



AIA New York Chapter

The Founding Chapter of the American Institute of Architects

3 June 2008

Hon. Robert Tierney, NYC Landmarks Preservation Commission
1 Centre Street
New York, New York 10007

Dear Chair Tierney,

On behalf of the AIA New York Chapter, which has over 4,400 architect and affiliate members based in Manhattan, we are here today to comment upon the updated proposal to build a new state-of-the-art medical facility for St. Vincent's Hospital.

The hospital needs to modernize to carry out its mission. The site of the O'Toole building presents the best opportunity for an up-to-date facility. Since the O'Toole building does not allow that facility to be constructed while simultaneously retaining its present form, we have supported the demolition of the O'Toole building.

Architecturally, there are significant challenges associated with reusing the O'Toole building for a new hospital. The volume of the existing building is too small to accommodate the uses of a modern healthcare facility that must serve a large part of the city. A tall addition to this building would have to be built. Structurally, the cantilevered floors would have to be reinforced in order to handle the weight of the new floors. The current size of the floorplate, and the structural considerations, prohibit an effective floorplan for the healthcare uses housed within. For example, the Emergency Department, which must be located on the bottom floor, would need to be split into two levels—a scenario which is rare and inefficient.

We believe that all of the designs before you today are of high quality from an architectural and urban design perspective. Several of the brick hospital buildings that have proven important to the Commission and the neighborhood residents are retained under this proposal. We support their reuse. We also feel that the new construction planned for the residences on 11th and 12th Streets is at a reasonable, contextual scale that takes into account the surrounding materials and building typologies. The residential tower proposed for Seventh Avenue at 11th Street is oriented towards the avenue, maintains the scale that is currently built, and will incorporate far lighter materials than the oppressive Coleman and Link structures.

We feel that, at this early stage when designs are still fluid and can benefit from community input, the project has potential to create a better streetscape for these Village blocks while assuring the continued existence of an important Manhattan institution.

Yours sincerely,

James McCullar, FAIA
Chapter President

Fredric Bell
Executive Director