

**THE NEW YORK
LANDMARKS
CONSERVANCY**

June 17, 2008

**STATEMENT OF THE NEW YORK LANDMARKS CONSERVANCY BEFORE THE N.Y.C.
LANDMARKS PRESERVATION COMMISSION REGARDING THE CERTIFICATE OF
APPROPRIATENESS FOR 980 MADISON AVENUE.**

Good morning, Chairman Tierney and Commissioners. I am Alex Herrera speaking on behalf of The New York Landmarks Conservancy.

Back in 2006, the Conservancy did not support the applicant's original proposal because we felt that a high-rise tower over the former Parke-Bernet Gallery was not in keeping with the special architectural, historical, and residential character of the Upper East Side Historic District. For this reason, when the Conservancy's Public Policy Committee met to review the new application last month, we were generally pleased to see that the applicant had taken the public's testimony and the commission's comments seriously and returned with a completely different approach.

While the Conservancy does not endorse the building of large additions on top of low-scale landmarked buildings, we believe that the facts here make it a special case worth considering.

Firstly, the historic building, built originally to house the Parke-Bernet Gallery, has been extensively altered over the years and only loosely resembles the original design, which was highly regarded by contemporary architects and critics. Secondly, it is a building that takes up an entire block front along Madison Avenue, which is itself a special thoroughfare within the Historic District.

The current proposal calls for the restoration of the historic building to its appearance circa 1949. We believe this is a huge positive for the District and the City. The geometric clarity of the original design will be re-established through the restoration of the original massing, the elimination of new window openings, and the restoration of the fourth story cornice. We also support the establishment of a carefully detailed master plan for the retail storefronts which are an important presence on Madison Avenue.

The proposed addition, which is visually organized through the same set of geometric proportions as the original building, is situated above a setback fifth story so that it gives the appearance of floating over the original roofline of the building. The original building was four stories with a setback fifth story; the addition is also four stories with a set back fifth story. This ensemble creates, in our opinion, a pleasing and harmonious whole that also happens to be in conformance with all applicable zoning regulations. The design and massing of the upper stories harmonize with the Gallery building but do not imitate it. The proposed bronze grillage echoes and plays off the spare, largely windowless expanse of the limestone façade. The combination creates an interesting ensemble that does not diminish the older building. The shift in approach on the part of the architects from a vertical spire to a horizontal mass, we believe is successful although it would be hard to imagine another instance where this approach could work.

We support the design in concept, but as in all projects, it is the details that make or break the finished product. The Conservancy has concerns about the execution of the bronze façade screen. What patination will blend the best with the streetscape? How will the louvers operate exactly? We anticipate that these design details will be further studied and analyzed by the Commission through the submission

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of detailed mock-ups and material samples. The follow-up on this project, should the Commission approve it, will be critically important. We also urge the Commission to involve the public in the review of the finishes and details should the proposal go forward.

In conclusion, the Conservancy finds that both developer and architect have returned with an appropriate and successful integration of historic preservation and new building design. We raise no objection to the Commission's approval of the application and look forward to future information about the architectural details.

Thank you for the opportunity to present The New York Landmarks Conservancy's views.