

# THE NEW YORK LANDMARKS CONSERVANCY

April 19, 2016

## STATEMENT OF THE NEW YORK LANDMARKS CONSERVANCY BEFORE THE N.Y.C. LANDMARKS PRESERVATION COMMISSION REGARDING A CERTIFICATE OF APPROPRIATENESS FOR ALTERATIONS TO THE FORD FOUNDATION BUILDING, 320 EAST 43<sup>RD</sup> STREET, MANHATTAN, AN INDIVIDUAL AND INTERIOR LANDMARK

Good day, Chair Srinivasan and Commissioners. I am Andrea Goldwyn speaking on behalf of the New York Landmarks Conservancy, regarding a proposal to alter the interior of the Ford Foundation Building. The Conservancy's Public Policy Committee has toured the site and reviewed the proposal.

The Ford Foundation built this landscaped atrium to foster a sense of community and transparency among its staff working within the building and to make a civic connection. The LPC's 1997 designation report quotes architect Kevin Roche, who said that Ford commissioned this open space on valuable Manhattan real estate "for no reason other than to make a public gesture" and that "it was important 'for the relationship of this community with the public.'" The atrium has proved extraordinarily successful. It is a verdant refuge available for employees and visitors to the Ford Foundation and, via the large window wall, visible to passersby along 42<sup>nd</sup> and 43<sup>rd</sup> Streets.

The Ford Foundation has been an excellent steward of its landmarked building. This series of proposed alterations respects the historic design, and will improve the facility, bringing it up to code and increasing access to those with disabilities, in accordance with the Foundation's mission to challenge inequality. Our Committee found the installation of a new door and modifications to existing windows and doors to be appropriate. Committee members did not object to installation of new lighting fixtures but some who have experience with the proposed fixtures suggested that they will not provide adequate lighting, and that the architects should consider selecting a shorter fixture that will light the paths more effectively and less obtrusively. The smoke exhaust system at Level 1 and A and a smoke barrier at Level 11 would be inconspicuous.

Regarding modifications to the hardscape and plantings, the Committee considered which elements are called out in the designation report. As the layout of paths and plantings is not specified, Committee members found that the addition of a pathway along 42<sup>nd</sup> Street is acceptable. We understand that the Foundation wishes to remove the large, brick-faced, fixed planter close to 42<sup>nd</sup> Street to increase barrier-free access from a nearby new door. As the planter is included in the designation report, we hope that it could instead be reduced or that new plantings in that corner be installed to honor the intent of this feature. We also ask that if the smaller planters grouped near the 43<sup>rd</sup> Street entrance are removed for renovations at the entry, that they be re-used to contribute to the overall sense of how the vegetation fills the atrium.

With these alterations, the Ford Foundation will expand the "public gesture" that animated the design of the building and the atrium.

Thank you for this opportunity to express the Conservancy's views.