

November 15, 2005

To: New York City Landmarks Preservation Commission  
From: Elliott D. Sclar, Ph.D.  
Re: Congregation Shearith Israel

Dear Commissioners:

I understand that Congregation Shearith Israel is once again proposing to develop their site on West 70th Street with an approximately 12-story building that combines a new community house on the lower floors with market-rate condominiums on the upper floors. I am taking the opportunity to re-submit the testimony I provided for public hearings concerning the previous proposal for a 14-story building. The current proposal violates the same principles of sound planning and architectural appropriateness.

Granted, two floors have been removed in the re-design. But the impact would be the same - a building that is considerably taller than any other midblock construction in the Upper West Side/Central Park West Historic District since the district was designated in 1990. This is not a precedent that this or any other commission should wish to set. I also understand that the synagogue has referred to this site as "transitional". This is not a term that exists in the New York City zoning lexicon nor in the landmarks designation that pertains to this particular district. "Splitting the difference" between the avenue height and the midblock height is not a rational formula for growth in this neighborhood. In fact, it goes against the very findings of the Commission's historic district designation report, which explicitly calls out the contrast between the tall avenue buildings and the low midblocks. Allowing a 12-story building at 8 West 70th Street would pave the way for a "transitional" swath to be developed all along Central Park West.

Please deny this application. Thank you very much.