



**Greenwich  
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Historic  
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**TESTIMONY OF THE GREENWICH VILLAGE SOCIETY  
FOR HISTORIC PRESERVATION  
REGARDING REVISED APPLICATION FOR  
DEVELOPMENT OF THE ST. VINCENT'S HOSPITAL  
'EAST CAMPUS' BY RUDIN MANAGEMENT  
June 3<sup>rd</sup>, 2008**

Thank you Commissioners for the opportunity to testify before you today. My name is Andrew Berman, and I am the Executive Director of the Greenwich Village Society for Historic Preservation. GVSHP will be commenting today solely upon the East Campus proposal and not the hospital/hardship application, as it is our understanding that the public has at least through the July public hearing to provide input upon that application.

Regarding the revised East Campus application, clearly your good input has already had an important impact. We are very pleased that the Smith, Raskob, Nurses, and Spellman buildings have been preserved, which certainly improves the application. We are also pleased that there has been a reduction in height of the 7<sup>th</sup> Avenue building, the "confetti" motif for the townhouses has been eliminated, some of the large mechanical penthouses have been eliminated from existing buildings, and some other details of the 7<sup>th</sup> Avenue building have been changed. However, we nevertheless have several concerns, both large and small, regarding the revised application, and we urge the Commission to seek further changes.

Firstly, we strongly urge the Commission to hold on making any final decision about the East Campus application until it has heard and made a decision upon the O'Toole hardship case and new hospital application. St. Vincent's has said that the proposed East Campus plan would only move ahead if the hardship application is approved, which is yet to be determined. If in fact that application were approved, these two very large proposed developments, and their relationship to each other and their surroundings, should be reviewed in their totality. If a new hospital were approved for the O'Toole site, this would mean a very significant increase in the overall bulk on these former hospital parcels. The current bulk on these sites is already significantly greater than is typical for the Village, but an exception was made specifically to accommodate hospital uses. Thus while we recognize that zoning determinations are the purview of the City Planning Commission and City Council, we would nevertheless expect the LPC to look at the overall mass and bulk of development collectively at these two locations, and find that such an increase is out of character for the neighborhood. Additionally, consideration would need to be given to the way in which the design of the new developments on either side of the avenue relate to one another.

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Looking at the particulars of the application, beginning at the southeast corner of the East Campus, we are pleased with the scale of townhouses which are proposed to replace the Cronin building, and are glad to see the former townhouse designs being rethought. However, we believe the designs still require further refinement. We do not feel that new townhouses need to exactly imitate exactly neighborhood or historic models, which those proposed do not. However, overall we did not feel the designs yet projected a coherent character. The lack of a cornice element seems to weaken the buildings, and crafted ironwork should replace the current proposed ironwork. While we thought that the variations in depth might be preferable to keeping the facades of all five houses in one plane, we nevertheless thought the relationship between the five houses and between the various elements of the individual house's facades has not yet been satisfactorily realized.

Regarding the Spellman building, we are pleased to see it being preserved and re-used, and we were also happy to see some of its bulky mechanical penthouses reduced. However, we did have concerns about the enlargements of the windows on the top floor, and felt that the stone trim around these windows should be maintained.

Regarding the 7<sup>th</sup> Avenue building and its 11<sup>th</sup> Street wing, we were glad to see a reduction in the height of the building as well as a change in the choice of brick. However, we did feel the building was still quite tall, noticeably more so than the neighboring post-war residential buildings which are among the largest in the neighborhood and not necessarily representative of the district's finer qualities or overall scale. The height of these neighboring buildings would seem a more appropriate upper limit for a new building; if bulk is to be eliminated from the East Campus in order to prevent an overall increase in bulk – or for any other reason – this would be the place to start. The new building also has a rather heavy mechanical penthouse, whereas larger Village interwar and even postwar apartment buildings have narrow, vertical mechanical penthouses which are probably more appropriate.

We were generally comfortable with the scale of the 11<sup>th</sup> Street wing and would not recommend shifting any bulk from 7<sup>th</sup> Avenue to this location. We did, however, feel that the balconies should be eliminated from this wing. Regarding the bulk of the building on 7<sup>th</sup> Avenue, while we support breaking up the building's mass, we nevertheless felt the massing still needed work. On the 7<sup>th</sup> Avenue street front, we welcomed the addition of a livelier streetscape than exists now and the introduction of retail space. However, we were concerned that the proposed storefronts appeared large and quite glassy, and thought that greater solidity would bring the streetscape more in line with storefronts characteristic of the district. Additionally, while we recognize that zoning and not the Commission regulates the size of stores, there are understandable concerns about potential "big box" retail in this space and we would urge the Commission to ensure that the articulation of the ground floors of this building reads as small, individual storefronts.

Our main concern regarding the proposed changes to the Raskob building at 7<sup>th</sup> Avenue and 12<sup>th</sup> Street also relate to the ground floor retail articulation. It is quite rare to have continuous retail 100 feet into a side street in the Village, and the retail space from avenue buildings rarely if ever faces, or has entrances and exits on, the side streets as is proposed here. Side street retail, where

it exists, is usually small, individual storefronts, and thus we are concerned that the type of ground floor articulation proposed here does not represent a typical Village street and could be quite disruptive. We would urge that there be no retail entrances or exits on the side streets, and that the side street windows be kept as they currently exist to maintain the both the integrity of the building and the quieter and more discreet feeling which Village side street ground floors typically maintain.

At the Nurse's Residence, we were pleased to see this handsome building re-used. However, some of the details did concern us. For instance, we were distressed to see the proposed removal of the bronze doors from the ground floor, which are among the richest architectural details in the entire East Campus. We urge these instead be retained. We were also somewhat concerned about the introduction of the copper vertical element into the former stair towers at either end of the building; we felt this was unnecessary and detracted from the overall integrity of the building. Regarding the proposed new windows, we thought that a window with more panes than the proposed one-over-ones, such as the neighboring Smith and Raskob buildings have, might be better suited.

Regarding the Reiss building, we regret and disagree with its proposed demolition. While the building is plain and simple, it nevertheless continues the vocabulary and motif of the other 12<sup>th</sup> Street buildings and relates well to its neighbors across 12<sup>th</sup> Street and to the Martin Payne building to its east. For a building of its era, Reiss went to considerable pains to be contextual in its design, and we would prefer to see it preserved and re-used. Regarding the new proposed building, we did have some concerns about the design, which is larger than the existing building and contains a large, mid-block garage entrance and exit, which is unusual for the West Village. Here as at the townhouses, we did not feel that a new building had to directly recreate historic models. However, we felt that the new building appeared somewhat disjointed and institutional in its design, and thus if there is to be a new building here, some rethinking of the design might be in order.

Finally, we were quite concerned about the proposed courtyard facades of the buildings. While we recognize that the Commission has limited jurisdiction in this area, some of these façade details may well be visible from the public right-of-way over the four-story townhouses, and will certainly be visible from the other properties on the block. We were disconcerted to see the dramatically modern facades facing the interior courtyards, especially for the existing buildings. In those cases, the utter lack of relationship to the rest of the building and to the building's history was disquieting. An approach which integrates more historic fabric, and which relates more to the character of the existing buildings, should be pursued for the interior facades, and we would urge the Commission to direct the applicant in this way to the degree that your jurisdiction allows.

In conclusion, we feel the Commission has thus far done a commendable job of directing this application of tremendous scope, stressing preservation, a reduction in scale, and a better relationship to the existing character of the Greenwich Village Historic District. We would urge the Commission to continue in this vein, and to consider the East Campus and O'Toole applications jointly, so that the final result is in fact a true continuation of the historic qualities and spirit of this neighborhood.