

June 11, 2019

**STATEMENT OF THE NEW YORK LANDMARKS CONSERVANCY BEFORE THE
MANHATTAN BOROUGH PRESIDENT REGARDING A NEW DETENTION FACILITY AT 124-
125 WHITE STREET, MANHATTAN**

Good evening Madam Borough President. I am Andrea Goldwyn, speaking on behalf of the New York Landmarks Conservancy. The Conservancy does not oppose the plan to close Rikers but we cannot support the current plans for a new detention facility at 124-125 White Street.

The Conservancy's mission is to protect the character of New York's neighborhoods. We are not jail experts, but we do know the buildings, the streets, and the communities that define this city, and we do not believe that a new facility some three times larger than the existing buildings is appropriate for this block.

125 White Street is part of the Manhattan Criminal Court Building and Prison complex, which is eligible for listing on the State and National Registers of Historic Places. Demolishing part of the building will cause irreparable harm to that structure. Individual landmarks surround this site. It is directly across the street from the Chinatown and Little Italy Historic District. The proposed 450-foot tall building will be substantially taller than its neighbors, and will dramatically change the character of the neighborhood.

As noted, we do not have expertise in jails, but we defer to someone who does. We spoke to former Judge Jonathan Lippman, who oversaw the independent commission that supported a new borough-based jail system. His comments this week echo those in a January 20, 2019 *Tribeca Trib* article, which reported his opposition to the out-of-scale size of the proposed jails. According to the article, the commission

"...never envisioned the kind of high-rise facilities that now have communities up in arms. 'Those buildings are way too tall. I don't think you have to be a nuclear scientist or a jail designer to get it,' said Lippman, who chairs the Independent Commission on New York City Criminal Justice and Incarceration Reform—more commonly known as the Lippman Commission. 'And you know what?' he continued. 'I've gone and spoken to these architects who build jails around the country and they're very smart and they know how to do these things. They know how to do it in ways that serve the community. But yet they are not just so huge that they dwarf the community.'"

If Judge Lippman, who wants to see new jails replace Rikers, argues against the size of this proposed new facility, we hope that you will agree. The Executive Summary of the Draft EIS states that neighborhood integration is a guiding urban design principle for this project but this plan alienates the neighborhood. A real commitment to community should honor the existing character, scale, and context. We urge you to oppose this proposal and find a better way to replace Rikers.

Thank you for the opportunity to present the Conservancy's views.