

August 5, 2008

**STATEMENT OF THE NEW YORK LANDMARKS CONSERVANCY BEFORE THE N.Y.C. LANDMARKS PRESERVATION COMMISSION REGARDING THE TRANSFER OF UNUSED DEVELOPMENT RIGHTS FROM 20 WEST 44<sup>th</sup> Street, THE GENERAL SOCIETY OF MECHANICS AND TRADESMEN (“GSMT”) TO A RECEIVING SITE AT 516 FIFTH AVENUE.**

Good day, Chair Tierney and Commissioners. I am Andrea Goldwyn speaking on behalf of The New York Landmarks Conservancy. The Landmarks Conservancy’s Public Policy Committee met with the proponents of this project on July 9, 2008, and reviewed plans for the proposal which was just presented to you.

In this real estate transaction, the applicants are requesting a report pursuant to Section 74-711 of the Zoning Resolution to transfer bulk from GSMT. The 74-711 procedure requires a finding of a preservation purpose. In this case, the landmark is to be restored to a state of first-class condition based on assessments by preservation architects.

As part of the application for the special permit the Conservancy has reviewed the preservation plan for the GSMT, and we were pleased to see that the plan will restore a building which is in solid structural shape, but has suffered from incomplete maintenance and a few minor alterations. Overall, the GSMT has proposed an appropriate and welcome restoration of the building’s front façade. For the future, the Conservancy would like to suggest that the owners pursue landmarks designation of the GSMT’s remarkable library interior and use some of the funds remaining from the transfer for restoration of that interior and the skylight which illuminates it.

This proposed new building at 516 Fifth Avenue will require demolition of several fine older structures at the site, and the Conservancy wishes to note regret at this demolition even though these buildings are not protected by the City’s Landmarks Law. While the new building will be taller than the existing ones, it will be barely visible from the GSMT, and will not deter from the landmark. The demolition will expose a party wall at the Century Association Clubhouse (McKim, Mead and White, 1891) on 43<sup>rd</sup> Street, so the Conservancy would like to ask the architects of the proposed new building to work with representatives of the Century Club to ensure that this wall and the Century Club overall are not adversely affected by the demolition or the new construction.

The Conservancy supports the General Society of Mechanics and Tradesman in this endeavor. The Society has owned the building since 1899 and has been a good steward of the property, deploying limited resources to maintain the building as best it could, and keeping the use intact for over 100 years. In that tradition, funds from this transaction will be used for this restoration, and will be set aside for a maintenance fund. The Conservancy concurs that the transfer of air rights will yield funds that are set to be used for a valid “preservation purpose” and we support the proposal.