

LANDMARK EST!

THE COMMITTEE TO PRESERVE THE UPPER WESTSIDE

Good afternoon. I am Kate Wood, speaking on behalf of LANDMARK WEST! and, I am certain, on behalf of many other concerned citizens who either could not make it to this daytime hearing, or have made the effort to attend, not necessarily to speak but to show their concern and concur with the important points that have already been raised.

Clearly, this issue has generated a strong response from the neighbors in the immediately affected area, those whose lives and properties would be most directly impacted by the proposed 7 variances. It is worth noting that the Board received nearly 200 Objection Forms, of which over 160 (80%) were from neighbors within the 400-foot radius that, for BSA purposes, defines the area of impact. The applicant collected nearly 300 forms from individuals consenting to the project. But, significantly, only 14 (5%) were from people within the 400-foot radius. And not one was from an owner of an "affected property."

There is simply no way around the fact that the community is overwhelmingly opposed to this application. Because they themselves would lose light, air and property value. Because they sympathize with their neighbors who would. Because they see this application as part of a larger trend, led by powerful developers and institutions, that ultimately diminishes the character and quality of our city.

I look around the room and see people from Central Park West, the Upper East Side, Chelsea, Greenwich Village, each facing the same development dilemma. It is not that we question the valuable missions of these institutions. But when nonprofits enter the for-profit arena, they must be held to the same rules that govern every other developer. And all developers must meet the same, appropriately high standard for variances, if the process is to work at all.

Again and again, Congregation Shearith Israel has failed to produce the evidence that this Board requires and has asked for, again and again. The case for variances—any variances—just has not been made. And yet the applicant has the audacity in its most recent letter to call on the Board to close the proceeding and set a date for approval. This kind of cavalier confidence when the case, on its merits, should be anything but a "done deal," this is what has people across the city on the edge of their seats. At stake is nothing less than the public's faith in the laws and procedures that keep our neighborhoods whole.

In conclusion, I would like to submit for the record a letter addressed to the Board from Dr. Elliott D. Sclar, the Director of Columbia University's Center for Sustainable Urban Development – Earth Institute. Dr. Sclar directed the planning studio that was the starting point for the creation of the city's first "contextual" districts on the Upper West Side back in 1982. He writes:

"The Upper West Side today is a delicate balance of intense and highly congested urban living. The low-rise midblocks give the area the necessary respite of light, air and human scale to remain vital. Once the scale of these midblocks is breached in one place, the case for enforcing zoning in other places will be severely compromised. The precedent that the granting of these variances will create may effectively render the carefully crafted land use development plan for the Upper West Side moot."

All to remedy a hardship that does not exist. Please deny these variances.