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July 22, 2014

Hon. Meenakshi Srinivasan, Chair
New York City Landmarks Preservation Commission
Municipal Building
1 Centre Street, 9th Floor, North
New York, NY 10007

Re: One Vanderbilt Avenue

Dear Chair Srinivasan:

On behalf of the American Institute of Architects New York Chapter and our more than 5,000 architect and affiliate members here in New York, we are pleased to offer testimony in regard to the One Vanderbilt project. As we have previously said in regard to the East Midtown Rezoning discussion last October, projects such as One Vanderbilt will allow for the development of a world-class business district and major job generator for the future of New York City, a future that is characterized by the design of the next generation of great buildings.

We stated then and repeat now that it is sound planning for the City's future to have first-class commercial space and added density linked to enhanced transportation connectivity. This project replaces outdated and obsolete buildings with a new, sustainable structure that contributes to the public realm, while at the same time enhancing the grand character of the heart of New York City's primary business district. We commend Kohn Pederson Fox and SL Green for their efforts in going beyond an as-of-right simplistic solution and their willingness to engage in open discussion about issues of harmony with the historical context dictated by the iconic importance of Grand Central Terminal and, let it be said, the Chrysler Building.

In cities around the globe, there are numerous excellent examples of transit-oriented development that improve the accessibility, quality, and competitiveness of business centers. New York is not different. There are several compelling reasons to support the project being presented today for the important block just to the west of Grand Central. The AIA New York Chapter has reviewed the project and feels that the design of One Vanderbilt is harmonious in its relationship with Grand Central Terminal.

First, the proposed building, by stepping back on 42nd Street, reveals new views of the southwest corner of Grand Central Terminal, its primary entrance point.

Second, the proposed building gestures toward Grand Central by a geometry – still being adjusted – that should help strengthen the compositional importance of the Terminal in the district for which it remains the center point and lynchpin.

Third, in its choice of materials, the proposed structure stresses the transparency of the street-level base, which emphasizes the public nature of a building with clear civic functions and which eases the 42nd Street approach to the Vanderbilt connection.

Fourth, the project extends the below-grade transit pathways, augmenting the intermodal transportation function of the building complex, fundamental to moving large numbers of commuters and visitors through the primary transit center in the country. This is especially important after East Side Access comes on line, relieving some of the pressure on Penn Station, but significantly increasing numbers of people coming from Long Island to this part of Midtown. Through the extension of on-grade public space by re-mapping and closing Vanderbilt Avenue to create a pedestrian public space between 42nd and 43rd Street, the entire neighborhood and the City also gain an outdoor living room that can function as an extension of Grand Central's waiting space.

The new building creates a “three-part” harmony between the three scales of design intervention that create world-class cities: the streetscape, interior public space, and the scale of skyline-defining gesture. We commend the Landmarks Preservation Commission for this discussion. We urge approval of the project as a first step on the path to a coordinated effort to reimagine the above and below grade experience for those living, working, and visiting in East Midtown, and we offer continued guidance as this conversation continues.

Respectfully submitted,



Lance Jay Brown, FAIA
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