



16 January 2007

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

re: Renaissance Ballroom Designation

Dear Chair Tierney:

On behalf of the AIA New York Chapter and its 4,000 architect and affiliate members based in Manhattan, it is my pleasure to speak about the proposal to restore and rebuild the Renaissance Theater and Ballroom located on the corner of Adam Clayton Powell Boulevard between 137th and 138th Streets in Harlem.

There are five compelling reasons to support the Abyssinian Development Corporation and Davis Brody Bond Architects and Planners in their efforts to bring this historic site back into active use:

- the facades of the Renaissance Ballroom and Theater desperately need to be restored
- affordable housing is needed in Harlem
- additional commercial space along Adam Clayton Powell Boulevard is desirable
- the landmark Abyssinian Baptist Church would become more visible
- the plan creates space for cultural facilities at a location having a most significant history

The AIA New York Chapter agrees that incorporating new construction into the existing complex is the best way to bring funding for façade restoration to this site, along with housing, cultural space and commercial revitalization . If designation of the entire site precludes building housing on it, we are opposed to the designation, at least, the portion of the site where housing could best be accommodated, which appears to be the southern part above the Renaissance Theater. A clear description of the program of façade restoration is needed, and we will need to understand better the shape, form and materials of the proposed tower and its relation to the historic base. Setback requirements and zoning issues, we assume, will be further developed in consultation with staff at the Landmarks Preservation Commission and the City Planning Commission. We would also hope that a portion of the units will be designated as affordable.

In regard to designation, however, we agree with the suggested compromise of designating only the northern portion of the site, the Renaissance Ballroom, with the understanding that the facades of the southern portion, the Renaissance Theater, will be treated in equivalent manner.

To quote Langston Hughes from *Still Here*, these buildings have “been scarred and battered” with “hopes that the wind done scattered.” They are currently sagging under a heavy load of uncertainty. But, also from Langston Hughes, we can say that “The eyes see there materials for building / See the difficulties, too, and the obstacles / The mind seeks a way to overcome these obstacles / The hand seeks tools to cut the wood.” Perhaps one of these tools is partial designation

Yours,

Fredric Bell, FAIA
Executive Director

Joan Blumenfeld, FAIA, IIDA
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