



NATIONAL
ASSOCIATION for
OLMSTED
PARKS

“... advances Olmsted’s principles and legacy of irreplaceable parks and landscapes that revitalize communities and enrich people’s lives.”

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May 9, 2016

Meenakshi Srinivasan
Chair
NYC Landmarks Preservation Commission
Municipal Building
1 Centre Street, 9th Floor, North
New York, NY 10007
msrinivasan@lpc.nyc.gov

Dear Chair Srinivasan:

On behalf of the National Association for Olmsted Parks (NAOP), we are writing to express our organization’s deep concern about the non-conforming high-rise development proposed for a site immediately adjacent to New York City’s Fort Tryon Park. We question the validity of the Environmental Assessment Statement that was submitted to the City, and call for a full Environmental Impact Study of the project that will directly and adversely affect one of New York’s and the country’s foremost Olmsted-designed public landscapes.

We understand that construction of this 23-27 story structure requires a zoning variance that, if granted, will place it at extreme odds with the prevailing neighborhood fabric of much lower, 6-7 story buildings. Permitting this project would set a precedent for further out of scale construction. The proposed tower as designed could exceed the height of both The Cloisters and the park’s summit, among the highest spots in Manhattan. Particularly disconcerting is its projected intrusion into public vistas throughout Fort Tryon Park.

In 1927 John D. Rockefeller, Jr. commissioned landscape architects the Olmsted Brothers to design Fort Tryon Park as a gift to the people of New York, on property he had amassed over a ten year period, captivated by the site’s outstanding natural beauty. The Olmsted firm ultimately produced nearly 1,000 plans under its Job Number 00529, over a span of 36 years. The designers’ involvement with the park was one of extraordinary longevity. Fort Tryon Park is recognized as a masterwork of landscape architecture, designated as both a National Historic Landmark

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and a New York City Scenic Landmark. By all measures it is an exceptional heritage landscape and a public legacy that unequivocally merits protection from private harm.

The site's inherent, expansive views toward the City, the Hudson River and the New Jersey Palisades are essential features around which park development was organized. Olmsted-designed public landscapes across the United States employed such "borrowed scenery" to great effect, an outgrowth of Frederick Law Olmsted's "early respect for, regard and enjoyment of scenery...and extraordinary opportunities for cultivating susceptibility to the power of scenery." He and his sons cultivated opportunities for generations of others to experience the "power of scenery" in public landscapes they created.

Fort Tryon's rocky topography and vistas embody the Genius of Place the Olmsted firm sought to capture in every landscape it designed. The park's exceptional views are primary contributing park features as much as physical elements within the park itself. Based on review of professional simulations commissioned by the Fort Tryon Park Trust, NAOP disputes the developer's assertion that the proposed tower would cause no significant adverse impact to the park's integrity. John D. Rockefeller, Jr. and landscape architect Frederick Law Olmsted, Jr. intended that the site's genius be preserved in perpetuity for park visitors to enjoy.

Fort Tryon Park remains a living landscape serving the diverse needs of neighborhood residents and visitors from across the city and around the world. Landscape degradation resulting from proposed construction would disproportionately affect the surrounding population, a great proportion of whom depend on Fort Tryon for recreation and rejuvenation, and who lack the wherewithal to travel further afield to enjoy places of natural beauty. A core tenet of the Olmsteds' design philosophy was their commitment to social equity, creating public green spaces that embrace people of all classes, ethnicities and means. They fervently believed that every human being needed and deserved access to healthful, beautiful places of respite as a birthright.

Established in 1980, the National Association for Olmsted Parks advances Olmsted principles and the legacy of irreplaceable parks and landscapes that revitalize communities and enrich people's lives. It is the only national organization solely dedicated to preserving the Olmsted legacy by providing advocacy, research and outreach needed to protect, restore and maintain these exemplary parks and landscapes, particularly in urban areas.



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Please protect the legacy of this incredible gift to New York and visitors from around the world. Undertake a full Environmental Impact Study that thoroughly addresses and mitigates the significant adverse impacts a project of such large scale would impose upon Fort Tryon Park and its surrounding community. We urge you to approve only a contextually appropriate development that is lower in height, lest Fort Tryon Park and its environs suffer irrevocable damage that you have the authority and the responsibility to avert.

Sincerely,

Ethan Carr
Co-Chair

Patrice Kish
Co-Chair

Copies to:

The Honorable Gale Brewer, Manhattan Borough President
The Honorable Ydanis Rodriguez, Councilmember, New York City Council
The Honorable Mark Levine, Chair, Parks Committee, New York City Council
Ms. Ruth Pierpont, Deputy Commissioner for Historic Preservation/ Deputy SHPO, New York State Office of Parks, Recreation & Historic Preservation
Ms. Jennifer M. Hoppa, Executive Director, Fort Tryon Park Trust