

Documentation and Conservation of buildings,
sites and neighborhoods of the Modern Movement

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NEW YORK | TRI-STATE

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June 29,2012

City Councilmember Mark S. Weprin
73-03 Bell Boulevard
Oakland Gardens, NY 11364

City Council Speaker Christine Quinn
224 West 30th Street, Suite 1206
New York, NY 10001

City Councilmember Leroy Comrie
113-43 Farmers Boulevard
St. Albans, NY 11412

City Councilmember Rosie Mendez
237 1st Avenue, #504
New York, NY 10003

City Councilmember Margaret Chin
165 Park Row, Suite 11
New York, NY 10038

Dear Councilmembers,

I am a board member of DOCOMOMO US New York/Tri-State and I am speaking here on behalf of the organization to strongly urge you to VOTE NO on New York University's revised proposed expansion plan in the Village.

Part of the core mission of DOCOMOMO US New York/Tri-State is to identify and focus attention on specific situations where important works of Modern Movement architecture and design are in danger. Washington Square Village and Silver Towers will be severely impacted and compromised by the NYU plan and therefore are of great concern to us.

Washington Square Village (1958-60) and Silver Towers (1966) are probably the best intact example we have in Manhattan of successful Modernist urban planning theory. Of the many Post War urban renewal projects in New York City, these two best achieve the ideals of architect/city planner Le Corbusier who pioneered the concept of the "tower in the park" in the 1920's. Le Corbusier's concept was to provide "light, air, greenery" by replacing existing structures of nearly full lot coverage with high rise buildings spaced apart to "liberate the ground plane" for public use.

Paul Lester Wiener, architect of Washington Square Village, with his partner in the firm Town Planning Associates, Jose Luis Sert (who had worked for Le Corbusier in Paris), had collaborated with Le Corbusier on a master plan for Bogotá, Colombia. Washington Square Village has a direct connection to this master architect of the Modern Movement.

The proposed plan to build in the open space between the buildings of Washington Square Village will destroy not only the acclaimed garden designed by Sasaki, Walker & Associates but will obliterate

ate the relationship of the apartment buildings to the open space and as well as to each other. The massive scale of the buildings proposed in the open space is unsympathetic to the notably historic Modern architecture and planning of Washington Square Village. Whatever open space that is left will remain in shadow for most of the day. Very little of the "light, air, greenery" that were the hallmark of this entire complex will survive.

Just to the south of Washington Square Village, the New York City Landmarks Preservation Commission has recognized the significance of Silver Towers (originally University Village). In 1963, NYU made a bold move toward creating a high quality project by engaging I.M. Pei as architect. The result was an award winning complex of articulated towers organized to create a monumental plaza. As in the earlier Washington Square Village, it is the careful juxtaposition of open to built space and high to low buildings, that is so successful...and so threatened today by the current NYU proposal.

Greenwich Village is recognized as being among the most poorly served neighborhoods in the city with regard to access to public open green space. This deficiency was addressed when both of these urban renewal projects were conceived 60 years ago. In exchange for the upheaval and loss of the old, the neighborhood would benefit by access to expansive green open space.

NYU's Plan is both disturbing and destructive because it treats the green open space of urban renewal projects that were expressly set aside for public use, as real estate to now be exploited. These superblocks were planned/designed in their entirety, with the open spaces and low-rise components essential parts of the design, and considered a public benefit which justified the taller buildings on the sites. The present "towers in the park" will become simply towers next to other towers, if NYU's present plans are executed.

Most importantly, the NYU plan is ILLEGAL under current zoning and agreements. It can ONLY happen if the City Council votes to overturn the current zoning and agreements, and votes to give away public land.

DOCOMOMO US New York/Tri-State urges you to Vote NO on this proposal by NYU.

Thank You.

Sincerely,

John Kriskiewicz
Board Member
DOCOMOMO New York/Tri-State