPC

Andrew Berman, Director of GVSHP **New York, New York 10011**

175 West 13th Street

23 February 2004

Robert Tierney, Chair
NYC Landmarks Preservation Commission
Municipal Building
One Centre Street
New York, New York 10007

re: Silver Towers

Dear Mr. Tierney:

On behalf of the American Institute of Architects New York Chapter, representing 3,400 architects and public members in New York City and its Historic Buildings Committee, we would like to support placing Silver Towers on the calendar of the New York City Landmarks Preservation Commission. Silver Towers, a complex of three residential buildings on Bleecker Street and LaGuardia Place in Greenwich Village, was designed by I. M. Pei for New York University as faculty housing and is a handsome representation of late-modern minimalist architecture. The complex is a fine example of "towers in the park", and, as such, the buildings deserve consideration for landmark status.

The complex is situated on a "superblock" with low-rise buildings at the perimeter. Designation of the entire block rather than the buildings themselves is a complex issue in which the quality and size of the existing buildings, the scale of the adjacent streetscape, the site's development potential through the possibility of transfer of air rights and the resulting zoning envelope will all have to be considered. For this reason we feel the site designation will require further study and discussion and a fair balancing of the needs and requirements of the various stakeholders.

Nonetheless, with the AIA New York Chapter's new home at the Center for Architecture diagonally across the street at 536 LaGuardia Place, we must emphatically state that Silver Towers is an unparalleled housing complex of extraordinary quality that contributes to the neighborhood context and creates a sense of place. Clearly the towers must remain part of New York's legacy for generations to come.

Yours truly,

Fredric Bell, FAIA
Executive Director

Mark Ginsberg, AIA
President

cc: I.M. Pei