

24 May 2006

Hon. Amanda Burden, Chair
NYC City Planning Commission
22 Reade Street
New York, New York. 10013

re: Silvercup West

Dear Chair Burden:

On behalf of the AIA New York Chapter and the AIA Queens Chapter, it is our pleasure to register support for the Silvercup West mixed-use project on the East River waterfront in Long Island City. In so doing, we join together to address the importance of high quality mixed-use development, the provision of housing and enhancement of access to the water's edge.

Having had the opportunity to review the design proposal by the Richard Rodgers Partnership and NBBJ Architects, we see the importance of the Silvercup West site as a visual gateway to and from the Borough of Queens. The interconnected structure proposed will be as important an aesthetic portal in relation to arrival in Queens by the Queensborough Bridge as the bifurcated Manhattan Municipal Building is to those entering Manhattan via the Brooklyn Bridge. Relatively tall buildings framing a point of entry put a visual marker in place aiding in orientation and wayfinding, but also defining borough identity and character. The AIA's credo of "Design Matters" has been amply manifested in this elegant and functional proposal. The design is contemporary but not themed to a specifically referential aesthetic - apart from a nod to the 59th Street Bridge - allowing these structures to remain contextually relevant.

New York is first and foremost a city whose economic and conceptual underpinning as well as its beauty and charm, relates to its harbor and rivers. With the leadership of the City Planning Commission, issues of the highest and best use of waterfront property in all five boroughs have led to increased residential use and public esplanades. Allowing for mixed-use development that expands the capability of the resurgent film and television industry and capitalizes on the glamour and scale of studio space as an economic catalyst is all to the good. The proposed mixed-use, of production studios, commercial and residential spaces, is to be commended for bringing 24-hour utilization and replacing a street-dead power plant.

Thinking beyond the project at hand, we also would urge the City Planning Commission to extend the mixed-use district to the other side of Vernon Boulevard so as to encourage the mix of artists, manufacturing and residential uses currently developing, and in so doing, helping to prevent the possible proliferation of big-box retail. Similarly, the project, as an example of waterfront zoning opening access to the waterfront, could be enhanced by the removal of the Department of Transportation salt pile and linking Astoria Park by extending the parkland under the 59th Street Bridge. Public access should be supported by the greatest amount of public use on the multiple levels. The Silvercup sign orientation is commendable, and reinforces the fact that Silvercup West is a destination that will encourage ferry transportation that links different developments on the waterfront.

Issues of scale are relativistic. The proposed towers will obscure views of the 59th Street Bridge from areas along 43rd Avenue just as the Municipal Building obscures some views of the Brooklyn Bridge. On balance, however, the AIA New York Chapter agrees with our colleagues from AIA Queens that the proposed scale and density are appropriate, and we call for ratification of the discretionary land use actions under consideration today, including the creation of a Special Mixed Use District and the height and setback waivers requested.

The overarching issue is the need for a City that speaks eloquently - and with the highest attention to design quality - to arrival, expansion and waterfront access. We support the project's creation of public open space both at grade and at levels above, and look forward to the project setting a standard for public use at multiple levels. We consequently urge the City Planning Commission to accept the proposal.

Yours truly,



Fredric Bell, FAIA
Exec. Dir., AIA New York Chapter

William Gati, AIA
President, AIA Queens Chapter