

1
2
3
4
5
6
7
8
9
10
11
12
13
14
15
16
17
18
19
20
21
22
23
24
25

Transcript of the Public Hearing
before the
LANDMARKS PRESERVATION COMMISSION
on Tuesday, November 26, 2002
at
One Centre Street, 9th floor
New York, New York

ORIGINAL

AR-TI RECORDING COMPANY, INC.
305 Madison Avenue 142 Willis Avenue
Suite 449 P.O. Box 347
New York, N.Y. 10165 Mineola, N.Y. 11501
(212) 349-9692 (516) 741-5235

1
2
3
4
5
6
7
8
9
10
11
12
13
14
15
16
17
18
19
20
21
22
23
24
25

Hearing convened at 4:00 p.m.

P R E S E N T

SHERIDA PAULSEN, Chair

JAN POKORNY, Commissioner

MEREDITH KANE, Commissioner

CHRISTOPHER MOORE, Commissioner

RICHARD OLCOTT, Commissioner

JOHN WEISS, ESQ., Deputy Counsel

BRIAN HOGG, Director of Preservation

JENNIFER FIELD, First Deputy Director of
Preservation

1 existing community house and construct a new
2 14-story building.

3 CHAIRMAN PAULSEN: Meisha?

4 MS. HUNTER: Good afternoon,
5 Commissioners. Meisha Hunter preservation staff.

6 This is an application for alterations at
7 the site of Congregation Shearith Israel as well as
8 complex community house and vacant lot adjacent to
9 the community --

10 AUDIENCE: Could you speak louder?

11 MS. HUNTER: Yes. Is that better?

12 And there is a large team to present
13 today so I am not going to be speaking too long. We
14 will begin with the counsel for the team.

15 MR. FRIEDMAN: Good afternoon,
16 Commissioners, Shelly Friedman, Friedman & Gotbaum.

17 You have before you the applications on
18 behalf of the 450 families of Congregation Shearith
19 Israel for a 14-story building adjacent to its
20 landmark. It is interesting to note that if you do
21 a research of the literature, you will find several
22 references, none of them attributable to the
23 congregation, referring to the congregation as,
24 quote, "The Mother Congregation of American Jewery."

25 This is an odd statement and it is at

1 odds with Jewish tradition as there is no hierarchy
2 among its houses of worship as with other religions.
3 Yet, for what it represents, both in the
4 congregation's historic role as the pre
5 Revolutionary War birthplace of the American Jewish
6 experience and its equally historic role of the
7 centuries old migration of the Jewish people into
8 the New World, the building at 70th and Central Park
9 West was already an international landmark long
10 before its designation by the Commission in the
11 1970s.

12 Each succeeding generation of congregants
13 has taken it as a matter of pride that they are the
14 stewards of the world-renowned physical icon of
15 faith, liberty, perseverance and history. The
16 continuing preservation of the synagogue for what it
17 represents to its past and its future is to this
18 congregation already an article of faith.

19 With that in mind, the congregants come
20 before you today fully supportive of your mission
21 and view it as identical to their own.

22 This generation of congregants needs your
23 assistance. Not once in its 350-year history on
24 Manhattan has it asked for such assistance from the
25 City of New York. It needs to produce a modest

1 economic engine, 10 or 11 apartments, to further its
2 preservation program for the landmark; to restore
3 adjacent parsonage, which is, in fact, one of the
4 true remaining single-family, built as a home on
5 Central Park West; and to replace a dysfunctional
6 and utterly unattractive community house located in
7 the historic district.

8 We are requesting a Certificate of
9 Appropriateness and for a report one exception
10 74-711 special permit is essential to these needs.
11 Our presentation today will hopefully demonstrate to
12 you the care with which the congregants have
13 approached this request. The formal presentation
14 will consist of remarks by Rabbi Marc Angel
15 following myself. He will be followed by Peter
16 Neustater, who is the president of the board of
17 trustees. They will discuss the commitment to
18 preservation purpose that the synagogue has long
19 adhered to and is certainly willing to adhere to as
20 we move forward through this process.

21 They will be followed by Steve Tilly.
22 Steve Tilly has been a preservation architect since
23 1999, has been working on the synagogue itself, and
24 will talk to you about the steps which have already
25 been taken to stabilize it, but for the important

1 work that remains especially to maintain the
2 building and to bring it up to first class
3 condition.

4 He will be followed by Elise Quasebarth,
5 Elisa Quasebarth, who will speak about the context
6 of building in the historic district, as an
7 individual landmark and as across the street from a
8 scenic landmark. And, then, she will be followed by
9 Charles Platt and Paul Byard who will take you
10 through the building.

11 Then, if you wish, I can return to talk
12 about some of the zoning aspects that are being
13 requested in the Section 74-711 application. And,
14 of course, we are all here to respond to your
15 questions.

16 CHAIRMAN PAULSEN: Thank you.

17 RABBI ANGEL: Thank you for very much
18 for giving us this opportunity to make our
19 presentation. My name is Marc Angel, I am the Rabbi
20 of the congregation. I began serving Congregation
21 Shearith Israel in 1969. I was a young kid in those
22 days. When I first came to the synagogue and sat at
23 the reader's desk, the person immediately to my
24 right then Rabbi Emeritus, David Sol Pool. Dr. Pool
25 began Shearith Israel in 1907. Dr. Pool's

1 predecessor began in 1877. To make a long story
2 short, since 1768, I am the eighth rabbi in the
3 congregation's history. This is a sense of history.

4 When one comes into this congregation one
5 has a sense of generations holding hands with
6 generations. When I said that to Dr. Pool, I was
7 talking about the members all the way back to the
8 days of the American Revolution. Our little
9 synagogue that we pray in every morning is a replica
10 of the first building that was built in 1730. We
11 pray at the same reader's desk and sit on the same
12 furniture that our ancestors sat on in 1730 and all
13 the generations since. In our main sanctuary, the
14 reader's desk where our prayers are recited, the
15 floors are the same floors as our synagogue building
16 in 1730. We literally walk in the footsteps of our
17 ancestors.

18 I tell you all of this to give you a
19 sense of the culture of the congregation of which I
20 am honored to be a Rabbi. This is a congregation
21 that respects its history, that respects its
22 connectedness from one generation to the next. This
23 is a congregation which does everything slowly,
24 carefully, very thoughtfully. When I was a young
25 Rabbi, I thought it was too slow, now I think it is

1 just right. But the congregation is based very much
2 in its history.

3 This congregation has played a part in
4 American life since day one. In the early days, our
5 members fought in the American Revolution. Each
6 year on Memorial Day we go to our cemetery downtown
7 and put flags on the graves of those of our
8 congregants who fought in the American Revolution.
9 In 1671, a member, Asher Levy, contributed to the
10 establishment of the first Lutheran Church in New
11 York.

12 In 1695, 34 members of Shearith Israel
13 contributed to establishing Trinity Church on 7th
14 and 11th, building the steeple of Trinity Church.
15 In 1847 they had a special service for Irish famine
16 relief. In the late 1800s, when tremendous numbers
17 of immigrants were coming into the United States,
18 they found a great voice in one of our members,
19 Emma Lazarus, who formed the words for the Statute
20 of Liberty.

21 In early 1930 a great voice for justice
22 in America was our member United States Supreme
23 Court Justice Benjamin Nathan Cardozo. In more
24 recent history, and certainly well-known to all of
25 you, is our illustrious member Alvin Henry

1 Goldstein, who was not only a great architect but a
2 person very dedicated to the historic preservation
3 of the City of New York.

4 So this is congregation of Shearith
5 Israel is a congregation rooted in history,
6 conscious of who we are, conscious of a tremendous
7 responsibility to society at large and to our own
8 immediate community as well.

9 In the 1920s -- I found a document in our
10 archives written by our previous Rabbi, Dr. David
11 Sol Pool. Dr. Pool thought that the west side was
12 going down the drain and there was no future there.
13 He made a recommendation to the board of trustees to
14 move to the east side, that's where the future was.
15 The board, in its infinite wisdom, decided to stay
16 where it is, the synagogue on Central Park West.

17 When I first came to the synagogue in
18 1969, there were a lot of people moving out of New
19 York. We first lived on 85th Street and Central
20 Park West, and we were warned, this block you can
21 walk on, that block you can't because this one is
22 dangerous. You didn't walk down Columbus Avenue.
23 It has changed since then, but there were times not
24 that long ago when the situation on the west side
25 was very vulnerable and deteriorating.

1 I had a conversation as a young rabbi
2 with our President Edgar J. Nathan III. I said,
3 "Edgar, we have no future here. We should be
4 looking someplace else. The demographics are not
5 with us." It shows how wrong a rabbi can be,
6 especially when he is young.

7 Edgar, who was wiser, said, "You know
8 what, We are part of the demographics here. When
9 our synagogue stays here, that's a vote for this
10 neighborhood, that's a vote for stability. That we
11 are committed to the future of this neighborhood, of
12 this congregation, of this area. When we stay here,
13 our families stay here and the neighborhood resumes
14 its stability."

15 This is the kind of commitment that
16 Shearith Israel had, and the one word that comes to
17 mind is stewardship. We have, it sounds a little
18 bit too proud, but I am proud, very proud, proud of
19 our members and proud of our history. We have a
20 very beautiful and wonderful building that we treat
21 with ultimate respect. We respect it not just
22 because it is a building and a sanctuary to God, but
23 because it is a visible symbol of our history and
24 our traditions and our generations.

25 In the last five or six years, our

1 congregation has spent a lot of time and effort
2 raising funds, repairing the building, doing a hole
3 lot of work that had to be done. The incredible
4 devotion of our board and of our committees is
5 something that is absolutely a wonder. They did
6 this not for self-gain, not because they thought
7 they would get anything out of it, but just for the
8 love of the building, love of the congregation and
9 love of the community.

10 As the Rabbi of this congregation, I can
11 say the following: We have pushed ourselves, we
12 have taxed ourselves mercilessly. And every dollar
13 that we invest in the building is a dollar we are
14 not investing in youth programs, in programs for the
15 elderly, in social action commitments, and programs
16 of a community important to us and to our community
17 at large.

18 The synagogue doesn't exist for the
19 building, the building exists for the congregation.
20 And right now, the financial burden of the running
21 this building is so high and future commitments are
22 so high, that I believe, speaking as a Rabbi, that
23 this imperils our mission as a religious institution
24 and as a civic institution.

25 In 1897 when we built our building on

1 Central Park West, this was a duck farm. The only
2 building in the area, I believe, was the Dakota at
3 on West 107th Street. All the other buildings in
4 the neighborhood since 1897 blocked our views,
5 interrupted our lives, caused all kinds of
6 commotion, but you know what, this is a growing city
7 and we are part of it and we did our best to adapt
8 and to be a very good neighbor.

9 In sum, Shearith Israel has proven over
10 the years its seriousness, its integrity and its
11 commitment to New York and its commitment to the
12 West Side. We have invested time, we have invested
13 money. This building, this area is not only our
14 past, we believe it is also our future. We ask you
15 to help us maintain the standards for which this
16 congregation is famous. We owe this respect and
17 reverence to the generations that have come before
18 us, and perhaps, more importantly for this evening,
19 we owe this standard of commitment and reverence to
20 the generations yet to come.

21 Thank you.

22 CHAIRMAN PAULSEN: Thank you.

23 MR. NEUSTATER: My name is Peter
24 Neustater. I am the "Pinnas" (ph) of Congregation
25 Shearith Israel Spanish and Portugese synagogue in

1 the City of New York.

2 In 1654, 23 Sephardic Jews claimed a
3 position in Portuguese Brazil. They were making
4 their way back to Amsterdam when they were captured
5 by pirates, rescued by a French ship and dropped off
6 destitute two weeks before Rosh Hashana here in New
7 Amsterdam. That Rosh Hashana service, held
8 September 1654, marked the beginning of Jewish life
9 in North America. Even at that time, they had the
10 historic foresight to name their newly formed
11 congregation Shearith Israel, remnant of Israel.

12 Congregation Shearith Israel, the subject
13 of this application, residing in its fifth synagogue
14 building on 70th and Central Park, is not only the
15 oldest Jewish congregation in North America, but
16 also the oldest in the English-speaking world.
17 These Jews from the beginning fought not to be
18 tolerated, but to be equal citizens. They fought
19 with the Dutch against the British. They fought
20 with the British against the Indians and with George
21 Washington for the independence of the United
22 States.

23 On exactly this date, November 26, 1789,
24 President George Washington declared a national day
25 of Thanksgiving. Our congregation 213 years ago

1 celebrated this first Thanksgiving ever in the City
2 of New York. The 1730 synagogue that this
3 Thanksgiving was celebrated in still exists today
4 next to our main sanctuary. It has been carefully
5 preserved and restored and is used every morning and
6 evening for services.

7 We sit on the original 1730 benches. The
8 Torah scrolls are kept in the 18th Century Ark, lit
9 by 270 year old eternal light. Pre Revolutionary
10 War era bells crown the Torah scrolls. One set of
11 these bells in the main sanctuary was made by the
12 famous colonial silversmith Ron Myers, a
13 contemporary of Paul Revere and the "Pinnas" (sic)
14 of this congregation during the colonial period.

15 In the Ark there are Torah scrolls that
16 were slashed by British soldiers when they entered
17 the synagogue during the war. The Chazan would read
18 on the 1730 reader's platform surrounded by the
19 Milano style candlesticks. In the main sanctuary
20 the loose floor boards under the reader's platform
21 were taken from the 1730 synagogue building.

22 This Friday afternoon we will be lighting
23 a Chanukah Menorah that predates Christopher
24 Columbus. As you can see, Shearith Israel's mission
25 is about preserving the past and carefully handing

1 it down to the next generation. For hundreds of
2 years we acted as a landmark and preservation group
3 before this concept was popular.

4 During the early 19th Century, the
5 Congregation of Turo Synagogue, the oldest building
6 in the United States, dwindled and could not main
7 their synagogue building. It was Shearith Israel
8 that took over the building, maintained it until the
9 congregation was revitalized at the end of the 19th
10 century. Today Turo Synagogue, still owned
11 Congregation Shearith Israel, was the first
12 religious institution to join the National Trust.

13 Shearith Israel, throughout its 348-year
14 history has always been at the forefront of historic
15 preservation. To think that we are going to do less
16 is inconceivable. Our goal today is still the same,
17 preserve the past through the landmark, hand it down
18 to the next generation restored, and provide the
19 means for future generations to maintain it. Even
20 before the fire at the Central Synagogue, the
21 trustees of the congregation ordered an engineering
22 study of our 100-year old building.

23 The engineers reported that the south
24 wall and parts of the ceiling were in danger of
25 collapse. The turn of the century electrical wiring

1 with a staple installation was a fire hazard and
2 there was, in fact, evidence of earlier electrical
3 fires that, thank God, did not spread. Water
4 leakage from the roof and walls were causing damage
5 to the magnificent scagliola. Tiffany glass was
6 falling out of its frames, and limestone masonry was
7 in danger of falling off the building.

8 It was obvious to the trustees that we
9 could not wait to go through this lengthy procedure
10 to start the repairs. Our historic building had to
11 be protected and stabilized immediately. We did the
12 responsible thing, we started a major capital
13 campaign and spared no expense to protect the
14 landmark. New electrical systems, state of the art
15 fire detection and suppression systems were
16 installed.

17 The first mist suppression system in the
18 City of New York was put in place. Leaks were
19 fixed, walls were reinforced and fire-retardant
20 materials pumped in. During the restoration, our
21 architects discovered that not only did Louis
22 Tiffany design the windows, but, also, Tiffany did
23 the entire interior. I think you will find of
24 interest the original list of invoices presented to
25 the trustees in 1898 that were found by architects

1 in our archives, if you would pass that around.

2 We have restored the interior to the
3 original 1897 Louis Tiffany color scheme. We all
4 knew that our synagogue was magnificent, but when
5 the interior scaffolding came down, it was beyond
6 expectations. New York City has one of the greatest
7 synagogues in the world.

8 While we have stabilized and protected
9 the landmark, much work is still left to be done.
10 Our restoration architect, Steve Tilly, will give a
11 detailed report on the extensive work that remains
12 undone on the exterior of the landmark and the
13 parsonage.

14 In addition, the community house next to
15 the landmark on 70th Street is in terrible condition
16 and has to be torn down and rebuilt. The trustees
17 of the congregation have decided not to proceed with
18 the developer for this application. We wanted to
19 take control over the process. We are the ones that
20 are going to be here years after the developer has
21 left. The goal of the developer would not
22 necessarily coincide with the needs of the landmark
23 in this community.

24 To achieve this, we have interviewed
25 architects and consultants that have a reputation

1 for historic conservation and preservation. We
2 asked them to design the minimum size building that
3 could become the economic engine for us to finish
4 the restoration, rebuild the community house and
5 provide the endowment for continued maintenance of
6 the landmark.

7 We feel our proposal is responsible, one
8 that highlights and supports the landmark building,
9 enhances the skyline of Central Park West, and
10 complements the neighborhood. Many people have
11 asked why don't we just raise the money from the
12 congregation and finish the restoration and rebuild
13 the community house? Before we submitted this
14 application, I met with our budget finance and
15 campaign committee, the main supporters of the
16 congregation. In today's world where there is such
17 great demand on every dollar, both here in New York
18 and abroad, I can tell you definitively that it
19 would be impossible to raise the sum of money
20 required from the congregation. There is no chance
21 that the congregation will be able to finish the
22 restoration of the landmark, continue the
23 maintenance of the landmark, and rebuild the
24 community house without the economic engine that
25 this process provides.

1 We will not be able to finish our task
2 without this approval. 100 years from now when our
3 grandchildren and great-grandchildren will be
4 sitting on the same benches that our ancestors sat
5 on during the first Thanksgiving in 1789, we hope
6 that they, at that time, will thank this generation
7 of congregants, this generation of New Yorkers, and
8 especially this landmark committee for providing us
9 with the ability to pass this precious heritage to
10 them in a condition that will make us all proud.

11 Thank you.

12 CHAIRMAN PAULSEN: Thank you.

13 MR. TILLY: My name is Steve Tilly. My
14 architectural team has been shepherding the master
15 planning and restoration process to this point.

16 As you can see, the time frame of
17 Shearith Israel is long, looking back as well as
18 looking ahead, and it is has been a thrill for us to
19 join this for the last tiny segment and to try to
20 help look ahead for the next several hundred years.

21 When we arrived and started working with
22 Peter and Rabbi Angel and the committee trying to
23 develop a preservation-based master plan, we looked
24 at obvious riches that we needed to preserve and
25 restore. We also saw obvious problems, an abundance

1 of problems that had to be dealt with immediately.
2 With the object lesson of Central Synagogue firmly
3 in mind, we saw a set of baseline improvements that
4 needed to be started to make it possible for us to
5 then continue with the restoration process safely.

6 Those problems were problems with the
7 infrastructure, problems with the building envelope,
8 water was pouring in through the structure, problems
9 with the decorative finishes that resulted from the
10 water migrating through the building, and also
11 problems with the basic circulation on the site.

12 Shearith Israel actually consists of
13 three -- it appears to be three independent
14 buildings: The parsonage, the synagogue and the
15 sanctuary, which faces Central Park West. Those are
16 the original composition from 1897 of Arnold
17 Brunner. And then the community house, which is
18 actually a couple of brownstones which had a facade
19 pasted on them in the 1950s. But, in fact, it is an
20 interconnected whole -- a single complex that's
21 interconnected on several levels so that the
22 mechanical systems and all of the circulation is
23 really of a piece.

24 Our work in phase one -- our master
25 planning dealt with this entire property, but our

1 work in phase one is really concentrated on the
2 individual landmark, the sanctuary. And that is
3 really the masterpiece of the site. We have done an
4 ambitious phase one. We have arrested the water
5 migrating from the building, we have dealt with a
6 lot of the basic building systems and we have laid
7 the foundation for the future, but there is a lot of
8 work remaining to be done on the structure.

9 The magenta, if you see that, gives you
10 an idea of the quantity of work on the exterior that
11 you see in the plan and in the elevations. This is
12 the elevation, obviously, facing Central Park West,
13 70th Street, the community house; the south
14 elevation with the parsonage blocking part of it;
15 and then looking from the west at the back of the
16 parsonage.

17 You can see, if you think of the three
18 buildings or the three portions, having dealt with
19 the synagogue we have not dealt with this rare
20 commodity, the townhouse on Central Park west. That
21 really is lingering, it needs immediate work. There
22 are a lot of issues to be addressed in that
23 structure, and ,of course, we haven't dealt with the
24 community house.

25 CHAIRMAN PAULSEN: Before you go on, the

1 areas shaded in purple represent the entire scope of
2 preservation work that you need?

3 MR. TILLY: The areas in purple
4 represent those areas that need to be addressed in
5 the continuing preservation work.

6 CHAIRMAN PAULSEN: How much of this has
7 already been accomplished?

8 MR. TILLY: The purple is what remains.

9 CHAIRMAN PAULSEN: The purple is the
10 what remains?

11 MR. TILLY: Right. The gray tone area
12 indicates the surfaces we have dealt with to this
13 point, but the purple hasn't been dealt with.
14 Which, again, there are quibbles on that, because,
15 for example, the largest piece of purple that you
16 are seeing here is the roof of the sanctuary, and
17 that we have put a temporary roof on, we put a
18 membrane roof on, and that we have done in a way
19 sitting on plywood which will allow to restore the
20 standing seam metal roof which we found underneath
21 the asphalt.

22 So there is a major expensive piece of
23 work that needs to be done, that roof is actually
24 visible up and down Central Park West. That is,
25 restoring that roof. The entire roof of the

1 parsonage needs to be replaced. If we look at the
2 photographs, over here it shows the parsonage. The
3 mansard roof on the parsonage, which is both a
4 decorative finish and a building envelope, it is
5 actually beyond the end of its useful life so that
6 needs to be completely redone.

7 We have serious limestone staining that
8 remains on the parsonage from copper and other kinds
9 of growth, that we actually will need to replace the
10 limestone. The front steps of the parsonage need
11 to be replaced. There are Tiffany windows that
12 haven't been dealt with. There was a program on the
13 major Tiffany windows four or five years ago, the
14 windows that they could not reach and that the
15 budget would not stretch to, which are in back.
16 These windows are in the back of the small synagogue
17 which is adjacent to the large synagogue. These are
18 on the south wall. Those are beginning to show
19 signs of buckling, so we need to begin restoration
20 and protect those windows in the back.

21 These pictures show you the parsonage
22 roof. This shows you the membrane of the roof on
23 the sanctuary which is being installed in copper
24 hatch. We have done penetration for the future for
25 ACHV systems, and that is awaiting the copper. This

1 is the detail of the copper maynard that needs
2 preservation.

3 On the sanctuary, there is an
4 inappropriate railing. The front steps are really
5 -- we deferred -- the scope of work that we done was
6 really everything that we did not need scaffolding
7 for. So we scaffolded the exterior and we
8 scaffolded the interior, just the work that could be
9 done from ladders on the ground. The front of the
10 synagogue facing Central Park West has seriously
11 deteriorated limestone steps, inappropriate
12 railings, a set of grades which do not meet access
13 codes, so we are in the process of restoring those.

14 A set of railings in front of the
15 parsonage and the parsonage steps which is in need
16 of repair. The areaway around the sanctuary, we
17 still have water, the potential for water to migrate
18 in at the foundation. We arrested the water that
19 was moving through the rest of the structure, but
20 that needs to be attended to. The hen house was
21 recently removed by the MTA, so that leaves the
22 railings leading down and the stairways leading down
23 to that areaway also remaining to be done.

24 So those are really the symptomatic
25 highlights of the degree of deterioration on the

1 exterior.

2 At the end of our master plan, we return
3 to issues of, as I said, there were circulation
4 issues, there also were the substandard issues in
5 the community house itself. So that we turned to
6 the notion of the new building on the community
7 house site for those three reasons, in order to
8 replace the substandard facilities in a building
9 that was, again, beyond the end of its useful life,
10 to solve the interior circulation problems, and also
11 to act as an **economic engine** for the rest of the
12 preservation program that we have mapped out.

13 Now I think Elise will talk about the
14 concept of the new building.

15 Thank you.

16 CHAIRMAN PAULSEN: Stephen, do you have
17 a full scope of work regarding the preservation that
18 you are proposing for the historic building?

19 MR. TILLY: Yes.

20 MS. QUASEBARTH: Good afternoon,
21 Commissioners. My name is Elise Quasebarth,
22 preservation consultant for this project.

23 We have worked with the team to take a
24 look --

25 AUDIENCE: Can you speak up, please.

1 MS. QUASEBARTH: Certainly.

2 My firm, Higgins & Quasebarth, has worked
3 with the team, particularly after Stephen Tilly
4 worked on the master plan, to take a look at the
5 context for the proposed new building and to see
6 what might be possible and appropriate to the site.
7 Just so that we are clear, Central Park West is here
8 and the synagogue is here, the parsonage is just to
9 the south facing Central Park West, and the existing
10 community house faces 70th Street. There is an
11 adjacent empty lot which is part of the site
12 directly to the west of the community house. The
13 existing synagogue is the individual landmark and
14 rest of the site is in the historic district.

15 The story of the development of the site
16 is interesting and helps illustrate the iterative
17 and thoughtful process that the congregation has
18 gone through over generations to accommodate the
19 space that they need for their community facilities
20 and educational purposes.

21 The synagogue as a congregation started
22 in Mill Street downtown and moved uptown in several
23 stages, from Mill Street to Crosby Street (ph), then
24 to 19th Street, and in 1895 they purchased six lots
25 at the corner of 70th Street and Central Park West.

1 They hired Arnold Brunner to design the classical
2 building for them and a residence next door. That
3 construction was completed in 1896. They had two
4 additional lots where the community house is now to
5 the west. They didn't use them and sold them in
6 1897 and these two buildings we see in the 1940s
7 photograph were constructed shortly after the sale.

8 Early in the history of the congregation
9 on this site, they needed new space and in 1902
10 constructed a mansard roof and an addition to the
11 back of the residence on Central Park West. This is
12 a 1900 photograph of the site showing the buildings
13 as they were constructed originally. And this photo
14 here, 1928, shows the view from the south with its
15 mansard roof on it and some of the construction in
16 the back.

17 In the 1940s, the congregation again
18 considered needing new space and went through a
19 whole planning process which resulted in their
20 repurchasing the buildings to the west of the
21 synagogue, these two small apartment buildings. And
22 they actually filed a building permit for a new
23 building in 1949 but then did not build the
24 building. They went through a whole new process of
25 evaluating what kind of space they could work with

1 and hired an architect in the 1950s to reconfigure
2 this building, take off the top floor and put this
3 face on the building. So the building you are
4 looking at here was constructed in 1953. This is
5 the place where the new building will be
6 constructed.

7 The adjacent lot was acquired in the '60s
8 and the building that was constructed there was
9 demolished in 1970. So this gives you some clarity
10 on how the site developed over time.

11 As the congregation went forward, you may
12 remember the proposal from the mid 1980s where the
13 congregation actually worked with a developer for a
14 proposal that was a 42-story building that came
15 forward to the Landmark Commission. That was
16 procedure to the designation of the historic
17 district.

18 In looking at the site and what might be
19 possible, we looked first at the individual landmark
20 itself. Actually, I want to show one other thing on
21 this board. These historic photos show not only
22 what was happening with the site itself, it also
23 shows how the city grew up around the building and
24 around the site.

25 This photo from 1900 shows a view down

1 70th Street with two very small apartment buildings
2 and a row of brownstones, and on Central Park West a
3 smaller apartment building. This photo from 1928
4 shows an excavation site, this building on Central
5 Park West was demolished to make way for the
6 16-story apartment building which exists today. The
7 apartment building here, just to the north of our
8 site, was demolished to make room for the building
9 that exists today at 101 Central Park West. So as
10 you can see, the city started to grow up around the
11 institution. Indeed, these views from the 1940s
12 down 70th Street also show apartment buildings where
13 there had been row houses.

14 This board shows different views of the
15 synagogue itself. This is from the northeast
16 showing the landmark in conjunction with the
17 apartment building to the south, and on this one
18 from the southeast showing a clearer modern-day view
19 and another view down 70th Street. We also looked
20 at widening the scope a little bit, what west 70th
21 Street looks like today. And this context map,
22 which you will be able to appreciate in the board
23 but when you have opportunity to get up and really
24 look at the model, this really tells the story most
25 graphically.

1 In our context here, this is right here
2 on 70th Street, we have the taller buildings along
3 Central Park West and interspersed with the row the
4 houses along the side of the street are, indeed,
5 apartment buildings: Two on West 70th Street and
6 one immediately adjacent to the site and one a few
7 doors down. And on 69th Street as well, three
8 apartment buildings there, so there is also a mixed
9 context; it is not simply a brownstone context on
10 the side streets.

11 And you will also note over here that the
12 Central Park West apartment building which is
13 directly north of the site is quite deep into the
14 side street. That's true also of the building on
15 West 69th Street, so that this is really directly
16 across the street from our site. These are just
17 photographs of buildings on 70th and 69th Streets
18 adjacent to the synagogue.

19 Finally, we looked at the Congregation
20 Shearith Israel synagogue in company with B'nai
21 Brith on Central Park West, it is the other
22 institution. And we have illustrated here the
23 eloquent institutions that line Central Park West
24 from 63rd Street up to 96th Street: The Society for
25 Ethical Culture, Holy Trinity, the Second Church of

1 Christ Scientists, 68th Street; this is Congregation
2 Shearith Israel synagogue, the New York Historical
3 Society, 76th Street; the New York Choral Society,
4 Museum of Natural History and the First Church of
5 Christ Scientists at 96th Street.

6 Many of these buildings are individual
7 landmarks, most are in the historic district with
8 the exception of the First Christ Scientists, which
9 is 96th, just north of the district. What we note
10 is the monumentality of the individual institutions
11 and their very special design, but we also note that
12 they are all within the context of an urban
13 environment and there are tall buildings around
14 them. This is particularly -- well, it is noted in
15 almost every case, what we do see is that the taller
16 buildings as they juxtapose with the institutions
17 generally have their side walls overlooking the
18 institution. And this is very clear at the First
19 Church of Christ Scientists, particularly the
20 Historical Society.

21 Our thought in looking at these two
22 contexts, particularly the West 70th Street context
23 as well as the Central Park West context, is that
24 there is a place here in this particular site for an
25 apartment building, scale building. And as I said

1 before, when you have an opportunity to look at the
2 model, it will really show that very clearly.

3 I think Paul Byard and Charles, the
4 architects, will describe it.

5 MR. BYARD: Thank you. I am Paul Byard
6 --

7 MR. PLATT: And I am Charles Platt.

8 MR. BYARD: And we will talk about the
9 architecture.

10 MR. PLATT: But before we do, I just
11 want to point out what a seasonal model this is.
12 This was entirely green when we started the project
13 and the trees have changed now and if you look
14 closely you will see that the leaves are now all
15 over Central Park West, and by tomorrow, there will
16 be snow on the model.

17 Let me see if I can simply frame the
18 discussion of the architecture a little bit. Our
19 job, as I think you appreciate, is to produce
20 essentially a work of art that will work with the
21 other works of art that it is charged to bring
22 together. There are at least three pieces that have
23 to be brought together: The synagogue, the Central
24 Park West Streetscape and the historic district
25 itself.

1 It is not just any building that can
2 bring these together. It has to have a certain
3 strength and that is what we've tried to give it
4 while working with the things that we need to
5 reconcile. This one is, of course, crucial. This
6 is the whole site, as has been pointed out, this is
7 the existing building and this is the portion, the
8 community house, that we get to work with to build
9 the building. It is a block of space. You can see
10 it there.

11 One of the wonderful things about dealing
12 with a landmark is that the zoning resolution allows
13 you to model the placement of the bulk in a way that
14 will work best for the landmark so that we get the
15 chance to concentrate what we want to do on that
16 particular site as a single block of space that then
17 relates to the landmark.

18 Let me put, first of all, the context by
19 itself with nothing in it where we started. And the
20 pieces, again, are the landmark itself, the Central
21 Park West skyline, which is what the Rabbi pointed
22 out, nearly drove Shearith Israel away when these
23 buildings were first built. Now we all love them
24 with a passion and you can see it in relationship to
25 them.

1 This is the first illustration of the
2 size of the block that we are working with, and you
3 see it particularly vividly in the context model.
4 It is a deliberately reduced size of the volume of
5 space, concentrated in a block at a height with
6 relationship to the --

7 MR. PLATT: I just want to interject
8 there. When we first came on the project, it was my
9 feeling, if not that of all of my colleagues, that
10 from an urban design and sculptural, compositional
11 point of view, this was too low, but it was made
12 very clear to us -- this is not a self-serving
13 argument, I made this right away, that from a
14 compositional point of view, it would be better if
15 this were higher -- it was made very clear, however,
16 that the needs of the synagogue limited and that
17 they wanted very much to limit it to the absolute
18 necessities which they had to support their project.

19 MR. BYARD: So that's the sources of the
20 block and you can see the way it fits here.

21 You can also begin to see, which will be
22 more vivid when we get the bigger renderings up, how
23 we have chosen to relate the block in this direct
24 juxtaposition with the old building. And when you
25 join one piece to another, you have lots of choices.

1 You can basically seal it up with some kind of a
2 joiner or you can pull it apart with some kind of a
3 reveal. And the way we have chosen to do it, you
4 will see it more vividly on the other, is to set it
5 10 feet off the back of the old building, in the
6 classic version of a reveal to set one off from
7 another. We'll come back here, but it is a single
8 block against the synagogue.

9 Now what we might start with and then go
10 on with other aspects is to start principally with
11 the synagogue. In working out an expression for the
12 apartment block, we have been trying to think of all
13 three contexts. We have to have a presence of our
14 own and we have to find a way to make all of the
15 parts work together in the combined work of art
16 which we will get when we succeed in bringing them
17 together.

18 The synagogue itself is a very strong,
19 small block of masonry, and it is very strongly
20 organized. Outside, edges symmetrically are edged
21 around the middle. The middle -- the solid outside
22 holds the glass middle. The glass middle is what
23 goes into the synagogue, which allows light in and
24 allows, obviously, the synagogue to appear outward,
25 and it is divided in an order of three, which is

1 perfectly stable. The same order is done on the
2 side. In fact, it is a rather longer expanse, but
3 two side pieces, three pieces in the middle, a very
4 important glass surface which is modeled between and
5 held in the shadow of the columns and its
6 surrounding masonry.

7 What we felt we needed to do was to think
8 about issues of masonry being next to a masonry
9 building to be sure that what we did gave them the
10 sense of masonry, a texture, a richness. Because,
11 remember, we want to participate with these
12 buildings, we want to have the strength to
13 participate with them. And then we thought we would
14 work particularly on the conjunction as you see it
15 on this elevation.

16 Here the matter is the centering of our
17 apparent facade on the Central Park West side.
18 There is another landmark in all of this, probably
19 most important of all, that is to say, Central Park.
20 And we have a very important relationship
21 addressing, as it were. Central Park across the top
22 of the synagogue, and that relationship calls for a
23 certain strength in this building, which even though
24 it is a hundred and so many feet back still has some
25 kind of relationship and dialogue with the park.

1 You see the three-part division, the
2 centering of that facade so that it works with the
3 old facade below. Here the issues become more
4 richer and more complicated. The reveal is fairly
5 clear, the ten feet seems about right to us. The
6 tower, then, if you can even call it that, the
7 apartment building then is independent here and it
8 is locked together with a piece that relates to the
9 community uses.

10 In section, this building is four stories
11 of community uses. Just to be absolutely sure
12 that's what was going on here, here is the
13 synagogue, here is the sanctuary, this is the
14 community portion of the new building, spaces for
15 synagogue uses, and the apartments begin one, two,
16 three, four, five, six, seven, eight, nine, ten
17 apartments, in fact, eleven because one is two. But
18 the community spaces are different uses within the
19 building and they are culled out by the glass facade
20 of the lower portion which is in the three parts of
21 glass but handled differently and brought across the
22 reveal to tie them all together. Then the building
23 itself goes up and resolves itself at the top with
24 three large glass studio windows.

25 Now, you all know the windows of the

1 neighborhood include the extraordinary studio
2 windows, particularly on 65th Street where you will
3 have, in some instances, art glass on the top and
4 clear glass on the bottom, and they are two-story
5 studio rooms that are used by artists. And that, we
6 thought we would take that idea and use it as a
7 device to resolve the building at the top and, once
8 again, using the rhythm of three, the form of three
9 to pull it together and end the building clearly at
10 the top.

11 So those are the basic givens of the
12 idea; it is masonry, glass and composed as you see
13 it.

14 MR. PLATT: It is more than that,
15 actually. It is a classically composed building of
16 base shaft and capital here. And we have used, as
17 Paul pointed out, devices that are used elsewhere in
18 the historic district; the great double height
19 windows that are so famous on the artist buildings.

20 The way we composed this, again, is to
21 place this tripartite frame, really, on the building
22 with the corners revealed as they are so prominently
23 in other parts of Central Park West within the
24 district. Here you see some rather typical examples
25 of how the window at the corner takes on a

1 particular importance. And we have done that as
2 well.

3 This is definitely a building in the
4 round here. It is not in the usual sense simply
5 just a corner building with party walls with a
6 secondary facade. Our only secondary facade is
7 facing west on the property line. We have looked
8 very carefully at this and there is no question but
9 that from the Park and, in fact, right across
10 Central Park West you can see the south facade. You
11 can see this facade around the corner.

12 We have not done a colored rendering of
13 it, but it is treated the same way. We have a black
14 and white which I will show you, but the three
15 facades here are very important to us and the
16 expression of those going with this expression,
17 which we believe is very complimentary and works
18 with the plastic qualities of the existing
19 synagogue.

20 The materials are very simply this is a
21 type of limestone which is represented here, which
22 if you look at this model, this is the 70th Street
23 facade, Central Park West, only showing a portion of
24 the synagogue and the sanctuary, and here the
25 interior court, which is built up, and this

1 represents the community facility. There is an
2 extension of some of the facilities below out into
3 the existing yard here, all below the 23 feet
4 permitted by zoning.

5 And you can see it, if you will look at
6 this later you will see it very clearly here in this
7 small model. The materials are again this
8 limestone, which is shown rather pinker here than it
9 actually is. There is a good deal of zinc which is
10 here, which is on the area between, the piece
11 joining the linking here is zinc; the metal of the
12 windows and here, which you see, is painted metal,
13 not zinc. There is a distinction, although in this
14 light it is very hard to tell, this is darker, this
15 is lighter, and has a lot more reflective quality
16 than shows here.

17 The base on 70th Street, which is here,
18 does have bronze on it. I should point out that the
19 apartment tower descends to 70th Street at this
20 point, so that the expression comes down here this
21 way, and the community facility is shifted slightly
22 this way and it relates then back to the synagogue
23 itself. But the tower, as it were, comes down to
24 street at this point and is expressed in bronze
25 which exists in the synagogue. This is a wood door,

1 but there are bronze elements elsewhere.

2 What wasn't said by Steve Tilly is that
3 this solves a lot circulation problems, among them
4 the entrance to the synagogue itself which now takes
5 place through this door, not through the front
6 runner at the front door here, but because of
7 liturgical and functional reasons, it is through
8 here, but it is not handicap accessible now. The
9 sanctuary level is up about five feet from the
10 street level, and there are all sorts of problems
11 dealing with that, which we now solve by being able
12 to enter here two elevators that serve only this,
13 the lower portion, the two below grade here as well,
14 and then can take people to any of the levels in the
15 sanctuary itself, if necessary.

16 The elevators for the residential tower
17 are exclusively in this portion of the building over
18 here. If I can find a plan, I will show you a
19 typical floor, which is very simple. These, of
20 course, are very early plans, but it is a very
21 straightforward building with, again, these glass
22 corners, the masonry portion on the three facades,
23 the north, east and south, and the party wall
24 conforming to code requirements with limited
25 percentage of glass overlooking the apartment

1 building to the west.

2 This is brick here and I think it is
3 actually best seen in the model as to the feeling
4 and coloring. This is brick, and brick
5 complementary to the stone, this is the brick we are
6 planning to use here. There is also in the windows
7 of the tower and in the lower portions here a bit of
8 corrugated glass which doesn't even show as
9 corrugation here, but there it is. That also
10 relates to, again, where the arts building has -- or
11 had, rather, I should say when it was constructed,
12 portions of this were frosted and corrugated glass.
13 So we picked that up and used it.

14 There is also a relationship, it is not
15 supposed to be a direct relationship but let's call
16 it a happy coincidence with the windows that are in
17 the synagogue sanctuary itself, which are bordered,
18 as are we here, by the different expressions.

19 MR. BYARD: They are really very strong,
20 these windows, as part of the composition and the
21 texture is very important.

22 MR. FRIEDMAN: Commissioners, I want to
23 briefly conclude by talking about the 74-711
24 application which we have requested. Obviously,
25 part of our request is for a certificate of

1 appropriateness, the standards, which you well know
2 well. Under 74-711, there is really only one
3 finding that you make, and that is a plan of
4 continuing maintenance that has been derived from
5 the preservation of the building and that the design
6 and modifications that are being requested address
7 those preservation purposes.

8 And in that case, we believe that we have
9 made that primary finding. The principal part of
10 this application, the principal effect of the zoning
11 modifications is to move the floor area back off the
12 top of the synagogue and onto the developing site.
13 This is a single zoning lot and has been one for
14 several decades, this is not about transfers of
15 floor area, this is about transferring across the
16 zoning district boundary as a result of moving
17 approximately 9,000 square feet more than we would
18 be permitted from the R-10A to the RAB portion of
19 the lot.

20 The previous application is, in and of
21 itself, is going to be an adequate preservation
22 purpose. You did that in the case of Saks Fifth
23 Avenue, the Swiss Bank building, in order to
24 preserve the strong facade of Saks Fifth Avenue, the
25 view to the south of St. Patrick's Cathedral and in

1 order to relate more harmoniously to the smaller
2 buildings of Rockefeller Center directly across the
3 street, that preservation purpose was deemed served
4 by moving it into the mid Plaza zoning district.
5 This is on that precedent.

6 The other, as a result of moving that
7 floor area across the district boundary, certain
8 other aspects of the zoning resolution need to be
9 made. As Elise just told you, there is a very
10 strong street wall sense in this historic district
11 where there are mid-block street walls for apartment
12 buildings, and in fact, this application requests
13 that the remainder of the street wall apartments we
14 would like to make between R and B, so that those
15 street walls would be retained to their height of
16 157 feet to the parapet and the building immediately
17 to its east. Also the RAP is already 100 feet to
18 the parapet.

19 The other zoning action required in the
20 rear yard for the residential portion of the
21 building, the top ten floors, we are respecting the
22 30-foot rear yard requirement. As you know, the
23 first floor we get a 23-foot full lot coverage, no
24 rear yard requirement there. With floors two, three
25 and four, the zoning would require a 30-foot rear

1 yard for the community facility, we are providing a
2 20 foot rear yard for the programmatic needs of the
3 community facility space right now. So for those
4 ten feet, floors two, three and four, we are
5 requesting a waiver of the rear-yard requirement.
6 Those are behind the synagogue and that aspect will
7 never be seen, but it is a programmatic requirement
8 of the synagogue.

9 In addition to that, when you trip across
10 the rear-yard requirement, you get a lot coverage
11 issue as well for those three floors, so we are also
12 asking for a waiver on those three levels of lot
13 coverage.

14 Those are the zoning actions that bring
15 us to you with a request for a report under 74-711
16 so that we can go to City Planning and seek the
17 waivers. Of course, none of that happens unless and
18 until you approve the certificate of appropriateness
19 in the first place. That is also an issue.

20 So that concludes our presentation. We
21 are very grateful for your time and happy to answer
22 any questions that you may have.

23 Questions?

24 CHAIRMAN PAULSEN: We will begin taking
25 public testimony. Before we begin, I want to make

1 very clear that this is the first public hearing for
2 this project, that there will be many public
3 hearings for this project. I am sure it is
4 extremely complicated, there is much public
5 interest, and today is the first time that the
6 Commissioners, including myself, have seen a full
7 presentation of this project in its totality.

8 The question before us, as articulated by
9 counsel, is to find, first, if this new building
10 that is being proposed is appropriate to this
11 historic district. This is a new building in the
12 district, this is not an addition to an individual
13 landmark. So it is very important in your comments
14 that you evaluate the appropriateness of this
15 building within this district; is it harmonious in
16 its scale, materials and relationship to the other
17 buildings in this district?

18 The Commission has frequently evaluated
19 the immediate content in making those determinations
20 and your comments, hopefully, would be focused on
21 that. The Commission does not have jurisdiction
22 over issues of traffic, construction and the other
23 jurisdictions that are the subject of the City
24 Planning Commission, so we will not be reviewing
25 those kinds of impacts heres. The applicants have

1 offered, I understand, to do a shadow study on the
2 scenic landmark of Central Park, so we will await
3 that information when it is available.

4 So those are the basic issues of the
5 certificate of appropriateness. If we were to find
6 this building appropriate, then the request is for
7 us to make an application, or support a report for
8 an application for a 74-711 modification of bulk
9 regulations if a preservation purpose is achieved.
10 That preservation purpose could be achieved through
11 the movement of the bulk and massing, if it is found
12 to be appropriate within the historic district, but
13 also the preservation purpose must be achieved by
14 undertaking restoration work and establishing a
15 continuing maintenance program that will preserve
16 the landmark building in perpetuity.

17 It would require that that restoration
18 work bring each building up to a first-class
19 condition in order for the Commission to support
20 that modification. Some buildings do, obviously,
21 require more restoration than others, but each must
22 ultimately be in a first-class condition as a result
23 of the restoration work.

24 The restricted declaration that each
25 applicant must sign spells out not only the

1 restoration work that is required to bring the
2 building up to a first-class condition, but also
3 what has to be done, presumably, a cyclical
4 maintenance program that is required by the
5 restricted dec. We are currently requiring that the
6 inspections be performed every five years. The
7 inspections include not only the exterior elements
8 of the building, but also portions of the interior
9 that have an effect on the exterior, such as
10 mechanical systems. And the building owner is
11 required to correct any problems that are identified
12 in the inspection.

13 And that restrictive declaration, I
14 believe many of you know, is filed with the
15 property's file at the County Clerk's office amid
16 the binding obligations that rest in perpetuity with
17 the property. So I think it is important if you are
18 going to comment on the preservation purpose aspects
19 of this, the two issues before us are: (A) Is the
20 bulk appropriate, and does the relocation of the
21 bulk serve the preservation's purpose?

22 Secondly, does the preservation work
23 proposed for this project rise to the level, and in
24 most cases it is to restore the building to a
25 first-class condition and enter into the cyclical

1 maintenance agreement?

2 Those are the main issues before us. We
3 look forward to your comments. We are going to
4 alternating, we will be calling five people for,
5 five people against. I am willing to sit here as
6 long as possible, but I would again stress that you
7 will have many, many opportunities to comment and
8 that we have received I think almost 80 to 90
9 letters regarding this project, either by snail
10 mail, e-mail, and all varieties. So we are very
11 interested in hearing your comments.

12 I will first call Jack Rudin, and then
13 Leon Levy, and then Dr. Michael Feldberg.

14 MR. RUDIN: Good evening, ladies and
15 gentlemen of the Commission.

16 I come as a lifetime neighbor in the
17 upper west side between 86th Street, Central Park
18 West and 84th Street where I live now. I come as a
19 thirty-plus year member of the board of trustees of
20 the synagogue. I come as somebody who found this
21 building in its earliest stages, many years ago, not
22 to my liking, it was too high. I come as somebody
23 who sees a need to develop architecturally and
24 economically this building to support the synagogue,
25 to support the void in the neighborhood

1 architecturally.

2 I urge the Commission to take a favorable
3 look because of the sensitivity of the architects
4 and the congregation. This synagogue, somebody
5 alluded to the fact that 30 years ago the
6 neighborhoods were changing. My father and I
7 prevailed upon the leadership of the synagogue not
8 to sell and move to the east side, that the west
9 side was the future of this city. So it is with
10 strong feelings that I urge that you approve this
11 design.

12 I am not the developer of this property,
13 of this building, but I represent a family that has
14 ten apartment houses between 67th Street and 86th
15 Street on the west side. We have great faith in
16 these properties as rental real estate, as rental
17 property that is needed, and we have not gone into
18 condo or cooperatives because there is a need for
19 less expensive -- in the long run, less expensive
20 rental property.

21 I think the architects have produced an
22 example of sensitivity and good taste that
23 complements the historic synagogue, that does not
24 demean in any way the neighbors, the properties of
25 the neighborhood, and I hope that you will look upon

1 this application as appropriate and favorable.

2 Thank you.

3 CHAIRMAN PAULSEN: Thank you.

4 Mr. Levy?

5 MR. LEVY: Good evening, my name is Leon
6 Levy. I am a past chairman of the Conference of the
7 Presidents of American Jewish Organizations. I am
8 presently a long-time president of the American
9 Sephardic Federation.

10 I took very seriously your comments about
11 preservation, long-time preservation. As a
12 Sephardic Jew, I see the need and the necessity of
13 planning properly and doing it in good taste that
14 the synagogue be forever enshrined in this
15 neighborhood, as it has been here already for 105
16 years, and that it serves, I can tell you on an
17 international scale, as a beacon of light. There is
18 not a Sephardic Jew in the world that does not know
19 about this historic synagogue.

20 When dignitaries come to the United
21 States, they know that the one place that they will
22 be accepted warmly and where they will come will be
23 at this synagogue, so it is important that we
24 continue with the tradition of Sephardic Jewery as
25 that began over 500 years ago when my ancestors, and

1 many of the ancestors of the people in this room
2 were expelled from Spain and continued on with their
3 historic tradition.

4 It is important that this preservation be
5 done, and I believe that by following along this
6 quite modest approach of creating the necessary
7 underpinnings to guarantee that the synagogue will
8 continue for many, many generations to come, that I
9 would ask that you approve the project so that we
10 can look forward for many, many years, for a long
11 time, that this part of the west side will be
12 preserved.

13 Thank you.

14 CHAIRMAN PAULSEN: Thank you.

15 Dr. Feldberg and then David Nathan.

16 DR. FELDBERG: I am Michael Feldberg,
17 the Executive Director of the American Jewish
18 Historical Society. The society was founded in 1892
19 and it is one of the oldest Jewish organizations in
20 the United States, but it is not nearly so old as
21 this congregation. In fact, in the archives of the
22 society are some of the first records of the
23 congregation, the founders of the congregation who
24 pledged themselves to each other and to the Jewish
25 community of North America. They signed some

1 founding papers that sit in our archives on 16th
2 Street, so it gives me some sense of the long-term
3 commitment that this congregation has had to serve,
4 as Mr. Levy said, as a beacon not only for Sephardic
5 Jewery, but, really, for the Jewish community of the
6 United States.

7 In 2004 it will mark 350 years from the
8 landing of the first 23 Jews who came here and who
9 have been meeting continuously as a congregation
10 that is now the owner of this building, so I have
11 great faith that in dealing with this organization
12 you are dealing with an organization that not only
13 has a sense of its history, but has kept a careful
14 record of its history, has maintained its archives
15 through hundreds of years, and that has a real
16 understanding of what the obligation of historic
17 preservation means, what historical continuity
18 means.

19 Sephardic Jews -- I guess I can say this
20 because I am not one, I am an Ashkenazic Jew, my
21 family is from the Ukraine and eventually the lower
22 east side -- they are known to have a sense of
23 worldliness, sophistication, good taste, good
24 judgment, and ability to live well with their
25 non-Jewish neighbors. And I think that is a fair

1 thing to say, that I have every confidence that if
2 the congregation feels that this building is an
3 appropriate neighbor, that the congregation has
4 thought long and hard about not offending, not
5 intruding and not getting into conflict with their
6 neighbors. That has been the tradition of Sephardic
7 Jewery which has lived in Moorish countries, Arab
8 countries, which has lived all over the world and
9 has been an ambassador of Jewish people all over the
10 world. I don't think this congregation, knowing
11 that tradition, would violate that sense of being a
12 good neighbor.

13 I am also very pleased as somebody who
14 just completed the development of a rather large
15 facility called the Center for Jewish History down
16 on 16th Street in New York to know that the
17 congregation is willing to sign a covenant with the
18 city saying that it will maintain -- that it will
19 create a preservation endowment, an endowment to
20 assure that not only will this current renovation
21 get done, but the resources will be there then to
22 maintain it and to live up to standards every five
23 years.

24 I hadn't known that until I sat at this
25 hearing, but it is a very wise program for the city

1 to have and it is very wise of the congregation, I
2 think, to want to sign such a covenant and maintain
3 it forever. I think that nonprofit institutions
4 that have programmatic needs have a well-established
5 history, and I am guilty of it myself, of putting
6 money into programs rather than facilities and to
7 spend money on human needs rather than maintenance
8 of their facilities. But this is such an important
9 building, this synagogue and this congregation, so
10 historically important, that if they are committing
11 to a preservation plan long-term, the entire Jewish
12 community of the United States and of the City of
13 New York should be grateful to have this kind of
14 commitment.

15 With that, I thank you. I hope you will
16 permit this.

17 CHAIRMAN PAULSEN: David Nathan and then
18 Lloyd Zuckenberg.

19 MR. NATHAN: Thank you.

20 I am a vice president of the
21 congregation. I happen to be a member of the family
22 that was among the founders of our congregation, but
23 I stand here today as one of the many young families
24 that are very much a part of this very active,
25 vibrant and growing community. If I can observe,

1 there is a reason that this congregation is still
2 here and is still vibrant, and I think that is
3 because I think always, we have always looked to the
4 future and always planned well and always tried to
5 make sure that we were taking steps to ensure that
6 we would be true to our mission of preservation, and
7 at the same time true to our mission in the
8 community, and in terms of staying active, young,
9 vibrant and growing.

10 We have many, many young families today.
11 We stand ready and we ask for the Commissioners'
12 help in this next stage of planning for the future
13 and we are prepared to do our part.

14 CHAIRMAN PAULSEN: Thank you.

15 Lloyd, and then Jennifer Hoppa.

16 MR. ZUCKENBERG: My name is Lloyd
17 Zuckenberg. I am a member of the congregation since
18 1994 and I care deeply about the built environment,
19 as does everyone probably in the room today.

20 I also care about the future of this
21 congregation. I am not, however, willing to place
22 the interests of my spiritual home above the
23 interests of the community, and that is why I have
24 been involved in this effort since 1996 when David
25 invited me to do so, and why I speak with great

1 pride in support of the building before you.

2 What we are asking for is reasonable and
3 appropriate. If it wasn't appropriate, I would not
4 be standing here today asking for your approval. In
5 its bulk and its massing, our objective is not to
6 maximize our profit. It is to do what is reasonable
7 and appropriate and contextual and still permit us
8 to create an endowment to maintain our landmark
9 sanctuary.

10 Seven weeks ago I held my newborn son at
11 the ceremony of the circumcision, or brit milah, as
12 we call it, in the newly restored sanctuary, nearly
13 completely restored but not completely restored. I
14 report proudly that this was the first ceremony of
15 its kind in the sanctuary since it reopened after
16 its partial restoration.

17 I look forward, with my wife and my three
18 children to celebrating generations of happy
19 occasions in this unique spiritual home, unique in a
20 way that I have never seen in any other Jewish
21 congregation I have ever been involved in because I
22 had not been in this congregation prior to 1994.
23 And I am confident that this building will provide
24 us with the resources that we need to be careful and
25 appropriate stewards of our landmark for generations

1 to come.

2 Thank you very much.

3 CHAIRMAN PAULSEN: Thank you. Jennifer
4 and then Kate Wood.

5 MS. HOPPA: Good afternoon, Chair Paulsen
6 and Commissioners. My name is Jennifer Hoppa, and I
7 am here to read the testimony of the Manhattan
8 Borough President C. Virginia Fields.

9 "Thank you for the opportunity to express
10 my concerns regarding the
11 modification of use and bulk and
12 the certificate of appropriateness
13 application for the venerable
14 Congregation Shearith Israel
15 Synagogue.

16 "An academic classical and Mozart styled
17 synagogue designed by Brunner &
18 Tryon and built in 1896 and '97,
19 this individual landmark graces
20 Central Park West at West 70th
21 Street and has influenced the
22 design of an abundance of
23 synagogues nationwide. The
24 synagogue is also within the
25 Central Park West Historic

1 District, known in part for its
2 residential side streets and
3 Romanesque Revival, Queen Anne and
4 near Renaissance row houses.

5 "Congregation Shearith Israel now intends
6 to transfer unused development
7 rights to this property blessed
8 with a synagogue to construct a
9 14-story residential community
10 services building. The transfer
11 of development rights, proposed
12 demolition of the community house
13 and the extensive changes to the
14 site's zoning results in an
15 inappropriate 157-foot building.
16 This high structure radically
17 compromises the individual
18 landmark and immensely detracts
19 from it at numerous vantage
20 points.

21 "As proposed, it jeopardizes the
22 integrity of the Central Park
23 Historic District with its slow
24 rise of roof houses on both the
25 north and south side of West 70th

1 Street. Given the extent of
2 alterations to the site zoning the
3 synagogue to secure and facilitate
4 the development, the preservation
5 purpose of this application is of
6 particular importance.
7 Unfortunately, up to this point,
8 the applicant has not been
9 adequately clear on this point.
10 "I urge the Commission to secure a firm
11 commitment from the synagogue to
12 direct resources gained from any
13 development for the preservation
14 of the individual landmark
15 synagogue, in addition to ensuring
16 that any unused development rights
17 are retained by the synagogue
18 site. The proposal before the
19 Landmark Preservation Commission
20 today raises considerable concerns
21 about the precedent this project
22 will set for other institutions
23 along Central Park West.
24 Residents, preservationists and
25 the Landmarks Preservation

1 Commission have worked diligently
2 to bring about Central Park West's
3 Historic District designation.
4 Institutions should be directed to
5 preserve its character and its
6 iconic skyline.

7 "Thank you for the opportunity to
8 testify. I am hopeful that under
9 the Commission's leadership a
10 lower-scaled, contextual and
11 historically appropriate project
12 can be brought to fruition that
13 aids the synagogue in their
14 on-site restoration work and helps
15 meet their needs for a community
16 facility."

17 CHAIRMAN PAULSEN: Thank you.

18 Kate Wood.

19 MS. WOOD: I would like to make my
20 statement after Norman Marcus and Mark Lebow. It
21 will make more sense after their presentation, if
22 that's all right with the Chair.

23 CHAIRMAN PAULSEN: Mark was third from
24 now, but if that's the order in which you want to
25 proceed.

1 MR. MARCUS: Good evening, members of
2 the Commission. I appreciate the opportunity of
3 this preliminary meeting on this application to give
4 you the benefit of some insights that I have had
5 both as a land-use lawyer for the City Planning
6 Commission going back to 1963, and, as well, when I
7 left the Commission in '85, I did participate in the
8 zoning study which was a building study of the area
9 that was subsequently designated as the Upper West
10 Side Central Park West District.

11 And just to recall, and we have this in
12 the record, the facts which showed three
13 prototypical kinds of buildings within this historic
14 district, the Central Park West street wall
15 buildings, which were street wall when they were
16 built to bulk --

17 CHAIRMAN PAULSEN: Norman, I am sorry,
18 can you state your name for the record.

19 MR. MARCUS: Sorry. Norman Marcus, I
20 live at 91 Central Park West and I am a land-use
21 lawyer.

22 I think the three types of buildings are
23 very much at the heart of the issue before you,
24 which is an issue of appropriateness. If this is an
25 inappropriate application of building, then it seems

1 to me the zoning questions beyond it fall away. Is
2 a 14-story building in a mid block an appropriate
3 building?

4 I would argue no. The study of all of
5 the buildings in this district which was used and
6 relied on when the historic district was adopted
7 here, which I believe is one of the largest in the
8 city if not the largest, showed three types of
9 buildings. The Central Park West iconic built to
10 bulk wall buildings similar to 91 and 101, where
11 there were such buildings, but Central Park West
12 also had the individual contributing or landmark
13 institutional buildings. This Central Park West
14 wall is a highly idiosyncratic wall, it is not
15 really a complete wall, it goes up and down. If you
16 remember the old planetarium, you could see it from
17 the planetarium and you could see it going up and
18 down, up and down. It is a classical New York
19 Central Park West skyline.

20 This proposal, although it is set back
21 over 100 feet, would read as a wall from the park
22 itself, which is a historic landmark. The other
23 buildings, they were avenue buildings, Columbus and
24 Amsterdam Avenue buildings, and were lower than the
25 Central Park West buildings. And then there were

1 the mid blocks, and the study found that an
2 unusually high survival rate occurred in the mid
3 blocks at the time this historic district was
4 designated. More than 85 percent of those buildings
5 were row house type, 55 to 60 feet high.
6 Ultimately, that style -- it contained, of course,
7 exceptions, and there are two exceptions to the west
8 of the site, but those were nine-story prewar
9 buildings, built without setback and were within the
10 district when it was designated.

11 Were they the new wave of the mid block?
12 I doubt it. Certainly, those two nine-story
13 buildings would not be any kind of context for the
14 proposal. The context, I would argue, is the north
15 side of 70th Street which has the perfect rows,
16 which is where the shadow of this proposal would
17 fall, and the south side which is predominantly row
18 house but does have two prewar nine-story buildings.

19 These are the types of buildings we have
20 in the district. I heard someone say that because
21 this application is only 14 stories, it is,
22 therefore, contextual. I think what the speaker
23 meant to say was that it was more contextual than
24 the earlier application which was 42 stories. But
25 14 stories does not fit within the historic mid

1 block, and when one looks at the other institutions
2 on Central Park West and one grapples with the idea
3 here, which is that it is necessary to allow an
4 inappropriate building to serve as an economic
5 engine to preserve landmarks, I suspect that this
6 Commission is at the threshold of a very slippery
7 slope and a slope that will really lead, I think, to
8 severe depredations within the historic district,
9 which is, after all, about preservation, not about
10 economic engines.

11 As far as expectations, I think a
12 religious institution, a charitable institution,
13 they have purposes for which they are chartered
14 which have to do basically with morality, goodness,
15 the state of the soul, these are all terribly
16 important. The properties were acquired in 1895, we
17 heard. I think those properties were acquired in
18 pursuit of the synagogue's incredibly moving
19 history, namely, to provide a place for worship.

20 These properties were never intended to
21 support real estate development, albeit dedicated to
22 the religious purpose. This Commission was a party
23 to a litigation over 20 years ago involving the
24 Society of Ethical Culture where Ethical Culture
25 attempted to get the right to build residentially

1 and use the development rights that were under the
2 zoning resolution to support their institution.
3 They claimed it was a taking of their property not
4 to be able to do that, but the courts did not accept
5 that argument. In fact, the court said this is not
6 the expectation of a charitable or religious
7 institution.

8 CHAIRMAN PAULSEN: Norman, with all due
9 respect, the synagogue had made many presentation
10 statements regarding the endowments and other
11 things, but the first structural question is, of
12 course: Is this building appropriate?

13 MR. MARCUS: Yes, I understand.

14 I think on that score, when you see the
15 model, it sort of looks like it is from another
16 planet. It is a Central Park West building that has
17 been moved around the corner. That's really all I
18 can say here.

19 I just -- I find it hard because I have
20 prayed in this synagogue on mornings when dominion
21 was lacking and I have been in that old synagogue,
22 it is a wonderful. And I will continue to do that,
23 I hope. I live next door and I hope they will be
24 with us for a long time to come. And I suspect that
25 if this building is found inappropriate, the

1 Commission will stay and perhaps come back another
2 day with a better proposal.

3 Thank you.

4 CHAIRMAN PAULSEN: Thank you.

5 Mark, and then Kate Wood.

6 MR. LEBOW: My name is Mark Lebow,
7 together with my brother, Norman Marcus, we are the
8 lawyers for the neighborhood and the surrounding
9 buildings and, naturally, we are opposed to this
10 application.

11 I think as your Chair announced, the
12 basic is, is this building appropriate? If I could
13 meander just a little bit --

14 CHAIRMAN PAULSEN: I am sorry. You have
15 to speak from the lectern.

16 MR. LEBOW: Okay, I will point long.

17 Take a look at that model, folks. This
18 model and this particular proposed building has been
19 called a work of art. You and I have been around
20 long enough to see works of art and know what a work
21 of art is. That is not a work of art.

22 What it is, it is a 14-story luxury
23 condominium building that, as my brother Norman
24 Marcus said, meandered from another planet into a
25 mid block on one of the most beautiful streets in

1 the city.

2 Now, I know that many of you have seen
3 the particular site, and if I were up there, I would
4 point to that building all the way on the right,
5 which is what Norman has described as somewhat out
6 of context, a building from a long time ago. But on
7 the entire south side of the street, we have a row
8 of four to six-story brownstones and the same thing
9 is true across the street, as it is in most of the
10 streets between 68th Street north between Central
11 Park West and Columbus Avenue.

12 Here is what the City Planning Commission
13 wrote about this neighborhood and what is
14 appropriate for it, way back on April 9, 1984, way
15 prior to the creation of this historic district.
16 The City Planning Commission said it was concerned
17 about the effect of new construction there. It
18 described the mid block area around West 70th Street
19 in the following language: "The typical mid block
20 building is the three to six story, 55 to 60 foot
21 high brownstone, limestone or less frequently
22 tenant, usually not built to the street line but
23 forming a wall of varying length with repeated
24 setback and rear yard lines."

25 The report continues: "The consistency

1 with which these building sites north of 68th Street
2 repeat themselves is the key to the strength and
3 clarity of the image of the west side. Over 85
4 percent of the structures in the mid blocks,"
5 talking about this mid block in particular, "conform
6 to this mid block type. New development will weaken
7 the quality and intactness of the existing context
8 by introducing buildings that are out of place."

9 That is what is appropriate to this
10 neighborhood. That work of art is not.

11 Now, as you know, the neighborhood is
12 hysterically against this particular building. They
13 all appeared at Community Board Number 7 at the
14 Landmarks Committee Meeting, and I was sort of proud
15 of Community Board Number 7 because it unanimously
16 found that this building was inappropriate after a
17 session that lasted practically until breakfast.

18 Now, as some of you know, I am a former
19 chairman of the Community Board, but I have a sort
20 of healthy regard for Community Boards, sometimes
21 they make the right recommendations and sometimes
22 they don't. But this one listens very, very
23 carefully, whenever it comes to what is appropriate,
24 that points to a particular block, a particular part
25 of a block, and even a particular building in a

1 block. So if you ever listen to a Community Board,
2 if any of its decisions make any sense, this is one
3 that makes sense.

4 I can hardly ever remember, at least in
5 my Community Board, a unanimous recommendation for
6 anything. I suppose that they have an occasional
7 certificate of appropriateness, but they are very
8 rare, at least in my experience.

9 Now none of us means any disrespect to
10 the Congregation Shearith Israel. They have been
11 around since 1654; they will be around in 2254, I
12 hope. I wish my congregation had Jack Rubin and
13 Leon Levy and the Nathan family. Don't worry about
14 them, they will do fine. They just spent \$6 million
15 to fix up this landmark. It is a work of art.

16 The landmark is a work of art. As I
17 understand it, it is in better shape than it has
18 been since about 1890. It is certainly in better
19 shape than I have ever seen it in at least 25 years.
20 Ladies and gentlemen, I have a dream about
21 Congregation Shearith Israel; it has had a
22 magnificent history, it has taken care of a new
23 Trinity Church and everything else in the
24 neighborhood and it will continue to do that, and a
25 100 years from now, the grandchildren of Jack Rudin

1 and the Nathan family will walk out on 70th Street,
2 out of Congregation Shearith Israel, and they will
3 say to themselves, because this inappropriate
4 addition will not be there, "We have continued our
5 tradition of being good neighbors. There is no
6 luxury condominium behind our beautiful synagogue.
7 We have not caused a virus that has affected every
8 similar building up and down Central Park to
9 happen." And they will say with great pride that
10 they have continued their tradition since 1654 of
11 serving the community and at the same time being a
12 good neighbor there.

13 Thank you.

14 CHAIRMAN PAULSEN: Thank you.

15 Kate?

16 MS. WOOD: Thank you, Commissioners.

17 Kate Wood speaking on behalf of Landmark
18 West, the Committee to Preserve the Upper West Side.
19 Landmark West does oppose Congregation Shearith
20 Israel's proposal to build a 14-story 167-foot tower
21 in the mid block of West 70th Street between Central
22 Park West and Columbus Avenue.

23 I just want to put something on the table
24 which -- I am not able to hear very well so I am not
25 sure if it has been mentioned before, but a lot of

1 people in this room have very long memories and they
2 remember a proposal that was put forward by the
3 synagogue back in the '80s, it was a 42-story
4 building, I think with a 440/480 foot tower. That
5 was something that I just want to get out there,
6 because it was raised at previous presentations. It
7 was printed in the New York Times. It is something
8 that people have in the back of their minds.

9 And I just want to up front dispel any
10 notion that had proposed that the building is modest
11 or harmonious or reasonable or appropriate, even by
12 comparison to that building. I do want to point
13 out, and this is just to reiterate what was
14 presented by Mark Lebow and Norman Marcus, about the
15 fact that the historic district designation in 1990,
16 and the creation of a contextual RAB zoning district
17 in 1984, that tower proceeded both of those
18 districts.

19 Back then, the only relationship that was
20 under Consideration really was the relationship
21 between the proposed tower and the individual
22 landmark. Today the Landmarks Commission has the
23 opportunity and the responsibility to insure that
24 new construction on this site not only relates
25 appropriately to the landmark, but also reinforces

1 the character of the surrounding historic district.
2 Both tests must be met in order to find that this
3 proposal is appropriate.

4 The proposed tower, we feel, meets
5 neither test. I just want to, first of all, focus
6 on the impact of the proposed tower on the landmark
7 synagogue. While it is not the sliver tower of
8 years past, the 157-foot building would,
9 nevertheless, overshadow the synagogue, eight floors
10 of approximately 3,500 square feet each not
11 including mechanicals, would rise up beyond the
12 cornice lines of the synagogue and create an
13 overbearing presence that would compete visually
14 with the landmark as part of the Central Park West
15 streetscape and sever its relationship with the
16 predominantly low rise mid block.

17 Now, as significant as the individual
18 landmark is, it is only one building. The historic
19 district, on the other hand, is a total environment
20 with a strong identity and sense of place. This,
21 too, or perhaps above all, must be respected. The
22 proposed building is incompatible with the dominant
23 character of the West 70th Street mid block, a
24 quintessential brownstone block in the upper west
25 side in Central Park West Historic District.

1 Preservationists have long urged the
2 Landmarks and City Planning Commissions to work
3 together to ensure that zoning matches the existing
4 built fabric within historic districts in order to
5 reinforce neighborhood character and prevent
6 avid-right blockbusters, so-called, from destroying
7 the contextual integrity of landmark protected
8 areas. In fact, this was one of the four planks of
9 the preservation platform which was spearheaded by
10 Landmark West, the Historic Districts Council, The
11 Municipal Art Society, New York Landmarks
12 Conservancy, and was supported by over 125 groups
13 citywide.

14 A unique and enviable situation exists on
15 the mid blocks of the upper west side where landmark
16 protection and zoning really do go hand in hand.
17 Here the zoning is perfectly in line with the goals
18 of the historic district and vice versa, and I would
19 just like to quote a couple of excerpts from the
20 Historic District Designation Report which describes
21 the neighborhood as follows: "This district evokes
22 the distinctive qualities of the Upper West Side
23 from the powerful iconography of the twin towers
24 along Central Park West, to its active commerce
25 along Columbus Avenue, to its residential side

1 streets. On most of the side streets, the
2 district's scattered maynard apartment buildings
3 have interrupted the original roads. But in
4 general, the surviving row houses present a strong
5 coherency and are the major element in creating a
6 special sense of place, particular to this district
7 on Manhattan's Upper West Side. The interplay
8 between the low scale character of the row house
9 groups which dominate the side streets and the large
10 scale character of the taller buildings that
11 terminate these blocks on Central Park West
12 reinforces that role of the avenue as an eastern
13 frame of the district."

14 I just want to turn for a moment to the
15 City Planning Commission's 1984 report which Mark
16 Lebow has already quoted from, but it does say that
17 a major concern raised by the study would be the
18 effect of new construction on the scale and urban
19 design characteristics of the west side. The study
20 area offers a special resource in the city. Its low
21 rise townhouse mid block, its residential boulevard,
22 and its highly identifiable profile on Central Park
23 West.

24 It says, "Even structures of lesser
25 individual value reinforce the human scale and

1 identifiable urban design characteristics with
2 notable consistency." So, as I said, we have an
3 enviable situation where these two, the zoning
4 resolution as well as the historic district
5 designation, really do reinforce one another. They
6 are beautifully in sync, but only, only if we adhere
7 to the sound principles that were established in the
8 landmark and zoning regulatory scheme.

9 If we falter, if we surrender on a
10 case-by-case basis to the particular pressure of a
11 particular developer, the soundness of the
12 principled approach is diminished and so is the
13 landmark and so is the historic district. So I urge
14 you to deny both the application for the certificate
15 of appropriateness and for a 74-711.

16 Thank you very much.

17 CHAIRMAN PAULSEN: Thank you.

18 Lisa Kersavage.

19 MS. KERSAVAGE: Lisa Kersavage, with
20 Friends of the Upper East Side Historic Districts.

21 Friends is testifying on this issue today
22 because both the east and west sides share a common
23 pressure characteristic, low rise mid block
24 residential buildings. This building pattern is
25 essential to preserve in order to maintain a sense

1 of place in both neighborhoods. This proposal to
2 build a 14-story building on a mid block is very
3 inappropriate.

4 In order to receive a modification of the
5 use and bulk regulations under Section 74-711, the
6 Commission must find that the bulk of the
7 modifications relate harmoniously to the landmark
8 building or buildings in the historic district. It
9 is eminently clear that the proposed 14-story
10 building is not harmonious to the landmark synagogue
11 itself, nor to the dominant character of the mid
12 blocks on the Upper West Side Central Park West
13 Historic District.

14 The character of that district is of low
15 rise buildings on the mid blocks and taller on the
16 avenues. And this proposal is contrary to that
17 pattern. Because the proposed building would be a
18 domineering presence over the synagogue and contrary
19 to that building pattern, it would destroy it and
20 should not be approved.

21 Thank you.

22 CHAIRMAN PAULSEN: Thank you.

23 Dr. Altchek and then Marian Weston.

24 DR. ALTCHER: My name is Edgar Altchek,
25 I am a trustee of Congregation Shearith Israel. My

1 family and I have a long history with the synagogue.
2 My parents were married in the chapel you saw before
3 in 1938.

4 I am familiar with the project and I find
5 it entirely appropriate. I believe it is in keeping
6 with the history, the values and the tradition of
7 the our synagogue, and at the same time, it is
8 considerate and respectful of the needs and
9 interests and concerns of our neighboring community.

10 I thank you for this opportunity to
11 speak.

12 CHAIRMAN PAULSEN: Thank you very much.
13 Marian Weston and then Jeffrey Mosseri.

14 MR. SOLOMON: I have been asked to take
15 her place. My name is Lou Solomon, and I am a
16 resident of the upper west side and a member of the
17 congregation.

18 I speak in favor of the proposal. I
19 think when you have preeminent architects and
20 preeminent preservation people coming and trying
21 their best to find something appropriate, if it is
22 not appropriate for the synagogue which needs the
23 funds to be arguing in favor of their preservation
24 use at this time, then I don't think it is
25 appropriate for the Commission to hear that the

1 synagogue has lots of rich members so the Commission
2 shouldn't really care.

3 This is an appropriate building because
4 people who know a lot about it and who are more
5 sensitive to these issues believe that it is an
6 appropriate building, and I speak in favor of it.

7 CHAIRMAN PAULSEN: Thank you.

8 Jeffrey Mosseri -- is Mr. Mosseri here?

9 AUDIENCE: No.

10 CHAIRMAN PAULSEN: Lucienne Bulow.

11 MR. BULOW: I am George Bulow. Lucienne
12 stepped out for a moment, if I may.

13 CHAIRMAN PAULSEN: You were next.

14 MR. BULOW: So I will speak and she will
15 be back by then.

16 CHAIRMAN PAULSEN: Go ahead.

17 MR. BULOW: I am George Bulow, I am a 30
18 year or more resident of the Upper West Side and I
19 am a member of Congregation Shearith Israel, and
20 very proud of it. I do not live at 91 Central Park
21 West, as do some of the speakers. I do not live at
22 101 Central Park West, nor do I live at 18 West 70th
23 Street, the three buildings which adjoin the site we
24 are talking about today.

25 There are in this audience, however,

1 members of the cooperative corporations which
2 constitute those buildings who are also members of
3 this congregation who are in this room, and I have
4 not heard one of them stand up and say that they
5 agreed automatically that all the people who live in
6 those buildings are all against it. So this is
7 something you also need to bear in mind.

8 These are members of our congregation and
9 they feel, as do I, that it is appropriate. This
10 building is a frame, and it should be looked at as a
11 frame. It is a method of focusing one's eye,
12 whether it is from the park or from the adjoining
13 catty-corner to the beauty of the jewel that lies
14 before you, a landmark. This building has done a
15 great deal to frame that jewel in a way which will
16 draw the eye to the bulk, to the limestone front of
17 that building, and to give you a sense which is
18 quite important.

19 As the architects have said in speaking
20 about the themes which Brunner brought forward -- I
21 might add, I am not an architect, nor am I a lawyer,
22 but I can speak to the artistic merits of this. The
23 three windows then, which one sees carried forward
24 both on the 70th Street side as well as on the
25 Central Park side, are echoed in the building which

1 lies behind it.

2 To characterize the 14-story building as
3 a tower, particularly in the context of New York and
4 even in the context of this historic district,
5 strikes me as a bit of an anomaly. Yes, it is an
6 apartment house and, yes, it is not five stories
7 tall, but it would hardly be a tower around the
8 context of any of the other apartment towers we are
9 seeing built of late.

10 In addition, if there is to be a
11 complaint on the part of the building, I think it is
12 very difficult for someone in a building which is
13 200 feet or more high, which constitutes the solid
14 block front on Central Park West to complain about a
15 157 and a half foot building. There are people who
16 live at 18 West 70th Street, which, again, is not a
17 brownstone and people have made the statement, well,
18 since it is not a brownstone, but it was
19 grandfathered, it should not be part of this
20 context. And they have attempted to describe the
21 building.

22 Our congregation stands and is asking to
23 allow it to be built as an appropriate facility with
24 the necessary changes, as one which, in fact,
25 matches and carries on the site lines that that

1 building at 18 West 70th Street constitutes. So to
2 describe us as either a mid block building, which it
3 clearly is not -- yes, it is not on the avenue, that
4 is very clear, but that does not necessarily mean it
5 is a mid block building -- and to constitute it as
6 something which casts a shadow throughout the
7 neighborhood, as if the 200-foot buildings alongside
8 it do not have or have not, or that a 125-foot
9 building to its west has not, is, I think, a bit
10 disingenuous.

11 I hope that you will consider this to be
12 an appropriate structure. I hope that you will bear
13 in mind what has been said so eloquently by the
14 other speakers who have come before me on behalf of
15 the synagogue in the sense that we are members of
16 this community, we want very much to stay there and
17 continue to be part of it. We all live there and we
18 are all your neighbors, but at the same time, we
19 have an obligation which we take quite seriously,
20 and this is the first time in our history we come to
21 ask the city's agencies and governmental bodies to
22 support us in our ability to continue to keep that
23 landmark, the jewel that it is, on the Upper West
24 Side.

25 Thank you very much.

1 CHAIRMAN PAULSEN: Thank you.

2 Is Lucienne here?

3 MS. BULOW: My name is Lucienne Bulow, I
4 live on the west side. I am a neighbor and I have
5 been a member of the Congregation for the past 30
6 years. This Congregation has been at the corner of
7 Central Park West and 70th Street for more than a
8 hundred years, and for all our hundred years it had
9 the right to expand to fulfill its needs, but it did
10 not. It chose to only consolidate two brownstones
11 to use as its community house, to have its office,
12 its school -- and if you look at it, it is pretty
13 unattractive anyway.

14 The passage of time should not take away
15 the right that the Congregation has to build an
16 appropriate building. And what you have as a
17 proposal is definitely an appropriate building. It
18 is a modest proposal, I would say, and it is
19 sensitive to its neighbors and to the neighborhood,
20 and as you have heard, it is needed to continue to
21 have the Congregation maintain its landmark status
22 with its landmark building. It is very expensive to
23 maintain, and maintaining it is also a credit and an
24 asset to the neighbors of the congregation.

25 So I would really ask you to accept the

1 proposal.

2 CHAIRMAN PAULSEN: Thank you.

3 Dr. Alan Singer and then James Greer.

4 DR. SINGER: My name is Alan Singer, I
5 am the Executive Director of Congregation Shearith
6 Israel.

7 I believe that the proposed building is
8 not only appropriate, but it is a necessity. I
9 would like to explain several ways that Congregation
10 Shearith Israel serves the community since it is the
11 community house that we now seek permission to
12 replace.

13 First and foremost, our religious
14 services are open to the public twice daily, 365
15 days a year, even on the high holidays we go out of
16 our way to accommodate visitors who make prior
17 arrangements with our security department. We
18 provide many classes and lectures open to the
19 public.

20 Second, tour groups. Thousands of
21 individuals per year from across the United States
22 of all ages, of all religions, participate in guided
23 tours of our historic landmark. In addition to
24 taking great pride in showing others our beautiful
25 sanctuaries, we proudly fulfill our responsibility

1 to explain the history of America's first Jewish
2 congregation. Our one of a kind archives are made
3 accessible to scholars and museums worldwide. In
4 fact, the new space that we are proposing will allow
5 us to better serve the academic community by
6 returning 50 percent of our historic documents back
7 to our facility from the off-site warehouse on 110th
8 Street where we currently rent space.

9 Throughout our history, we have been
10 asked by communal and governmental bodies to host
11 community-wide events which we were always happy to
12 accommodate. In June 2002 at the request of the
13 Manhattan Borough President, C. Virginia Fields,
14 Shearith Israel hosted an evening of Jewish Heritage
15 Commemoration, which was attended by over 200 people
16 and the general public was invited.

17 In March of 1997, having just completed
18 the restoration of our Tiffany glass windows, our
19 synagogue hosted a workshop in stain glass
20 restoration at the request of the New York Landmarks
21 Conservancy which was attended by 185 individuals.
22 This past May, at the request of the New York
23 Landmarks Conservancy, Shearith Israel for the first
24 time in anyone's memory opened its historic West
25 21st Street cemetery to the general public to

1 provide hands-on experience in a program titled
2 "Preserving Historic Burial Grounds." 50
3 reservations were received in advance of the
4 workshop and over 180 people actually participated.

5 And this coming January, Shearith Israel
6 has gladly agreed to host another program of the New
7 York Landmarks Conservancy which is a forum on
8 decorative paint finishes to which we will, again,
9 be happy to invite the entire community.

10 Thank you.

11 CHAIRMAN PAULSEN: Thank you.

12 Mr. Greer, and then Jonathan Baker.

13 MR. GREER: Members of the Committee, my
14 name is Jay Greer. I reside at 101 Central Park
15 West, where I am a director of the
16 board of directors and immediate past president.

17 I am under a considerable disadvantage,
18 both I and my directors. Our first notice of this,
19 as far as I can tell, came about five weeks ago.
20 Our first board meeting came before the first
21 meeting. That board, having heard the information
22 that was in the press and some that we gleaned from
23 our friends at 91, took the unanimous view that this
24 was not an appropriate building to be put in across
25 the street on 70th Street, for all the reasons that

1 I think have been amply laid out, they really have,
2 before this gathering this evening.

3 I happen to share those. I might say
4 only one of the directors has a view that will be
5 affected by this. Mine will not. There is nothing
6 personal in this.

7 Responding to Mr. Bulow's comment, I am
8 sure that there are members of the congregation who
9 live at 101 Central Park West who support this.
10 There are, however, a great many people who have
11 made it very, very clear to us that they do not
12 support this. This is not a popularity contest, but
13 there is a very, very serious outcry about this.

14 I also met yesterday with Rabbi Angel,
15 Dr. Neustater, Mr. Friedman, six out of the nine
16 directors, to hear their story face to face for the
17 first time. We said at that meeting -- first of
18 all, we tried to make it very, very clear that we
19 respect enormously their incredible tradition, which
20 was brilliantly laid out this evening. We
21 understand -- and I want to say this from a personal
22 standpoint, I understand the importance of landmarks
23 in general and this landmark in particular. It is a
24 very pivotal piece of a wonderful neighborhood.

25 I also think that it was said in the

1 testimony, and I say that as a now retired lawyer,
2 that there was no other way to finance the
3 preservation work, some of which clearly has to be
4 done, the roof you have to fix or it will leak all
5 over the gorgeous interior. Rabbi Angel very
6 graciously took us through it yesterday. That would
7 be a crime.

8 We also tried to make it clear that we do
9 not have any problem with tearing down the very
10 ugly, I will call it the social hall, it is not a
11 community house. It may serve the community of the
12 congregation and I have to say that we do hold our
13 annual meetings in the basement sometimes, but it is
14 hideous, and undoubtedly, for all the reasons that
15 were laid out here, needs work.

16 The thing that we left with them, that we
17 are not persuaded that there is, as was testified
18 earlier, there is no other way of financing the
19 necessary work. My mother came from Missouri and
20 she would say, "Show me." And we offered to meet
21 with them after this hearing, which is our first
22 opportunity to hear the full presentation, and see
23 whether they could persuade us, so we in turn can
24 persuade the unhappy members of our household that
25 this is not a bad thing. Our offer, I will now say

1 on the record, still stands. Absent that, however,
2 I think that you will find our board will continue
3 with its unanimous opposition to this proposal as
4 quite inappropriate.

5 Thank you very much.

6 CHAIRMAN PAULSEN: Thank you.

7 Jonathan Baker and then Sandra Levine.

8 MR. BAKER: My name is Jonathan Baker, I
9 live at 31 West 69th Street where I have lived for
10 31 years.

11 You have asked a very direct question,
12 you have asked us whether this is compatible with
13 the Code. Our answer is dramatically no, it is
14 visibly out of character. It is rather like the old
15 fable of the Emperor with no clothes, you are asked
16 to believe that this disproportionately tall
17 building is proportionate. We can see it is not.

18 That's really not the argument that has
19 been presented. The argument that has been
20 presented is that this building is necessary for the
21 economic vitality of the synagogue in order to
22 propel itself forward as a preservationist. I would
23 propose this is a false dilemma. What we have is a
24 middle to upper class prosperous synagogue of
25 650-plus families that has been able to afford to

1 keep this building, the temple itself, in condition.

2 What this building does, it is 14 stories
3 and it is not perhaps limited to 14 stories, by the
4 way, is that it denigrates the character of this
5 historic block. You will see that we residents, we
6 who really live there, are highly protective of that
7 character.

8 What has been presented here is a kind of
9 blackmail, if you don't give us this 14-story
10 building, well, we are not going to do these
11 renovations. It is not said directly, it is
12 implied, but it is a very strong implication. We
13 reject this quid pro quo. It is a false
14 proposition. Therefore, what is the basis of this
15 building? It is visibly out of character,
16 dramatically so. The only argument is that the
17 money is needed.

18 I will conclude with just an anecdote
19 that really pins this down. As a full-time
20 liturgical musician for churches and synagogues,
21 full time for more than 30 years, I have been all
22 over these monkey bars for decades. The problem is
23 that you take an example that was presented up on
24 the board of the churches and the various
25 institutions along Central Park West that are

1 protected. I have been at those institutions, both
2 of the Christian Science churches I have been
3 director of in my capacity. With far smaller
4 congregations and far smaller budgets, they have
5 been able to maintain the architectural integrity of
6 their buildings.

7 A very dramatic case, and I will probably
8 have to present this again at a further hearing,
9 when I was at 96th Street and Central Park West as
10 the director of the First Church Christian Science
11 Church, I can tell you if you go in there on any
12 Sunday morning or Wednesday evening, you will see 30
13 active members in that congregation, never more. It
14 is tiny. When I was there, they had a portfolio of
15 just over \$200,000; yet, they were totally dedicated
16 to maintaining that building and they do.
17 Therefore, I am astounded that a 14-story tower is
18 necessary for this congregation, which is already
19 quite prosperous, to function.

20 What they have proposed, in their own
21 words, as an economic engine, is really a cash cow
22 that is not necessary, and for us who live in the
23 neighborhood, this cash cow is a white elephant. It
24 is out of proportion.

25 Thank you for the time.

1 CHAIRMAN PAULSEN: Thank you.

2 Sandy, and then Bob Mattson.

3 MS. LEVINE: Sandra Levine, Historic
4 District's counsel.

5 HDC does not support this proposal.
6 Shearith Israel synagogue is an individual landmark
7 that is also in the Upper West Side Central Park
8 West Historic District. The proposed new building
9 affects both the distinguished individual landmark
10 and the historic district in which it is located.
11 Regrettably, the effect on both is negative.

12 Putting aside all reasons and focusing
13 instead on the esthetics, a 14-story building that
14 might be appropriate at that height on an avenue, is
15 being proposed for mid block. The designation
16 report for the district notes that row houses on the
17 side streets that form the heart of the district are
18 the predominant residential building type.
19 Eighty-five percent of the buildings in the district
20 are row houses.

21 The character of the Upper West Side
22 Central Park West Historic District is defined by
23 rows of brownstones on the side streets. The
24 contextual zone district, RAB, in which the proposed
25 building is located, reflects the low rise character

1 of the mid blocks that both the zoning and the
2 historic district are supposed to protect. To the
3 extent that the north side of West 70th Street,
4 between Central Park West and Columbus Avenue, looks
5 almost exactly like the illustration for RAB
6 districts in the zoning handbook, if this building
7 were proposed for a site, say, two lots farther
8 towards Columbus Avenue, there would be no question
9 about its inappropriateness.

10 The building proposed is an avenue
11 building on a mid block. On that basis alone, it
12 should not receive a permit. Rising above the
13 synagogue, the 14-story tower will disrupt the
14 iconic skyline of Central Park West by looming over
15 the synagogue itself. In very general terms, the
16 design of the proposed building, as well as its
17 height, raises additional concerns about its
18 appropriateness.

19 Its orientation is problematic. The
20 entrance to the building is on West 70th Street;
21 yet, the structure reads as a Central Park West
22 building. The east facade faces Central Park West,
23 is actually the side facade, not the front, and it
24 is designed as such. The west facade, equivalent of
25 the rear facade, is at a right angle to West 70th

1 Street, and at a right angle to West 70th Street is
2 very visible along West 70th Street. This is a
3 facade of the building that would normally face the
4 garden core.

5 More specifically, the design shows
6 insufficient deference to the landmark and to the
7 major avenue of the historic district. It is unlike
8 any other building on Central Park West in terms of
9 ornamental massing or gold detailing such as a
10 pediment at the roof that characterizes buildings on
11 that avenue. Neither is it a bold modern design
12 that would afford a lively contrast to other
13 buildings in the historic district. With its open
14 glass corners, neither does it relate well to the
15 streetscape.

16 On 70th Street, we question the choice of
17 exterior grilles rather than interior blinds for the
18 privacy of the offices. The asymmetrical treatment
19 below the floors of the facade do not relate to the
20 brownstones on the street. A more carefully thought
21 out design that would allow the building to make a
22 contribution to the historic district is needed.

23 As for the special permit being sought
24 under 74-711 of the zoning resolution, the
25 preservation purpose remains unclear. The

1 Congregation has been a wonderful steward of this
2 extraordinary building and has substantially
3 restored the building.

4 To conclude, applying out of the zoning
5 to the side street will result in an erosion of the
6 character of the Upper West Side Central Park West
7 Historic District that the Landmarks Preservation
8 Commission is supposed to protect. The applicant
9 has tried to orient the building to Central Park
10 West, but in fact, its entrance is on West 70th
11 Street. When the character of West 70th Street is
12 considered, everything that is inappropriate about
13 the design becomes clear.

14 Without any waivers or variances, the
15 synagogue could construct a six-story building. If
16 the design were appropriate, a building of that
17 height would be supportable. This one is not. We
18 ask the Commission to deny the application.

19 Thank you.

20 CHAIRMAN PAULSEN: Bob Mattson and then
21 Deborah Platt.

22 MR. MATTSON: My name is Bob Mattson, I
23 live at 300 Central Park West, the El Dorado, which
24 itself is an individual landmark building. I happen
25 to be on board of that building, but I am not

1 appearing in that context. Another, I also belong
2 to a synagogue, an upper west side historic
3 synagogue that has similar needs to this synagogue.
4 I would like to make only two points.

5 One, with regard to the skyline, not
6 speaking as a neighbor on the blocks adjoining this
7 temple, the southern skyline would clearly be
8 unalterably affected by this building, and I think
9 that's inappropriate.

10 The second point is, we are working on a
11 major project, preservation project, as you probably
12 know, at the El Dorado, and there are also reasons,
13 economic, personal, major reasons of tenants and
14 others who would like to have variances and thank
15 God for the Commission. You hold us to standards
16 that I think are appropriate. This is not one of
17 those applications that should be approved. As a
18 precedent, it would be a terrible precedent.

19 The synagogue that I belong to right now
20 has a terrible roof problem. We have space that we
21 would love to build and I guess to build eight or
22 ten million dollar apartments and have all revenue
23 from that, that would help us to meet our needs,
24 reasonable needs as well; however, it would be
25 destructive of the neighbor.

1 Again, I hope you oppose this
2 application.

3 CHAIRMAN PAULSEN: Thank you.
4 Deborah Platt and Angelo Abdela?
5 Is Deborah Snyder Platt here?
6 (No response.)

7 Angelo Abdela?

8 AUDIENCE: He's not here.

9 CHAIRMAN PAULSEN: Florie Algranti
10 Charles and then Myron Smith?

11 MS. CHARLES: I am Florie Algranti
12 Charles. I am a member of the congregation and I
13 don't live on the Upper West Side, I live up in
14 Inwood. I have been a member of this congregation
15 for 26 years, and the reason was that I was raised
16 Sephardic and 26 years ago, when it was time to
17 raise my son in the tradition I was raised, my
18 choice was here was here or Co-Op City, so I chose
19 here. They have been extremely welcoming.

20 I am not a Central Park West person.
21 When they asked for contributions for the
22 refurbishing of the synagogue, I sent them a couple
23 of hundred dollars, because that's all I could
24 afford; however, when they started a homeless
25 program years ago and they asked us to be part of

1 it, we used the Town House in Manhattan. The men
2 came and they were our guests for the evening. We
3 welcomed them, and the synagogue is a welcoming
4 place.

5 I looked at The New York Times article
6 that was talking about what they were building and
7 the level of how high it was seemed to be the same
8 size as the buildings around it. I feel that the
9 synagogue goes out of its way to be part of the
10 community. They did a blood program, but I couldn't
11 be part of that because I can't give blood, but they
12 have been involved in community affairs and have
13 always tried to reach out.

14 They welcomed my son and I when I went
15 there 26 years ago, and it wasn't like, "Well, can
16 you afford this and can you afford that?" It wasn't
17 like that at all. So when we characterize our
18 congregation as it's very wealthy, maybe some people
19 are, but not all of us; and there are people who
20 come from all over. I found out about this
21 synagogue, I didn't really know much about it, when
22 I was in Lauderdale Road in London, 27 years ago. I
23 said, "This is like what I remember from when I was
24 being raised on Allen Street downtown, the synagogue
25 I went to. And they said, "Well, there's one just

1 like this in New York," and I went there. I knew
2 nobody and I was very welcomed and I have been
3 welcomed for 26 years.

4 I think if the synagogue feels that they
5 can do this now, and they have lowered their scale
6 and lowered their scale. I notice when they did
7 their restorations -- in fact, we didn't have the
8 main sanctuary for about a year until this past Rosh
9 Hashana -- it was so beautiful. My son said
10 something to me. He's living in Chicago, he was in
11 Germany in the U.S. Army for a few years, he said,
12 "Mom, how could you take me to that synagogue?"

13 I said, "What did I do wrong?"

14 He said, "You spoiled me for every other
15 synagogue I have ever gone to since."

16 Thank you.

17 CHAIRMAN PAULSEN: Thank you.

18 Myron Smith and then Naomi Sutton.

19 MR. SMITH: I am Myron Smith. I am a
20 resident of the West Side for 44 years and I reside
21 in Majestic Apartments. I have seen many changes on
22 the West Side, other buildings going up and all for
23 the good. I think this building is entirely
24 appropriate. It is not a mid block building, it is
25 more towards the corner, and I appeal to the

1 Commission to approve this project because it will
2 enhance the entire neighborhood and will also
3 enhance 70th Street.

4 Thank you very much.

5 CHAIRMAN PAULSEN: Thank you.

6 Naomi Sutton and then Colonel Jonathan de
7 Sula Mendes.

8 MR. KELLER: No, I don't look like Naomi
9 Sutton, she has asked me to speak in her stead. My
10 name is James Keller (ph), I am a trustee of
11 Congregation Shearith Israel. My wife and two
12 children are members. My wife and I have been
13 members since we have been married at the
14 congregation in 1985.

15 I would like to speak very briefly talk
16 about the preservation that has been debated today.

17 History is littered with fallen giants,
18 so as much as I am cheered by my proposed confidence
19 that our grandchildren of will walk out of
20 Congregation Shearith Israel in I think the Year is
21 2254, regardless of the decision which you will
22 make, I think it would not behoove us to imagine
23 that depressions and especially the good fortune
24 which has kept our synagogue building standing and
25 in reasonably good repair for a hundred years will

1 endure forever.

2 Congregation Shearith Israel is at its
3 core a community of families, not very different
4 from those who have spoken up against this building.
5 Families like mine, with mortgages to pay, with
6 children to education. Musicians, librarians,
7 museum curators, school teachers -- we're not all
8 lawyers and doctors -- all of whom have reached deep
9 into their pocket to fund the restoration that has
10 been affected today, but we cannot continue to do so
11 indefinitely.

12 We are indeed fortunate to have generous
13 members like Messrs. Rudin and Levy, but these
14 gentlemen are not regrettably eternal. The
15 congregation needs your approval to in order to
16 create a trust which will ensure its future and
17 transcend that commitment to its benefactors.

18 Thank you.

19 CHAIRMAN PAULSEN: Colonel Mendes -- is
20 Colonel Mendes here?

21 AUDIENCE: He just stepped out.

22 CHAIRMAN PAULSEN: Gilda Angel, is she
23 here?

24 MS. ANGEL: Ladies and gentlemen, I've
25 lived on the West side --

1 CHAIRMAN PAULSEN: State your name,
2 please.

3 MS. ANGEL: I'm sorry, Gilda Angel.

4 I've lived on the West Side with my
5 family for 30 years. As a matter of fact, for 27-
6 and-a-half of those years we lived on West 70th
7 Street, on the same block as the synagogue. It was
8 our neighborhood, it is still our neighborhood, and
9 the synagogue was so central to the lives of so many
10 people who hoped for many, many years that it would
11 be able to maintain itself. The building proposal
12 that you have heard today will give us the means to
13 do so.

14 We feel that the building is appropriate.
15 I feel that the building is appropriate for the
16 neighborhood. There are many different styles of
17 buildings along Central Park West, some modern, some
18 not so modern. There's a variety of styles to be
19 contended with. There is certainly no uniformity
20 along Central Park West, and this building which
21 backs up the synagogue certainly acts as a beautiful
22 back drop to set off the synagogue as the jewel that
23 it is.

24 We feel that the proposed building will
25 serve not only the congregation but also the

1 community at large with the dignity and distinction
2 which is the hallmark of all Congregation Shearith
3 Israel projects and activities. We hope that you
4 will approve the proposal for this project.

5 Thank you very much.

6 CHAIRMAN PAULSEN: Thank you.

7 Is Gloria Mosseri still here?

8 No. Then James Platt.

9 AUDIENCE: I think they had to go.

10 CHAIRMAN PAULSEN: Okay. Marc Daniel?

11 MR. DANIELS: Sorry. Thank you very
12 much. I was just telling my wife that I was going
13 to be late for an event at my daughter's school,
14 sorry for walking in late.

15 My name is Marc Daniel. First, I wanted
16 to thank the Chair for their understanding in
17 agreeing to continue the hearing and to hear
18 additional testimony at a later date. I would ask
19 that I and the other speakers tonight be allowed to
20 speak again at other moments, should the committee
21 members not present today be present at future
22 events.

23 CHAIRMAN PAULSEN: If I could respond to
24 that request. We have a stenographer present today
25 who is making the transcript that will be available

1 to all Commissioners. Because of the great number
2 of people who we anticipated would be here, we do
3 want to provide that written record to all
4 Commissioners who are not present today. At future
5 meetings and hearings, we will open the record
6 obviously for testimony. We will ask people to
7 speak to issues that are different or if they have
8 further thoughts at the next meeting.

9 MR. DANIELS: But people may speak
10 again if there is additional testimony?

11 CHAIRMAN PAULSEN: If there is
12 additional information, they will obviously be able
13 to come and offer additional information.

14 MR. DANIELS: Thank you.

15 CHAIRMAN PAULSEN: You're welcome.

16 MR. DANIELS: In the interests of time, I
17 will speak briefly and very briefly reiterate some
18 things people have said.

19 I am a long time West Sider. I am
20 Treasurer of the Board at 18 West 70th Street and my
21 son has attended school at Shearith Israel, so we
22 have many ties to both the community and to the
23 synagogue.

24 There are two preservation goals and only
25 one is agruably supported by this proposed building.

1 Equally important is the goal that some of the
2 people in the community have spoken about today,
3 which is the preservation of the West Side historic
4 district as represented by 70th Street, and the
5 precedent this sets for historic districts
6 throughout the city.

7 One speaker, a couple of speakers have
8 actually said that this is not a mid block building.
9 That reminds me of saying it depends on what the
10 definition of "is," is. The building would be in
11 the middle of block; it is a mid block building.

12 The first gentleman who made that
13 reference also talked about the size of other
14 buildings in the neighborhood, including my own
15 building, Number 18 and Number 30, all of which, I
16 would argue, is irrelevant to the appropriateness
17 question before the Commission, because these
18 buildings have existed since the 1920s.

19 I would also like to agree with Rabbi
20 Angel. He noted earlier today, way back in the
21 beginning, how wrong a rabbi can be. The community
22 -- what he did not hear is the speakers who came
23 after him and he did not hear the testimony given
24 before the Community Board Landmark Committee last
25 week, but it was very clear that there is broad and

1 wide spread community opposition to this.

2 The Community Board, as you are aware,
3 Community Board Landmarks Committee and other
4 Community Board members were present there last
5 Thursday, and unanimously voted that this tower is
6 not appropriate and is too big for the site. Dozens
7 of people from the community spoke against this
8 proposal, and as far as I am aware, no non-member of
9 the synagogue tonight or then spoke in favor of the
10 proposal, or President or Assemblyman, or Councilman
11 and other representatives and political figures also
12 oppose this.

13 Over 100 residents of my building, Number
14 18, some of them are members of the synagogue, many
15 of them have lived here for decades, have asked me
16 to speak on their behalf, and they strongly feel
17 that this tower is inappropriate, and I share that
18 with all the Commission members here and I thank you
19 for the time.

20 CHAIRMAN PAULSEN: Thank you very much.
21 Myles Weintraub, then Dana Miller.

22 MR. WEINTRAUB: Good evening. My name
23 is Myles Weintraub. I'm a resident of 18 West 70th
24 Street. I am an architect, and I was co-founder of
25 the urban design group of the New York City Planning

1 Commission in the late 60s.

2 I will try to be very brief. The issue
3 to speak to is the question of appropriateness in
4 the historic district, and I urge you to turn the
5 models around so you can see the models from the
6 west, and then answer that question. Is the
7 proposal appropriate to the historic district?

8 On another point, it was said before that
9 74-711 allows this proposal. 74-711 allows the
10 application. 74-711 is a special permit proceeding,
11 not an as-of-right proceeding.

12 We first saw drawings of the proposal on
13 November 6th. We have started our own analyses of
14 the impact of the building on surrounding buildings
15 with drawings. We are not complete. We are cheered
16 to hear that the hearing will be extended, and we
17 will present our information graphically at that
18 point.

19 Even though we aren't complete, last
20 Thursday night, without the benefit of presentations
21 like the applicant, the Landmarks Committee,
22 Planning Board 7, each member expressed clearly his
23 and her decision as to the inappropriateness of the
24 project.

25 Thank you.

1 CHAIRMAN PAULSEN: Thank you. Dana
2 Miller and then Ron Prince.

3 MS. MILLER: Hi. My name is Dana Miller
4 and I live at 110 West 90th Street, so I am not a
5 person who would be directly affected if the
6 building went up; however, for the last 18 years the
7 Upper West Side has been my home. My first
8 apartment rental after graduating college was on the
9 Upper West Side. When we were married we purchased
10 our condominium on the Upper West Side. My husband
11 opened two restaurants on the Upper West Side, and
12 our son goes to school on the Upper West Side.

13 When I had my son Marco eight years ago
14 and would take him out in the stroller, I started
15 developing a new appreciation for the beautiful
16 blocks on the Upper West Side, in the Central Park
17 West Historic District. As Marco grew older,
18 pushing to stroller gave way to walks and even field
19 trips through those same blocks. You could say that
20 I inadvertently developed a lay person's interest in
21 preservation.

22 There are favorite blocks that were
23 regularly ventured down. Many are in the lower 70s
24 and 70th Street is one of them. When I turn east on
25 70th from Columbus and take a few steps, I feel like

1 I could be in a time decades ago. The north side of
2 the street in an uninterrupted line of houses. The
3 south side is largely brownstones, some with
4 dramatic stairways leading up to the entrances.
5 There are a couple of taller buildings, but all
6 prewar and none taller than 10 stories.

7 A 14 story, nearly 160 foot tower would
8 loom over this block. Anyone approaching from
9 Columbus Avenue would have an entirely changed
10 experience of this block. Turning on to 70th Street
11 wouldn't be transporting any more, it would be
12 saddening. I am not an architect, I'm not a lawyer,
13 but shouldn't I be able to enjoy the feeling of
14 history in our historic district? And shouldn't I
15 also be able to trust that my son will be able to
16 when he is taking his children to the park?

17 In my own synagogue we are asked to dig
18 in deep for buildings funds and special drives, and
19 yes, we grumble, but the money gets raised. Here we
20 are asked to believe that the only way this
21 established, successful congregation can finance its
22 new facility is through a high rise luxury condo? I
23 don't understand it and I promise you, no one in New
24 York will understand it either.

25 Congregation Shearith Israel is the

1 going to go up, it didn't. We now have this
2 incredible offer to build a short tower. So much is
3 in the telling of the story. Everything is in the
4 telling of the story. The other day Kelly Friedman
5 was asked over at 91, she said, "I have been meeting
6 with community groups three times a week." Somebody
7 said, "For how long?" She said, "For one week".

8 So which way is it? Is it in the middle
9 of the block? Is it Central Park West? It is tied
10 together, it's referential, all this is bogus. This
11 is a condominium tower. The only honest word is
12 "tower." If you walk down the block, it is a block
13 that doesn't want a tower. If you go stand on the
14 block -- I am not an architect and I am not a zoning
15 specialist, but I am a walker and I love the
16 historic district, it has a kind of social
17 conscience.

18 Mr. Rudin referred to an architectural
19 void on the Upper West Side; I don't think so, and I
20 don't think the historic district is about an
21 architectural void. My friends in Texas say, "If
22 you want to see old buildings go to Europe." I am a
23 New Yorker, and I think we can do better. I think
24 we can take care of what we have got. We don't have
25 to build this thing.

1 oldest established synagogue in the U.S. It should
2 be a voice of treasuring history not a threat to it.
3 If the congregation will not play the role that it
4 should, then this Commission must. This building
5 plan will be a major blow to the historic district
6 and it seems a nasty precedent to establish. Please
7 do the right thing on this important issue.

8 Thank you.

9 CHAIRMAN PAULSEN: Thank you. Ron Price
10 and then Michael Marsh.

11 MR. PRINCE: I am going to make my
12 remarks at a later meeting. Thank you very much.

13 CHAIRMAN PAULSEN: Thank you. Michael
14 Marsh?

15 MR. MARSH: I am Michael Marsh. I am a
16 resident of 101 Central Park West. If I crane my
17 neck around I would see this new building. I live
18 in New York City out of choice. I grew up in the
19 Texas Panhandle, I came to New York when I was 19, I
20 love New York. A friend of mine from Texas and I,
21 we walked to the mid 60s, we walked almost every
22 street of Manhattan, every week we walked and walked
23 and walked. I moved to the Upper West Side in 1967,
24 I love it. I am still a walker.

25 I lived in 101 when the big tower was

1 I got married recently. My wife had a
2 baby. I would like to add on to my apartment, I
3 need more space, and I can make a really good case
4 that I need more space, so what? I have got to live
5 with what I've got, I've got to live within my means
6 with what I have got. So I am not a pro, but I love
7 my neighborhood and I love the streets, I love
8 walking the streets of the Upper West Side, and we
9 don't need more, we don't need more.

10 I agree with Marc, these institutions, if
11 they have survived, will continue to. I have been
12 there for 25 years, it seems to be doing just fine.
13 Thank you.

14 CHAIRMAN PAULSEN: Thank you. Alvin
15 Deutsch?

16 MR. DEUTSCH: Thank you, Madam Chairman
17 and members of the Commission. I am Alvin Deutsch.
18 I was formally President of the congregation until
19 my retirement in April, and I was the president at
20 the time that we did this extraordinary fund-raising
21 to preserve our congregation, to preserve our
22 sanctuary.

23 I just want to tell you it was not easy.
24 It is the first time in the history of this 105 year
25 old building that we went to our members asking for

1 direct contributions for this kind of work. Indeed,
2 we do have some people of means in our congregation,
3 but as Ms. Charles told you, we have an abundance of
4 people not in that category. That's why I am here
5 today. We are not a museum, we are a living body.

6 We have members of our congregation who
7 are struggling, as my co-trustee said, to raise
8 their kids, to pay for apartments adjacent to our
9 synagogue; many of them have to walk to attend
10 Sabbath services and, therefore, they have to be in
11 the immediate neighborhood. We rely on those people
12 for our future.

13 We must look ahead to who is going to
14 fill the social needs of our synagogue. Community
15 house can not do it. We need better classroom. We
16 need a library. We need facilities for our historic
17 documents, and the only way that this is going to be
18 achieved is by your approving this program, which is
19 within the needs of the congregation and neighbors.
20 Let us not become a relic. Let's not depend upon
21 what has gone on before. We must look ahead to
22 those members who in the future will be supporting
23 this, and at the present cannot do so because their
24 own economic needs yet need the services of our
25 congregation as a house of worship, not a museum.

1 Thank you.

2 CHAIRMAN PAULSEN: Pedro Gonzalez?

3 MR. GOLDSTEIN: I am Gabriel Goldstein.

4 I am the curator of Yeshiva University Museum. I am
5 an art historian and specialize in Jewish visual
6 culture. I am also married to a trustee of the
7 congregation. She takes great pride to be a trustee
8 of the congregation.

9 Addressing the building in terms of its
10 architectural content, firstly, the building, I
11 think, is conceptual, not only in terms of its
12 presence by 518, which is not a traditional
13 brownstone; the block does not contain merely
14 traditional brownstones, there are obviously larger
15 buildings. It's obviously very close to Central
16 Park West, that is mid block or not, it is
17 relatively eastward on the block, and, therefore,
18 conceptualized with the larger buildings on the
19 south side.

20 Treatment of the facade, in terms of the
21 use of materials, in terms of echoing architectural
22 elements based on the treatment of other Central
23 Park West landmark buildings -- and we checked this
24 with our own congregational building, but also with
25 67th Street larger studio windows. That places it

1 firmly within an architectural content.

2 The synagogue is a landmark. It's a
3 landmark technically and it is a landmark also
4 conceptually. It's a landmark for the multicultural
5 nature of New York City, being a Jewish house of
6 worship which was established in New Amsterdam, and
7 there's a continuity then of the multiculturalism of
8 various communities from that point onward through
9 today and into the future.

10 We were able to afford to preserve our
11 sanctuary partially. In order to be able to
12 preserve our congregation, we must go elsewhere. As
13 a museum professional, I am very aware of the cost
14 of preservation activities, and it is unfortunately
15 impossible for a relatively small community, a
16 community which contains members of means, as was
17 said, and many members who have to struggle to live
18 in Manhattan, to afford to preserve such an
19 important landmark, landmark in terms of historic
20 import, in terms of beauty, in terms of aesthetics,
21 and in terms of a faith community. We must look to
22 another source of income for this purpose.

23 I think as a community which recognizes
24 the importance of preservation as part of an
25 historical community recognizing historical

1 legacies, we must look to how not to profits will be
2 able to find money to preserve their heritage,
3 architectural heritage, conceptual heritage and
4 faith heritage. They do not have a source of
5 income.

6 The congregation is proposing a
7 relatively modest and sensitive architectural
8 enterprise to be able to continue forward. We must
9 continue forward with this legacy for our
10 congregation and for all New Yorkers.

11 Thank you.

12 CHAIRMAN PAULSEN: Thank you Barbara
13 Smith. Is Ms. Smith here? And then Saul Laniato
14 (ph).

15 MS. SMITH: Thank you for this
16 opportunity. My name is Barbara Haran Smith and I
17 am very proud to lend my support to this project.
18 I'm a life-long West Sider and part of a family,
19 devoted congregants of Shearith Israel.

20 I consider the proposed project
21 appropriate, tasteful, and an enhancement of our
22 West Side Historic District. I most respectfully
23 urge you to approve it.

24 Thank you again.

25 CHAIRMAN PAULSEN: Thank you.

1 Saul Laniato (ph), and then Naomi
2 Dovdavany.

3 AUDIENCE: She left.

4 MR. LANIATO: Ladies and Gentlemen, my
5 name is Saul Laniato. I have been a member of the
6 congregation for the past 56 years. I'm just
7 concerned that other people in this audience have no
8 idea of the inner workings of our congregation, of
9 the financial structure; what the cost to our
10 congregation was to come this far in the restoration
11 of our building, of our historic building, and I
12 would urge you that this building is both
13 appropriate and necessary for the community. I
14 would urge you to support it.

15 Thank you.

16 CHAIRMAN PAULSEN: Thank you.

17 Cornell Mendez?

18 COLONEL MENDEZ: I am John Mendez and I
19 am a retired trustee of Congregation Shearith
20 Israel. My family's roots go back to the colonies
21 before the American Revolution, and we have been
22 here for all these years. Because our footsteps are
23 deep in the sands of time of the history of the
24 congregation, I feel a responsibility to think about
25 its future, and to speak out about its future.

1 It is clear to the current trustees and
2 past trustees like myself that the congregation has
3 outgrown its present facilities. We don't have the
4 facilities to do the things that we are responsible
5 for doing to enhance the Jewish life of our
6 congregants. We are blessed with having the
7 remnants of Israel -- Shearith Israel in Hebrew is
8 the remnants of the seed, the remnants of the
9 departing of all the Sephardim from all over world
10 to come to New York, and come to worship with us.
11 We have to provide for them the framework that they
12 left abroad in the Mediterranean countries. They
13 come here not as wealthy people, they come here
14 tired and the poor, those who were expelled, and it
15 is our responsibility to provide the framework for
16 these people to worship appropriately.

17 We are not a rich congregation as has
18 been suggested by a number of people who oppose the
19 project. That is a fiction. We are not a rich
20 Congregation. We struggled to raise the money to
21 renovate our hundred year old synagogue building,
22 and it wasn't easy and we are not finished yet.

23 The word "appropriate" or
24 "inappropriate," I am not competent to judge
25 appropriateness or inappropriateness with respect to

1 the standards that you have before you and that you
2 must make a judgment on, but I do want to say this:
3 You will recall our famous Senator Daniel Webster.
4 He argued a case before the Supreme Court, a
5 Dartmouth College case in the State of New
6 Hampshire, and his closing words before the Supreme
7 Court were, "It is a small school, but there are
8 those of us who love it." Congregation Shearith
9 Israel is a small congregation but there are those
10 of us who love it.

11 Thank you very much.

12 CHAIRMAN PAULSEN: Thank you very much.

13 Ruth Schulson, is Ms. Schulson here?

14 MS. SCHULSON: Yes.

15 I am Ruth Schulson, and I want to say
16 that I am for this proposal. Shearith Israel has
17 always contributed to New York City, to the
18 community since they first came here. So I feel
19 that it should -- and we need a community house with
20 more space.

21 My family has been here since the very
22 beginning so I don't know what has gone on over
23 there, but I heard about it.

24 MS. PAULSON: Thank you.

25 Steven Neuwirth?

1 MR. NEUWIRTH: Good evening. My name is
2 Steven Neuwirth and I would like to address, as you
3 requested, the appropriateness of the building.

4 I think it is important, just by looking
5 at the drawings that are up on board, to think about
6 both 91 and 101 Central Park West when judging the
7 appropriateness of this building. Compared to those
8 two buildings, this is a modest contribution to both
9 the Central Park West skyline and to West 70th
10 Street. I invite you to come to West 70th Street,
11 to look how far into the mid block 101 Central Park
12 West actually goes, and then to go to 69th Street
13 and to look at 91 Central Park West. This is not an
14 intrusion into the mid block, but it is a contextual
15 contribution that will support the synagogue and how
16 it looks on Central Park West.

17 I am not an expert in city planning or in
18 landmarks preservation, but I did have the good
19 opportunity in the early 1980s to work with Con Tou
20 (ph), who was then head of the Manhattan Office of
21 the City Planning Department on the work that that
22 office did on mid blocks and addressing the problem
23 of sliver buildings, which you will recall was a
24 major problem at that time. And I got to work with
25 Con on the City Planning Department's report, which

1 ultimately led to the rules that the City Planning
2 Commission adopted to deal with sliver buildings.

3 I believe that this building which has
4 been proposed is fully consistent with the
5 principles that were behind that work by the City
6 Planning Commission. First, not to disrupt mid
7 blocks. Second, to preserve the integrity of street
8 walls. Third, to create a graceful transition from
9 mid blocks to avenues. And, fourth, to maximize the
10 beneficial use of air rights that exist on historic
11 buildings like Congregation Shearith Israel.

12 I think that what has been proposed here
13 makes a contribution to the skyline, makes a
14 contribution to the block. It is a wonderful thing
15 about the Upper West Side that people walk on the
16 mid blocks. I walk down West 70th Street almost
17 every morning to pray at our synagogue, and I can
18 tell you that if you come and walk from Columbus
19 Avenue to Central Park West, consider the existence
20 today of 101 Central Park West on that block; I
21 think you will easily be able to see that this
22 building is consistent with and contributes to the
23 integrity of that street, and the suggestion that
24 only a six-story building should be built is
25 absolutely inconsistent with the other buildings

1 that would be adjacent to the lot that is now
2 standing.

3 So I strongly support the proposal.
4 Thank you.

5 CHAIRMAN PAULSEN: Thank you.

6 CHAIRMAN PAULSEN: Michael Katz.

7 MR. KATZ: My name is Michael Katz, I am
8 a trustee of Congregation Shearith Israel and
9 resident of the Upper West Side at 86th Street.

10 I would like to speak to some personal
11 experience that I have with the maintenance of the
12 building. It has been my privilege as a trustee
13 over the past six or seven years to be intimately
14 engaged in the renovation of the stained glass
15 windows, as well as having the responsibility of
16 maintaining the building.

17 With respect to what Norman Marcus said,
18 for 25 years, the building was not well maintained.
19 And when a group of us took on the trusteeship, we
20 began to examine the infrastructure of the building,
21 and we were shocked that despite the appearance, the
22 real infrastructure was in serious decay, and we
23 began -- without a fund-raising program, simply
24 because it had to begin -- we began a project of
25 maintaining and upgrading the existing building,

1 utilities and, as I mentioned, the window.

2 We have experienced -- I used to come to
3 the budget meetings and see the administrator, who
4 was treasurer at the time, and he said, "Here's the
5 biggest item in the budget," because even more than
6 salaries and any other item, the cost of maintaining
7 the building and bringing it up to what were minimal
8 standards were the largest capital expenses out of
9 our operating budget that we had for many, many
10 years. I can assure you that without the endowment
11 that the economic funds from this new building will
12 provide us, we will not be able to maintain the
13 building on a five-year cycle.

14 Up until when we began the project six or
15 seven years ago, it hadn't been maintained on a
16 five-year cycle probably forever, but we realized
17 what the cost of it was. It is our sincere dream
18 that this building will enable us to do that on a
19 regular basis and will enable us to protect the
20 building the way the building really needs to be
21 protected.

22 Like Steve, it is my privilege also to
23 walk to 70th Street every morning. I begin my
24 morning by leaving 86th Street and Central Park West
25 and walking down to 70th Street. I see different

1 degrees of sunlight, different degrees of shade, and
2 I have really learned to enjoy the various
3 distinctions as Central Park West changes. I can
4 say that, number one, there is no uniformity.
5 Certainly 101 and San Remo are so looming that they
6 are a little frightening to these eyes, but when I
7 turn the corner and see our building, it gives me
8 great pride that we have presented a true landmark,
9 something that is appropriate and sensitive,
10 appropriate for the context and also a project that
11 we have struggled so hard for so many years to
12 develop that it will serve the needs of our landmark
13 and will enable us to use our funds for our
14 programming, which is the most appropriate use of
15 our funds, and will also be within the context of
16 the West Side historic district.

17 CHAIRMAN PAULSEN: Israel Goldstein.

18 AUDIENCE: He's left.

19 CHAIRMAN PAULSEN: Suzanne Stern?

20 Dennis Freilich?

21 MR. FREILICH: Members of the
22 Commission, my name is Dennis Freilich. I am
23 speaking as a supporter of this proposal. I have
24 been a member of the Congregation Shearith Israel
25 for 40 years. I have raised my children here, all

1 four of which are now members and have growing young
2 families and are struggling like everybody else to
3 be able to live in Manhattan.

4 I think that I don't want to repeat a lot
5 of things that have already been said, but I am a
6 former President of the congregation. I know the
7 problems that the congregation had in trying to
8 raise the funds to do what we have already done, and
9 I think that, as you have heard, there are some
10 members of means and there are also many members
11 struggling, who are struggling, who cannot afford to
12 finance a complete and ongoing renovation without
13 help from the City Commission dealing with this
14 question.

15 I want to just express my opinion that I
16 think to a city that is full of large towers, a 14
17 story building, to say that this is a tower, is a
18 little bit disingenuous, and I would just like to
19 urge the Commission to approve this proposal.

20 CHAIRMAN PAULSEN: Thank you.

21 Stan Towne?

22 MR. TOWNE: Good evening. My name is
23 Stan Towne. I am resident of Manhattan and a member
24 of Shearith Israel. I am here to speak in favor of
25 the proposal.

1 I have looked at the drawings and seen
2 the models and it seems to me, although I am not an
3 architect, that a 14-story building, immediately to
4 the north is another 14-story building, immediately
5 to the south is another 14-story building, it is
6 contextual and will present a very nice arrangement
7 at the end of West 70th Street.

8 I don't think that a person walking along
9 the street considers this mid block. You would
10 consider this an extension of the end of the block.
11 So I urge you to find it is an appropriate building.

12 Thank you.

13 CHAIRMAN PAULSEN: Are there any other
14 people who wish to speak this evening? If so --
15 yes?

16 AUDIENCE: For some reason I signed up
17 and my name didn't pop up, so ...

18 CHAIRMAN PAULSEN: There were a number
19 of people whose names I called who had left the
20 room.

21 MR. WRIGHT: I am Peter Wright of Six
22 West 77th Street, so, no, I don't live on the
23 adjacent block. I am a long-time West Side activist
24 with significant involvement in projects relevant to
25 this, and I want to speak to them. I am also a

1 former vestrman and Chairman of the capital
2 campaign at Christ and Saint Stevens Episcopal
3 Church, which is just two blocks west of this
4 particular synagogue.

5 In thinking of this synagogue's long and
6 distinguished history, and moving up from downtown
7 as did Christ and Saint Stevens, I think we have
8 many such institutions on the West Side and,
9 unfortunately, if we took every single one of them
10 which have a leaky roof, as mine did, and we had a
11 capital campaign and successfully raised the money
12 to replace it, if every single leaking roof
13 sanctuary problem, problematic, not for profit on
14 the West Side were able to build whatever it wanted
15 to, wherever it wanted, I wonder what the West Side
16 would look like?

17 I think we are addressing two issues and
18 I want to address the second one: The first is: Is
19 this in context appropriate physically? It
20 certainly isn't. It's a simple building, 100 feet
21 off Central Park West, but I want to address this
22 whole business of preservation purpose. It seems to
23 me the reason this thing is being considered is the
24 idea that economically somehow it's going to pay for
25 what needs to be done to keep this hallmark in great

1 shape and keep the institution moving forward. I
2 went through this at Christ and Saint Stevens, a
3 little church, 150 families, we raised some money,
4 solved the problem.

5 I was a founding Director, and all of you
6 around remember this one, the Fourth Universalist
7 Church -- "Save our Universalist landmark's soul,"
8 remember that one -- where that thing was a slam
9 dunk hardship because all religious sanctuaries are
10 uneconomic. They aren't office buildings, they
11 aren't rentals set up by Jack Rudin, they aren't
12 economic. That's not why they are built. So the
13 Universalist was a slam dunk for hardship, if you
14 remember, and it almost became an apartment building
15 in the Horace Mann School, by that much.

16 The neighborhood got involved and raised
17 the money, non-Unitarians, some were Episcopalian,
18 and it is still there and it is doing just fine, and
19 there's no tower.

20 Last, and certainly not least, is the
21 building right next to where I live, the New York
22 Historical Society, which is the other celebrated
23 74-711. We all remember, and I remember oh so well
24 -- by the way, I'm a former Director of Landmark
25 West, and I am on the New York Historical Society

1 Advisory Committee, currently dormant and so forth.
2 I have been around. I was on the Riverside South
3 Planning Board with Donald Trump too. I remember
4 that whole story and the hardship almost and the
5 this and the that.

6 We were going to have this big tower --
7 remember the Hough Hardie tower -- and the closer we
8 got to the Historical Society, and the closer we got
9 to the real numbers and to the tower, the more we
10 saw, in that case -- and I am not saying in this
11 one, we don't know, this my final point -- that the
12 money wasn't going to solve their problems. Then
13 The New York Times broke some stuff and you all
14 remember what happened.

15 The real problem I have here is that
16 aside from the red herring of this wonderful
17 institution's history, Christ and Saint Stevens has
18 a long history too.

19 CHAIRMAN PAULSEN: Mr. Wright, I'm
20 sorry, try to speak to us. We are the ones that
21 want to hear what you have to say.

22 MR. WRIGHT: I'm sorry.

23 The thing to me that is critical to
24 discover, which may in fact make this thing more
25 viable, is we talk about the economic engine that

1 the Rabbi earlier referred to, of selling, I gather,
2 eight or nine or eleven park view condominiums of
3 3500 square feet for four or five million dollars or
4 whatever, and to me, if you are going to consider
5 what is, I think on the surface it is plainly
6 inappropriate if not contextual, then the question
7 of hardship, which has been kind of skirted this
8 evening, is, "Okay, what is your endowment now?
9 What is your cash flow?"

10 CHAIRMAN PAULSEN: I'm sorry, Mr.
11 Wright, this is not a hardship application. We have
12 to first review this building in terms of, A, is it
13 appropriate? And, then, B, is there a preservation
14 purpose to be served by approving this application?

15 So I appreciate your comments, but please
16 try to stick to those two points.

17 MR. WRIGHT: How do you know that there
18 is a preservation process being served without
19 seeing numbers? In the case of the three things
20 that I mentioned, Christ and Saint Stevens, the
21 Universalist Church --

22 CHAIRMAN PAULSEN: Mr. Wright, if you
23 weren't here earlier, I outlined the issues that we
24 must find in order to approve this project, in order
25 to approve this project and prepare a report that we

1 would issue to the City Planning Commission.

2 MR. WRIGHT: Thank you, I understand.

3 CHAIRMAN PAULSEN: Thank you, Mr.
4 Wright.

5 Is there anyone else who wishes to speak
6 this evening?

7 This hearing is going to be continued, I
8 wanted to stress that again. Please come forward.

9 MS. WRIGHT: I am Carol Wright. I live
10 at 91 Central Park West. I live next door to the
11 synagogue, and I feel very fortunate to live next to
12 it because I think it is a, beautiful magnificent
13 building, but I also loved Penn Station, and we lost
14 Penn Station. Penn Station was what moved everybody
15 to get into landmarking, preserving neighborhoods.
16 We finally managed to that, we do not want to chip
17 away what we have gained.

18 CHAIRMAN PAULSEN: Thank you very much.

19 I want to thank everybody for your
20 patience, for your respect and for the very, very
21 high quality of the comments that you have made this
22 evening. I look forward to hearing from you again,
23 as well as all the Commissioners, and I will move
24 that we continue to a date that will be set as
25 notified in the City Record, and we will be reaching

1
2
3
4
5
6
7
8
9
10
11
12
13
14
15
16
17
18
19
20
21
22
23
24
25

out to all of you to let you know when that is.

Could I have a second to that motion?

(The Commissioners all say "aye.")

CHAIRMAN PAULSEN: All in favor?

(Chorus of "Ayes.")

(Time Noted: 7:30 p.m.)

