



THE COMMITTEE TO PRESERVE THE UPPER WEST SIDE

**Testimony of LANDMARK WEST!
Certificate of Appropriateness Committee
Before the Landmarks Preservation Commission
Congregation Shearith Israel (the Spanish & Portuguese Synagogue)
Tuesday, July 1, 2003**

LANDMARK WEST! is a not for profit community organization committed to the preservation of the architectural heritage of the Upper West Side.

The Certificate of Appropriateness Committee wishes to comment on the application to demolish the existing community house and construct a new 14-story building, and to request that the Landmarks Preservation Commission issue a report to the City Planning Commission relating to an application for a special permit pursuant to Section 74-711 of the Zoning Resolution.

Thank you very much for the opportunity to testify on this vital issue, which affects the future of this individual landmark, this and other midblocks in the Upper West Side/Central Park West Historic District, as well as communities throughout the city striving to protect neighborhood character.

Slide 1:

Neighborhood character. Ask ten people to define it, and you'll get ten different answers. No community has a single identity. However, when it comes to historic neighborhoods, it is the role of the Landmarks Preservation Commission to articulate, via the designation report, the distinguishing traits of a built environment.

Slide 2:

In the case of the Upper West Side, those traits are reinforced by the 1984 R10-A and R8-B contextual zoning, which laid the foundation for the designation of the Upper West Side/Central Park West Historic District in 1990.

The 1990 designation report and the 1984 zoning report are in complete agreement about the fact that, on the Upper West Side, tall buildings define avenues, and low buildings define side-street midblocks, with few exceptions.

Slide 3:

For this reason, the proposal to build a 15-story, 168-foot building in this location is not, and will never be, appropriate. In this side-street midblock location.

Slide 4:

The designation report describes the district's side streets as follows:

On most of the side streets of the district, scattered later apartment buildings have interrupted the original rows, but in general the surviving rowhouses present *a strong coherency* and are a major element in creating *a special sense of place* particular to this district on Manhattan's Upper West Side. (p. 46, emphasis added)

Slide 5:

Regarding the relationship between the side streets and Central Park West, the report states:

The interplay between the low-scale character of the rowhouse groups which dominate the side streets and the large-scale character of the taller buildings that terminate these blocks on Central Park West reinforces that role of the avenue as an *eastern frame of the district*. (pp. 22-23, emphasis added)

Taller buildings that terminate these blocks on Central Park West. This is the key. To quote one of Commissioner Paulsen's comments from the February 11, 2003, hearing on this matter, the applicant has proposed "a building that could be appropriate in this district." We agree – on a terminating site on Central Park West.

Slide 6:

But the proposed building would not be on Central Park West. It would be on West 70th Street. A side street, a midblock.

Slide 7:

Now, admittedly, West 70th Street is not a perfectly typical block. Here, the low-rise landmark synagogue, instead of a tall building, terminates this predominantly brownstone block. And as inappropriate as it would be to demolish the synagogue and construct a tall building on its site, or to cantilever a tall building over the landmark, it would be equally inappropriate to erect a tall building behind it. This would essentially reverse the typical relationship between the side street and Central Park West.

Slide 8:

It does not help to argue that 101 Central Park West extends 150 feet into the midblock – which, by the way, is less than the 172 feet that the proposed building would cut into the midblock – because 101 is clearly a Central Park West building. Everything about its orientation and massing suggests that it is a Central Park West building. Most importantly, it is a tall Central Park West building terminating a block of rowhouses. This is the defining pattern of the Upper West Side/Central Park West Historic District, and the proposed building negates this.

Slide 9:

On February 11, Commissioner Paulsen also stated that the designation report "recognizes that there are not two types of buildings in the Upper West Side Historic District, but many." Again, we agree. But, these building types occur in a strongly consistent pattern. The zoning report quantifies this pattern, stating that over 85% of the structures in the midblocks conform to the "midblock" type – "the 3 to 6-story, 55 to 60 foot high 'brownstone'."

Slide 10:

In his February 16, 2003, *New York Times* "Streetscapes" column, Christopher Gray confirmed this pattern for West 70th Street, calling it "A Block Full of Late-19th-Century Row Houses," that "has remained largely unchanged for many decades."

Slide 11:

Gray goes on to note that the West 70th Street midblock does contain two exceptions to the rowhouse rule. But, as much as these buildings are now part of the fabric of the district, illustrating a short-lived, early 20th-century development trend, no one would seriously argue that Numbers 18 and 30 West 70th Street – or for that matter, the 14-story building at 19 West 69th Street – "relate harmoniously" to their side-street contexts. The proposed building would be no more successful. Shouldn't the Commission work to preserve the district's consistency rather than perpetuate its anomalies?

Slide 12:

Last February, the applicant suggested that part of this project's "preservation purpose" was "to permit the replacement of a dysfunctional and commonly viewed unattractive community house which is behind the designated landmark." But one does not have to like the design of the 1953 community house to appreciate the fact that its scale is "contextual." It is approximately the same height as the two rowhouses it replaced. If these rowhouses still stood, would there even be a question about whether a 15-story building in this location would be appropriate? No.

That is not to say that the existing community house must not be changed. However, in terms of form, the existing structure provides a good template for what an appropriately scaled building on this site would look like.

Slide 13:

Importantly, the community house gives precedence to the landmark. It is slightly lower in height, respecting Brunner & Tryon's vision to create the sense of a free-standing temple anchoring the corner.

Slide 14:

By contrast, the proposed building, with its articulated, overtly primary eastern façade and its "ziggurat" top competes with the landmark for a presence on Central Park West.

Slide 15:

It undermines the historic order of the landmark and its siting and thus essentially changes the character of the landmark.

Slide 16:

All of which reinforces the plain fact that the proposed building is, fundamentally, a Central Park West building on a midblock site, and the design changes since the last hearing have made it even more so. The building bears no remote relationship to the midblock, even though (using zoning as a guideline) 83% of the site is in the midblock. And it is important to recognize that the 125-foot boundary between the Central Park West zoning and the midblock zoning was set specifically with sites including 8 West 70th Street in mind.

The community felt then and believes now that this site should be developed in keeping with the traditional rowhouse scale of most of the area's midblocks. Why go back on that decision now, when the impacts on the individual landmark and the historic district would be so severe?

Slide 17:

This building does not relate harmoniously to the landmark or the historic district. Height and bulk are an issue. This will set a precedent for allowing manifestly out-of-scale development in locations that the zoning and the landmark designation report both clearly state should be developed at a lower scale. It represents a fundamentally unfair trade-off between what may in some, only vaguely articulated way benefit the individual landmark and what will clearly undermine the character of the historic district, as defined in the 1990 designation report. It will violate the contextual zoning that underlies the historic district designation, disregarding every established principle of sound planning for this area from height and bulk regulations to front and rear setback requirements. This is the reason that so many neighborhood groups throughout the city have spoken out on this application. They recognize that if such a building is permitted here, where zoning and landmarks protection are so beautifully in sync, it could be permitted anywhere.

This is your watch. Do not allow this building to be built, this character to be destroyed, this precedent to be set.

**LPC Applications 03-2628 & 03-2653 - 8 West 70th Street
Supporters of Protecting the UWS/CPW Historic District
from the Proposed 15-Story Tower**

List in Formation, 7/1/03

Elected Officials/Community Leaders

Manhattan Borough President C. Virginia Fields
NYS Senator Thomas K. Duane
NYS Senator Eric T. Schneiderman
NYS Assembly Member Richard N. Gottfried
NYS Assembly Member Scott Stringer
NYC Council Member Gale A. Brewer
Manhattan Community Board 7
Manhattan Community Board 8
Phyllis Gunther, District Leader 67 A.D.

Civic Organizations

Beachside Bungalow Preservation Association
CIVITAS
Coalition for a Livable West Side
Committee for Environmentally Sound Development
Defenders of the Historic Upper East Side
East Side Rezoning Alliance
The Fine Arts Federation of New York
Friends of the Upper East Side Historic Districts
Greenwich Village Society for Historic Preservation
Historic Districts Council
Historic Neighborhood Enhancement Alliance, Inc.
LANDMARK WEST!
Municipal Art Society
Murray Hill Neighborhood Association
Park Slope Civic Council, Inc.
Society for the Architecture of the City
Women's City Club of New York
World Monuments Fund / V. Flyer

Block Associations

West Side Federation of Neighborhood & Block Associations
West 64th Street Block Association
West 67th Street Committee (Numbers 2, 15, 17, 27, 33, 39, 40, 45, 50)
West 69th Street Block Association
West 75th Street Block Association
West 77th Street Block Association
Park West 77th Street Block Association
West 78th Street Museum Block Association
West 89th Street Block Association
West 90th Street Block Association
West 102-103rd Street Block Association
Duke Ellington Neighborhood Association

Buildings/Co-op Boards

1 West 64th Street
11 West 69th Street
18 West 70th Street
24 West 70th Street
49 West 72nd Street
25 Central Park West
75 Central Park West
80 Central Park West
91 Central Park West
101 Central Park West
103 Central Park West
115 Central Park West
300 Central Park West

Individuals

Alison Ames
Ina Avrich
Alain Bankier
Lauren Belfer
Julie Blackburn
Jeff Byles
Robert A. Caro (Historian)
Giorgio Cavaglieri, FAIA
Charles Church, Esq.
Chris Cockfield
David Colarossi
Peter Coombs, AIA
Louis Z. Cooper, MD
Anne Correa
Cathleen Cuneo
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Michael De Cuollo
Suzanne H. Dickerson
Andrew Dolkart (Architectural Historian)
Richard Falk
Gerald Galison
Martin Gallent
Tom Giordano, Esq.
Judy Glassman
Grace Glueck
Alex Gray
Carol & William Greilshelmer

Individuals (continued)

Jay Greer
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Ashton Hawkins, Esq.
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Suzanne Herz
Florence Hodes
Judith and Robert Hunt
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Peter Jennings
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Stuart M. Paley
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Avra Petrides
Linda Pogue

Ron Prince
Alice Pucknat
Marc Rakotomalala
Kathleen Randall
Richard Ray
Eliane Reinhold
Joan Rome, Ph.D.
Ned Rorem
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Judy Samuels
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Neil Schlater -Booth
Elliott Sclar, Ph.D. (Urban Planner)
Casey Shane
David Smiley
Eliot Soffes, AIA
Deirdre Stanforth
David Stutzman
Anna Taam
Naomi Usher
Kent Wallgren
Walter J. Wilkie
Lori Zabar, Esq.
Marjorie Zucker

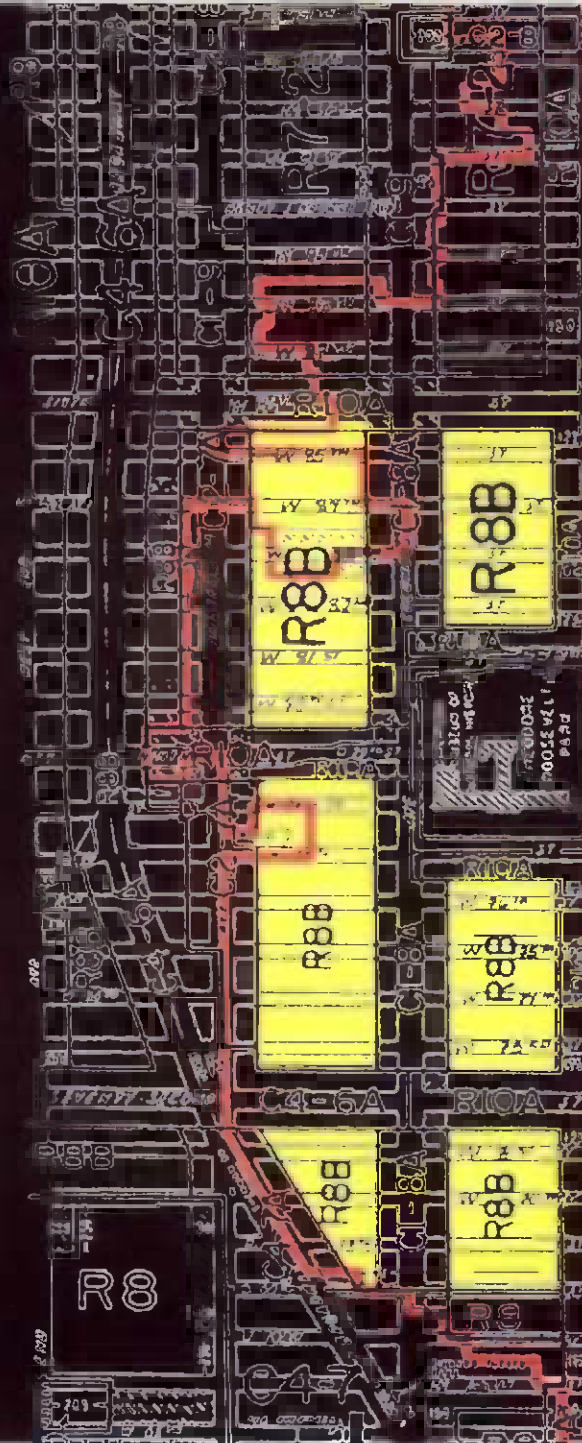


Upper West Side: Predominantly Low-Rise Midblocks

Protective Mechanisms

Upper West Side/Central
Park West Historic District

R8-B Contextual
Zoning Districts



W. 70th Street midblock – south side



W. 70th Street midblock – north side

Proposed 15-Story Building: View looking east from W. 70th Street



Upper West Side/Central Park West Historic District: Side-Street Character



Upper West Side/Central Park West Historic District: Central Park West Character

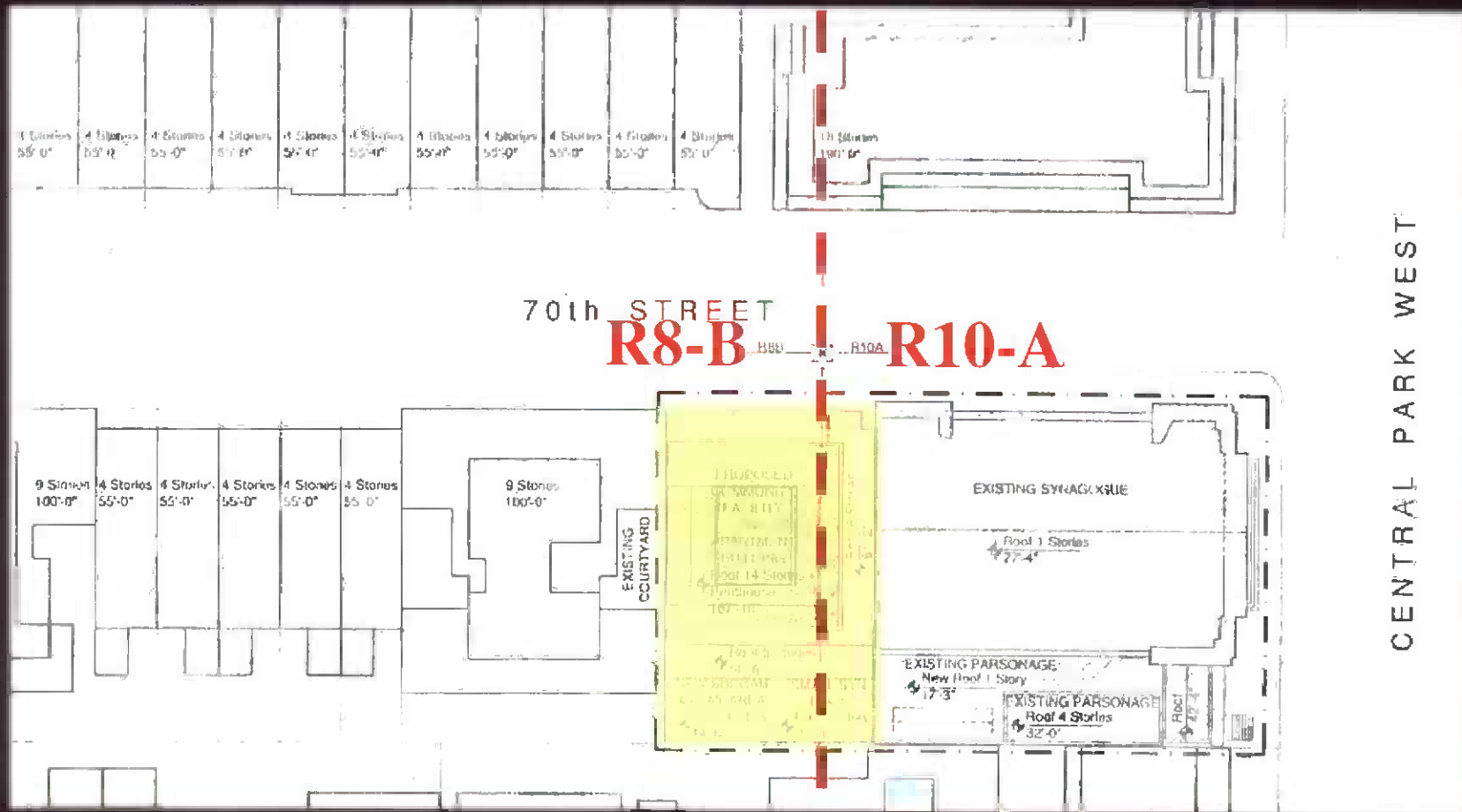


“Avenue” buildings – view north along
Central Park West



101 Central Park West – view east
from 70th Street

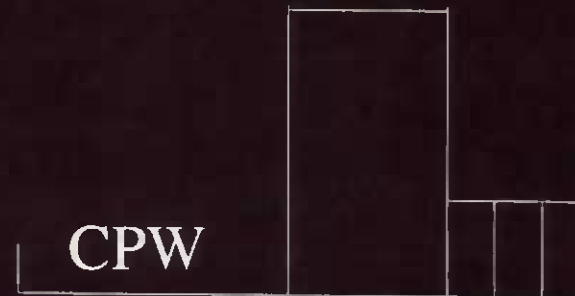
Proposed 15-Story Building: On a Midblock Site



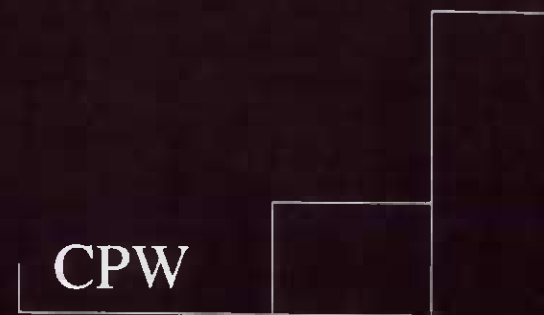


Proposed 15-story building behind
Spanish & Portuguese Synagogue

Upper West Side/Central Park West Historic District



Typical side street profile = tall building on CPW



W. 70th St. profile with proposed tower
= low building on CPW, tall building on midblock

101 Central Park West



View from Central Park



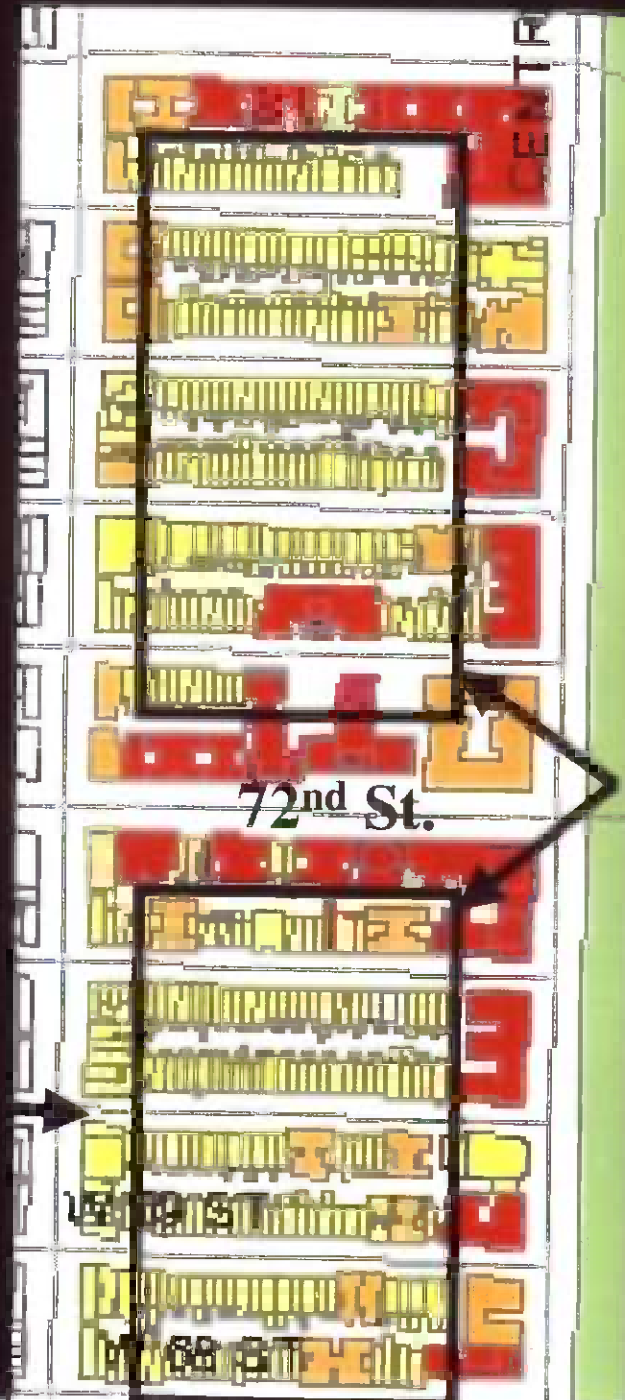
View from W. 70th St.

Upper West Side Building Heights

Number of Stories

- 1 – 6 stories
(typ. rowhouse)
- 7 – 12 stories
(typ. tenement)
- 13 – 36 stories (typ.
apartment building)

West 70th Street



R8-B Zoning Districts

R8-B zoning encourages buildings that are compatible with existing low-rise buildings, typically traditional rowhouses.

Max FAR = 4.0

Max streetwall height = 60 ft.



20-40 W. 70th Street, 1910
Office for Metropolitan History

“A Block Full of Late-19th- Century Row Houses”

— *New York Times* columnist
Christopher Gray, 2/16/03



W. 70th Street, 2003

Upper West Side/Central Park West Historic District: Height Anomalies



19 W. 69th Street



18 W. 70th Street



1122 37 M

Former rowhouses on site of
existing community house
(Tax Photo ca. 1940)



Existing community house
June 2003

Spanish & Portuguese Synagogue: “Temple” Anchoring the Corner



Spanish & Portuguese Synagogue: Proposed 15-Story Building Rising Up Behind the Landmark



Proposed 15-Story Building: A Central Park West Tower

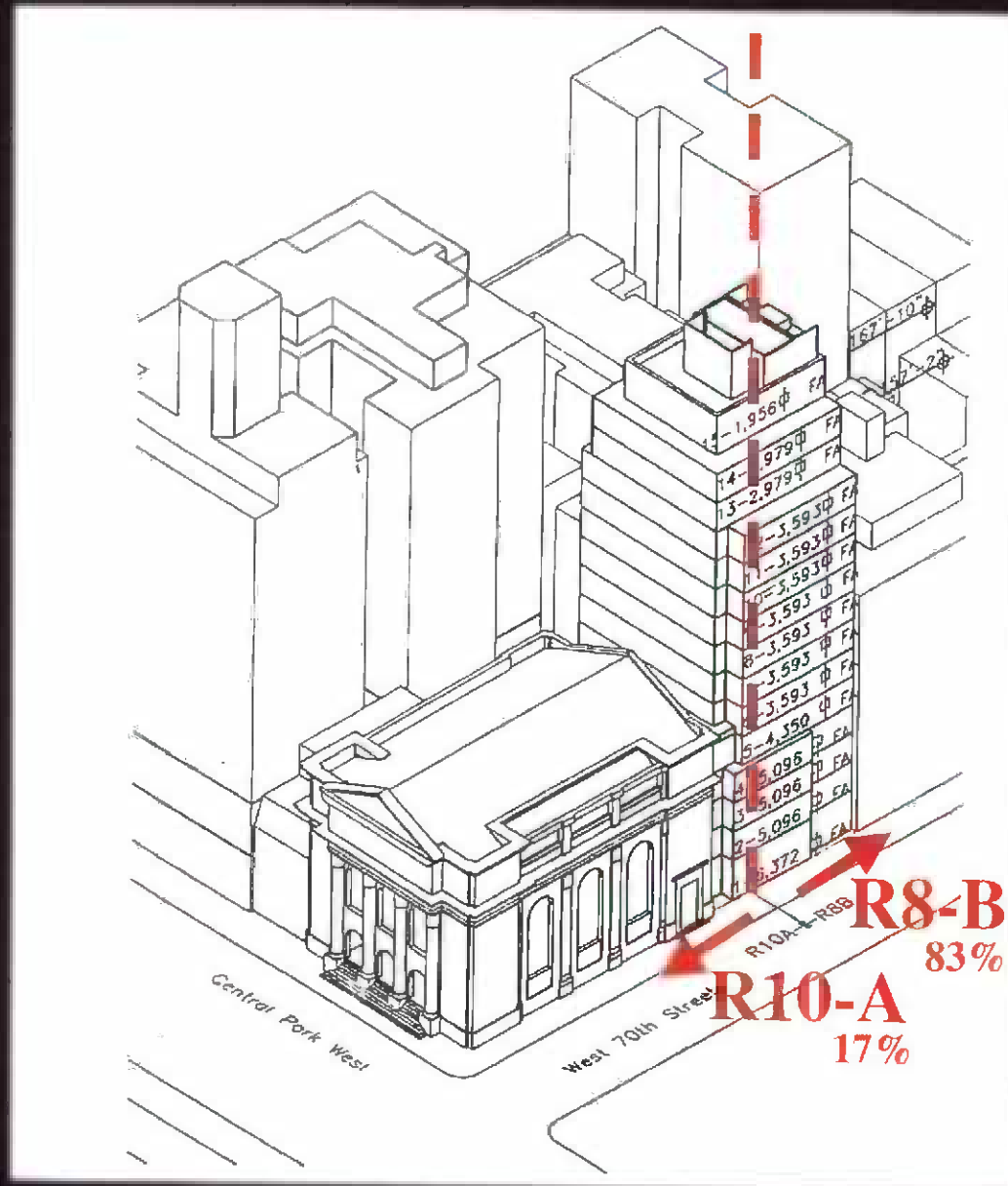


Proposed building: Central Park West elevation



View from Central Park West

Proposed 15-Story Building: 83% in Midblock



Proposed 15-Story Building: 100% Inappropriate

