

# AIA New York Chapter

The Founding Chapter of  
The American Institute of Architects



13 April 2005

Hon. Amanda Burden, Chair  
New York City Planning Commission  
22 Reade Street  
New York, New York 10036

Re: Lincoln Center West 65<sup>th</sup> Street Project

Dear Chair Burden:

The American Institute of Architects New York Chapter, representing almost four thousand architects and affiliate members in New York City, strongly supports the proposals by the Department of City Planning, working with Diller Scofidio + Renfro Architects, in regard to the Lincoln Center West 65<sup>th</sup> Street Project.

Starting with a presentation to the AIA New York Planning & Urban Design Committee on 15 November 2002, architect and urban design volunteer members of the AIA have been continually informed of programmatic and conceptual intentions of the Lincoln Center Development Project. Over two years ago, the AIA noted that the existing Lincoln Center complex “is far too self-contained and does not lead to an open and public feeling.” Back then, our urban design committee also commented that Lincoln Center’s “front door is at a crossroads of major traffic routes and is most troublesome for pedestrians.” We further noted that the redesign of 65<sup>th</sup> Street should become “a pedestrian-friendly, lively streetscape with entrances, lobbies and marquees” and felt particularly positive about the creation of a “light, airy footbridge to open up street views of the Lincoln Center Theater and the North Plaza.”

These issues are on view every day for West Siders and cultural enthusiasts and do not need extended recapitulation here at 22 Reade Street. It should be said, however, that our support of the further development of these design principles, first seen visually represented back in April of 2004, is based, however, on more recent discussions at the AIA, including but not limited to those following a comprehensive presentation to the AIA New York Chapter’s Executive Committee by Liz Diller and others on the project development team.

The manner in which the schematic design has evolved from the early conceptual phase has been exemplary. The West 65<sup>th</sup> Street view corridor has been significantly improved, creating a pleasant pedestrian-friendly street with wider sidewalks and significant building entrances. The

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prior sense of 65<sup>th</sup> Street being a vehicular by-pass, a parking ramp or a “superhighway wannabee” has been eliminated in the current scheme.

The streetscape, in addition, is literally animated by informational signs that work as public art in a district positively characterized by all types of demonstrative performance and artistic display.

As importantly, the details of the new ethereal pedestrian bridge crossing West 65<sup>th</sup> Street indicate a massive reduction of bulk. This removal of a virtual cork in the visual bottleneck of the street opens a new community link. The relation of the re-designed bridge to the more transparent and accessible theater to the north and the more exciting and functional public plaza to the south, makes the change all the more meaningful.

Accessibility changes within the Lincoln Center development project address the needs of those with disabilities and also those of us who are what can be said to be “temporarily able-bodied.” Universal Design principles say that simply complying with ADA requirements does not address the impetus to design excellence suggested by greater attention to entry level, good way-finding and clear signage. The Lincoln Center West 65<sup>th</sup> Street Project scores well in regard to all of these indicators.

The AIA New York Chapter consequently supports the application at issue before the Lincoln Center Task Force today. Specifically we feel that the increase in visibility, accessibility, and streetscape safety and animation are made possible by the proposed changes in the City Map, acquisition of easements necessary for the pedestrian bridge, the requested permission for signs along West 65<sup>th</sup> Street up to the designated heights (generally 40 feet above street level except for the Broadway façade of Alice Tully Hall) and for approval of the installation of informational signs along the south side of West 65<sup>th</sup> Street.

The plan is a comprehensive improvement to the most important cultural district in New York City, and, arguably in the USA. The incremental changes needed to make this vision possible should merit the support of the City Planning Commission. It certainly has elicited strong and enthusiastic support among the architectural and design community that the AIA serves and represents.

Yours truly,

Fredric Bell, FAIA  
Executive Director