



September 30, 2014

## 2014 Board of Directors

**Lance Jay Brown** FAIA  
President

**Tomas J. Rossant** AIA  
First Vice President / President-Elect

**David Burney** FAIA  
Vice President for Design Excellence

**David Piscuskas** FAIA LEED AP  
Vice President for Professional  
Development

**Gerard F.X. Geier II** FAIA FIDA LEED AP  
Vice President for Public Outreach

**Jane Smith** AIA IIDA  
Secretary

**Mark C. Regulinski** AIA  
Treasurer

**Andy Frankl** HON. AIA NYS  
Director for Development Affairs

**Lia Gartner** FAIA LEED AP  
Director for Educational Affairs

**Ashok Raiji** ASSOC. AIA PE LEED AP  
Director for Industry Affairs

**Laurie D. Kerr** AIA LEED AP  
Director for Legislative Affairs

**Abby P. Suckle** FAIA LEED AP  
Director for Programs and Strategic  
Planning

**Barbara E. Spandorf** AIA  
Director for Publications

**Jessica Sheridan** AIA LEED AP BD+C  
Associate Director

**Robert A. Schubert**  
Public Director

**Mark A. Wigley**  
Public Director for Educational Affairs

**Anthony J. Mannarino**  
Public Director for Professional Affairs

**Venus Carbuccia** AIAS  
Director for Student Affairs

**Jill N. Lerner** FAIA  
Immediate Past President

**Jennifer Sage** FAIA LEED AP  
Alternate Director for Design Excellence

**Venesa Alicea** AIA LEED AP BD+C  
Alternate Director for Professional  
Development

**Illya Azaroff** AIA  
Alternate Director for Public Outreach

**Rick Bell** FAIA  
Executive Director

Meenakshi Srinivasan, Chair  
Landmarks Preservation Commission  
1 Centre Street  
New York, NY 10007

re: 140 West 81<sup>st</sup> Street

Dear Chair Srinivasan,

Thank you for the invitation to comment on the adaptive re-use project at 140 West 81<sup>st</sup> Street. The AIA New York Chapter, with 5,000 architect and associate members here in New York, is keenly interested in the manner in which preservation, neighborhood context, and the production of housing and other needed facilities can co-exist in a diverse and dynamic city.

At the AIANY's Center for Architecture, located in the South Village Historic District, our 2009-2010 Context/Contrast exhibition demonstrated how new structures, significant additions, and adaptive reuse projects can find a place within designated districts with distinctive architecture and important social history. That remarkable exhibition, developed in concert with the Landmarks Preservation Commission and the New York Landmarks Preservation Foundation, continues to elucidate and educate issues of importance across the country.

We are here today in regard to the proposal by DXA Architects to transform 140 West 81<sup>st</sup> Street, where a dwindling congregation had seemed to doom the ongoing presence of a remarkable Romanesque Revival church structure that is not an individually designated landmark. One could say that in and of itself this project is not of citywide importance and ordinarily would not bring us here to the Commission to testify about its merits; however, the project is complex, and there is a tension between new and pre-existing fabric.

That said, I would like to speak in favor of approval of the project for three reasons:

1. The issue of obsolete or obsolescent church and synagogue structures in New York City is a major problem. With property values and maintenance costs at an all-time high, citywide tear-downs remove places of worship that have fulfilled social and spiritual needs for a century or longer. This project allows the congregation to remain in an accessible and appropriately-scaled space on the ground floor.
2. There is a concurrent need to maintain the continuity and variety of traditional urban streetscape. On West 81<sup>st</sup> Street, between Columbus and Amsterdam Avenues, there is a good mix of housing types and, with this church as a cornerstone, a lively diversity of form and function. Seeing the church removed from the block in favor of as-of-right housing development would be detrimental to the neighborhood.
3. There is a desperate need for housing in our city with its growing population. Manhattan's West Side, well-served by public transportation, has few sites for this type of inventive insertion of new apartments. The proposal by DXA architects is inventive and responsive to the need and the neighborhood.

We voice good feelings about these important aspects of the plan for 140 West 81<sup>st</sup> Street and look forward to having the opportunity to share similar thoughts at other opportunities.

Yours truly,

Lance Jay Brown, FAIA  
President, AIA New York

Rick Bell, FAIA  
Executive Director, AIA New York