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VILLAGEPRESERVATION.ORG

April 8, 2021

Hon. Sarah Carroll, Chair
NYC Landmarks Preservation Commission
1 Centre Street, 9th Floor
New York, NY 10007

Re: 14-16 Fifth Avenue, Public Meeting 04/13/2021

Dear Chair Carroll,

I write to reiterate Village Preservation's adamant objection to the demolition of 14-16 Fifth Avenue. As thoroughly documented in our testimony at and submissions prior to the public hearing, the two former 1848 townhouses have a deep and broad history connected to the development of Fifth Avenue, Greenwich Village, and the city as a whole. The people who lived here, including those after the building was altered in the 1930s, were a vast array of historically significant figures including great industrialists, inventors, philanthropists, railroad tycoons, civil war generals, actors, editors, writers, and political reformers. However if the Commission makes the very regrettable decision to allow demolition, we would also like to voice our objection to the scale and height of the proposed new building.

Nos. 14-16 Fifth Avenue were built by Henry Brevoort, Jr. in 1848 in the Gothic Revival style. These buildings set the tone for the development of Fifth Avenue as the place for the City's elite to reside. Among the people who would make these two town houses their homes during the 19th century were Simeon Draper, prominent New York City merchant and politician; George R. Blanchard, according to the *New York Times* "one of the most prominent railroad men in this country;" Isaac Merritt Singer, founder of the Singer Sewing Machine Company; Civil War Major General Daniel E. Sickles; Charles E. Strong, chief of the oldest law firm in the United States; and author Bret Harte.

The list during the 20th century is just as impressive including Oscar-winner Celeste Holm; Cyrilly Abels, who transformed modern literature, journalism, and publishing, and was known for her relationship with Katherine Anne Porter; politician and activist Miriam Bockman; and Baroness Eva Gourgaud who, with her husband, founded the Napoleonic Museum.

In addition to the over 1,300 letters that Village Preservation has generated from the public in opposition to this application, we have also received numerous letters in support of our position from scholars and organizations who are experts on the significance of the people mentioned above. These include prominent author and editor Sir Harold Evans; scholars from the Institute for Social and Economic History at the University of Göttingen in Germany; representatives of the New Amsterdam History Center; Professor Gary Scharnhorst, author of "Bret Harte: Opening the American Literary West;" David Eicher, author of "The Longest Night: A Military History of the Civil War;" and the Katherine Anne Porter Society.

Commissioner Devonshire at the public hearing stated that these are historic buildings, no matter that their appearance is altered. He went onto say, "You can call them no-style because that allows you to somehow clear your conscience of the fact that these are in fact very important buildings for Greenwich Village." We wholeheartedly agree and would like to again point out that the modifications of row houses is very much a part of the area's history, but does not negate their part in the development in the area and therefore their significance to its history. Nos. 14-16 Fifth Avenue are still discernable in their scale, mass and fenestration as two former row houses.

As stated at the beginning of the letter, we recognize the need to opine on the revised design for the proposed new building should the Commission allow for the demolition of these 1848 structures. Here again, I would like to reference a comment by one of the Commissioners at the public hearing. Commissioner Goldblum made the observation that this proposed mid-block building is trying to be a corner building in terms of its scale and design. Typical development in the city features taller buildings at the corners and smaller at the mid-block locations. We do not believe that reducing the height by a mere 18 feet addresses that very astute observation. It towers over surrounding buildings. Referencing One Fifth Avenue as a justification for this height is preposterous as that building occupies its own block front, and its towering pinnacle is an anomaly, and should not be cited as a benchmark for new development in the area. The proposed new building would still be nearly 70% taller than the average building on Fifth Avenue in the Greenwich Village Historic District, and nearly four times the height of the average building on its block.

I urge the Commission to not approve the demolition of these structures which not only housed many significant historic figures over the years but speak to the history, development and evolution of Greenwich Village. If demolition is regrettably permitted, the new building's scale should reflect its context and the height and be reduced in scale significantly.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Andrew Berman". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke extending to the right.

Andrew Berman
Executive Director