



February 11, 2014

Robert Tierney, Chair
Landmarks Preservation Commission
1 Centre Street
New York, NY 10007

Dear Chairman Tierney,

The Context/Contrast exhibition demonstrated how new structures can co-exist with historic districts. That wonderful show continues to educate and elucidate issues of importance across the country. We are here today in regard to the proposed Park Avenue Historic District, and, in particular, the Park Avenue Christian Church Annex site. This is an issue of citywide importance. We are in support of the three key issues of moment: new buildings in historic districts, housing creation, and building height/street wall.

As the Context/Contrast exhibition demonstrated, it is possible to include new structures in architecturally distinct and sensitive historic districts, if there is a skillful use of appropriate materials and understanding of scale and proportion. The AIA New York Chapter supports the creation of a Park Avenue Historic District, and assumes that the Landmarks Preservation Commission will give all due diligence, given its professionalism and expertise, in determining whether or not a new building, proposed by BBB, is appropriate. For now, based on very preliminary information, we commend the direction the project is going in regard to materials and fenestration.

There is a crying need for housing in New York City as our population expands and housing vacancy rate remains distressingly low. Both market rate housing and affordable housing are critical for the future of all five boroughs of New York City. Given the demand for housing, we conceptually support the idea of inserting a residential structure where the Park Avenue Christian Church Annex has been located adjacent to the sanctuary.

Lastly and most importantly, AIANY supports the insertion of a taller structure into the street fabric of Park Avenue because of the increasing importance of the street wall as distinct from the visibility of any given building, landmark or not, as a three dimensional object. The beauty of Park Avenue as the City's preeminent Grand Boulevard comes from the integrity and consistency of building height, which, in conjunction with the street width, plantings and art, define a visual experience that goes beyond any one building or corner. Notable interruptions of that continuous wall plane, including the Seagram Building, Lever House, St. Bart's and the Park Avenue Christian Church demand and receive special attention and protection. Background buildings are more difficult to validate in this regard. Is the rectory a contributing building or not? Our position is that in the absence of significant original fabric, the building massing in and of itself is not adequate to be a contributing structure. A new building can find a place in the vibrant urban context of a growing and ever-changing city. Careful consideration must be given to the interval between the new structure and the existing sanctuary to insure that the individuality of the Park Avenue Christian Church is not compromised, not excluding setting back if permissible.

We voice good feelings about these important aspects of the Park Avenue Christian Church plan and the creation of the historic district, and thank you for the opportunity to share these thoughts today.

Best regards,

Lance Jay Brown, FAIA
President, AIA New York

Rick Bell, FAIA
Executive Director, AIA New York