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PARKS

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December 15, 2021

Anita Laremont, Chair  
City Planning Commission  
120 Broadway, 31<sup>st</sup> floor  
New York, NY 10271

<https://www1.nyc.gov/site/planning/about/email-the-director.page>

**Re: Irreversible Damage to Fort Tryon Park; 4650 Broadway, FRESH Application & 19-story building**

Dear Chair Laremont:

The National Association for Olmsted Parks (NAOP) urges you to oppose development of a 19-story building immediately abutting heritage landscape Fort Tryon Park. The proposed structure would do serious and irreversible damage to this National Historic Landmark that was both home to the Wecquaesgeek Tribe and centerpiece of the American Revolution.

**At a minimum, it is critical that the Planning Commission take the time to review the details of the proposed development before any action occurs.**

Notably, those who are most affected by the development – the neighbors – are opposed. The Manhattan Community Board 12 recently adopted a unanimous resolution opposing the FRESH application and the high rise, noting it is at odds with the prevailing neighborhood of much lower, 6-7 story buildings. Permitting this project would set a precedent for further out of scale construction. The proposed tower would exceed the height of both The Cloisters and the park’s summit, among the highest spots in Manhattan. Particularly distressing is the projected intrusion into public vistas throughout the Park-- especially those enjoyed by residents who live on the east side.

Back in 2016, Fort Tryon was threatened by a development that would have similarly destroyed the viewsheds and park design. That effort was vigorously rejected for the reasons outlined above. **This project should be rejected for the same reasons.**

In 1927, John D. Rockefeller, Jr. commissioned the Olmsted Brothers landscape architecture firm to design Fort Tryon Park as a gift to the people of New York,\* on property he had amassed over a ten year period, captivated by the site’s outstanding natural beauty. The Olmsted firm ultimately

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produced nearly 1,000 plans under its Job Number 00529, over a span of 36 years. The site's expansive and unimpeded views toward the City, the Hudson River and the New Jersey Palisades were essential features, as were tranquil vistas from The Cloisters, built on the crest of the escarpment. The superb views --in every direction -- were defining features of the park, intended to be preserved in perpetuity for park visitors and neighbors to enjoy. **Indeed, in creating the Park, Frederick Law Olmsted Jr. recommended limiting building heights around the perimeter, urging no higher than six stories, in order to preserve those views.** Cushing, *A Life of Frederick Law Olmsted, Jr.*, p. 148 (2021), citing Olmsted to Raymond Fosdick (May 10, 1927).

As the neighbors have outlined, the proposed structure will undermine the unique beauty and vistas of Fort Tryon while providing virtually nothing in return. While the developer has made a FRESH request for a grocery, in fact, the neighborhood already has a number of supermarkets. The application is nothing more than a misuse of the zoning rule to grow the building's footprint and to increase the number of residential units -- all to be offered at market rates.

Sensitive natural spaces are also involved. The 19-story building will cast a shadow in the critical morning hours, creating shade at a key growing time. The City should insist on an Environmental Impact Study that thoroughly addresses and mitigates the significant adverse impacts a project of such large scale would impose upon the Park and its surrounding community. It is noteworthy that municipal officials and citizens in Brooklyn recently rejected a proposed high rise development that threatened the BBG's conservatories, greenhouses and nurseries. As here, the proposed development would have caused lasting damage to the landscape and plant collections.

Please reject the FRESH application and building as currently proposed in favor of exploring more appropriate development -- as requested by the neighborhood. The deleterious visual and ecological impacts of this new building demand further examination before any action is taken. To proceed without further review will result in irrevocable damage to Fort Tryon Park and its environs.

Sincerely,



President and CEO

*Established in 1980, the National Association for Olmsted Parks is the only national organization solely dedicated to preserving the Olmsted legacy by providing advocacy, research and outreach needed to protect, restore and maintain these exemplary parks and landscapes. NAOP's Olmsted Network consists of more than 80 Olmsted parks and landscapes across the country including the Fort Tryon Park Trust, Central Park Conservancy, and Prospect Park Alliance. NAOP is the Managing Partner of Olmsted 200, the bicentennial in 2022 of Frederick Law Olmsted's birth. [www.olmsted200.org](http://www.olmsted200.org).*

*\*Given the immense philanthropy of the Rockefeller family, the letter opposing this development from the Greenacre Foundation deserves special weight and attention.*

Copies to:

Sarah Carroll, Chair

New York City Landmarks Preservation Commission

David N. Dinkins Municipal Building

1 Centre Street, 9th Floor North

New York, NY 10007

<https://www1.nyc.gov/site/lpc/about/email-the-chair.page>

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