



**Greenwich
Village
Society for
Historic
Preservation**

252 East 11th Street
New York, New York 10005

(212) 475-9585
fax: (212) 475-9582
www.gvshp.org

Executive Director
Andrew Berman

President of the Board
Mary Ann Arisman

Vice Presidents
Arthur Levin
Linda Yowell

Secretary/Treasurer
Katherine Schoonover

Trustees
John Bacon
Penelope Baeau
Meredith Bergmann
Elizabeth Ely
Jo Hamilton
Thomas Harney
Leslie S. Mason
Ruth McCoy
Florent Morellet
Peter Mullan
Andrew S. Paul
Cynthia Penney
Jonathan Russo
Judith Stonehill
Arbie Thalacker
Fred Wistow
E. Anthony Zunino III

Advisors
Kent Barwick
Joan K. Davidson
Christopher Forbes
Margaret Halsey Gardiner
Margot Gayle
Elizabeth Gilmore
Carol Greitzer
Tony Hiss
Martin Hutner
Regina M. Kellerman
James Stewart Polshek
Elinor Ratner
Henry Hope Reed
Alice B. Sandler
Anne-Marie Sumner
Calvin Trillin
Jean-Claude van Itallie
George Vellonakis
Vicki Weiner
Anthony C. Wood

October 18, 2007

Henry J. Amoroso
President and Chief Executive Officer
St. Vincent's Catholic Medical Center
170 West 12th Street
New York, NY 10011

Dear Mr. Amoroso,

Thank you for the presentation which you and your staff, and your architects and the architects for the Rudin Family, made regarding proposals to construct a new St. Vincent's Hospital on the current site of the O'Toole Building at 7th Avenue and 12th Street, as well as to develop about 650,000 sq. ft. and 400-500 units of residential space on the remainder of the St. Vincent's campus east of 7th Avenue. We know how important this project is to St. Vincent's, which we hope to see remain in Greenwich Village and modernize its facilities to better serve the public. However, as you know, this project is also of an enormous scope – over 1 million square feet of space – and will be the largest development in Greenwich Village in fifty years. There are many aspects of this plan with far-reaching implications which could set important precedents not only for our neighborhood but citywide. We therefore feel very strongly that in addition to addressing the needs of the hospital, any plan must also address concerns about neighborhood character and scale, as well as the rules governing development within historic districts, especially the Greenwich Village Historic District within which these sites are located.

Based upon the massing and site plan presented to the public last week, our specific concerns include the following:

- 1) We are greatly concerned about the height of the proposed new hospital building. At over 300 feet tall (including mechanicals), this building will tower dramatically over the Greenwich Village Historic District, and the West Village in general (we believe it may in fact be the tallest building in the Greenwich Village Historic District, as well as in most of Greenwich Village). This height and scale seems greatly out-of-context for the neighborhood from both a zoning and a landmarks perspective. Given that due to the West Village's unusual street pattern the building is located at the confluence of so many different streets, it will be uniquely visible throughout the neighborhood. We therefore urge that the height be substantially reduced. This could be addressed by looking at the possibility of placing more of the uses currently slated for this building underground (either on this site or perhaps on the triangle site), and/or locating some of these uses east of 7th Avenue on the sites currently slated to be developed by the Rudin Family. Once more details have been provided regarding the specific proposed design elements of the hospital building, we will likely have further comments.

- 2) We are also greatly concerned about the height and bulk of the residential building currently planned for the east side of 7th Avenue. At approximately 265 feet in height (including mechanicals) the building is much too big and too tall for its surroundings. Covering almost the entire avenue frontage from 11th to 12th Streets and rising almost straight up, the building is massive and bulky, much more so than virtually any other residential building in the Greenwich Village Historic District. Like the hospital building, this building will be located at the confluence of several streets and will be highly visible for many, many blocks in multiple directions. We feel strongly that the size of this building must be substantially reduced to bring it more in line with other apartment buildings in the district and in the immediate vicinity. Once more details have been provided regarding the specific design elements of the building, we will likely have further comments.
- 3) While we see no historic significance to the Link, Coleman, and Cronin buildings, we cannot support the argument that all of the older St. Vincent's buildings should be demolished (as opposed to re-used for either residential or medical use), given their location within a designated historic district, which protects buildings from demolition. In fact, several of the older St. Vincent's buildings (some of which are over 80 years old) are quite handsome and perfectly in context with their surroundings, and are certainly connected to the history of the neighborhood. Regardless, the demolition of buildings within an historic district has important implications not just for this neighborhood but for the applicability of landmark regulations in general. Within historic districts, demolition must be the exception, not the rule. Given that the older St. Vincent's buildings are located at the northern end of the Greenwich Village Historic District, and could have therefore easily been carved out of the Historic District in 1969, it is clear that the original designation considered it important to include these buildings in the historic district. In fact, the designation reports specifically comments upon many of the pleasing details of these buildings and the way in which they collectively create a harmonious streetscape.

It is generally understood that the only time a building within a historic district can be approved for demolition by certificate of appropriateness (as is proposed in this case) is when the building clearly is without architectural style or merit, or does not bear any relationship to the character of the historic district within which it is located, or is so new as to not merit historic district protection. None of these apply to the older buildings on the St. Vincent's campus. We also cannot endorse the argument which has been put forward as part of this plan that Greenwich Village's character is solely defined by rowhouses, even on sidestreets, as the streets of Greenwich Village show a great diversity of building types and forms. There are also environmental and sustainability concerns which stem from simply demolishing all of these buildings, and several residents of West 12th and 11th Streets have expressed to us a preference for or willingness to retain the existing hospital buildings for re-use on these and other bases

- 4) We feel it is imperative that the Triangle site be improved as a publicly accessible and usable space in a substantive way as a part of this plan. While we appreciate that the hospital has stated that it commits to doing so and to work with the community to make this happen, we feel there needs to be specific designs and commitments as part of this discussion before any approvals can be given.

- 5) We are concerned about the way the new hospital building's entrance was depicted in the presentation. The entrance looked cavernous, and not the welcoming or comfortable element in the streetscape one would hope for. In some ways it seemed reminiscent of the (no longer accessible) entrance to St. Vincent's Link Pavilion. We urge you to rethink this configuration.

We very much appreciate the time and thought that you and others at St. Vincent's, the Rudin Family, and your architects have put into this proposal, and your willingness to share it with the public in advance of filing your application with the Landmarks Preservation Commission. As you know, this massive proposal needs to go through several stages of public hearings and must be approved by the Landmarks Preservation Commission, the City Planning Commission, and the City Council. We hope that the concerns we are raising can be addressed before applications are filed with these agencies, and the official review, hearing, and approval process begins.

I look forward to continuing to work with you and other concerned members of the public on this proposal.

Sincerely,

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

Andrew Berman
Executive Director

Cc: Mayor Michael Bloomberg
City Council Speaker Christine Quinn
Manhattan Borough President Scott Stringer
Congressman Jerrold Nadler
State Senator Tom Duane
Assemblymember Deborah Glick
Assemblymember Richard Gottfried
City Council Land Use Committee Chair Melinda Katz
City Council Zoning Subcommittee Chair Tony Avella
City Planning Commission Chair Amanda Burden
Community Board #2, Manhattan
Community Board #4, Manhattan
Municipal Art Society
New York Landmarks Conservancy
Historic Districts Council
St. Vincent's Community Working Group
Greenwich Village Block Associations
West 13th 100 Block Association
West 12th Street Block Association
Mulry Angle/West 11th Street Block Association
Waverly/Bank Neighbors
175 West 13th Street Board
175 West 12th Street Board
101 West 12th Street Board
P.S. 41 Parent's Association