

January 23, 2006

Hon. Amanda M. Burden, Chair  
City Planning Commission  
22 Reade Street  
New York, NY 10007-1216

Hon. Robert Tierney, Chair  
Landmarks Preservation Commission  
One Center Street 9th Floor  
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Re: General Theological Seminary development in the Chelsea Historic District

Dear Chair Burden and Chair Tierney:

The General Theological Seminary (GTS or the Seminary) has announced plans to erect a 17 story building at its site in the Chelsea Historic District in conjunction with the Brodsky Organization. This building will cover the block front of Ninth Avenue, between 20th and 21st streets. Four stories are to be a replacement of the present building (Sherrill Hall) for the Seminary's use, and 13 stories are to be a private co-op consisting of 82 apartments. The importance of this issue and the concerns of the community compel us to issue this statement on the matter.

On November 21st, Community Board 4 hosted a widely attended public meeting at which the Seminary presented its proposals, and members of the Board and community asked questions of the seminary. Proponents and opponents then expressed their opinions about the project. A letter was subsequently passed at Manhattan Community Board No. 4's January 4, 2006 full board meeting addressing their concerns.

At the November 21<sup>st</sup> meeting, some of the contentions stated by the Seminary were:

- The present Ninth Avenue building, built in 1959, was not a contributing building to the Chelsea Historic District in which it is located, was in poor physical condition, and that it was not feasible to repair it in such a way that it would serve the Seminary's needs.
- Many of the historic buildings in the seminary close were also in poor condition and badly needed rehabilitation.
- The seminary lacked the necessary funds to address these problems. The agreement with the Brodsky Organization would result in a needed new building and a very necessary infusion of cash.
- The design would preserve the integrity of the perimeter wall of the Seminary close, would not reduce the open space in the close, and would do minimal damage to the historic area.

Home club of: City Council Speaker Christine C. Quinn, State Senator Tom Duane and Assembly Member Richard Gottfried

State Committeewoman: Doris Corrigan; District Leaders: Mary Dorman and Tom Schuler

Club President: Steven Skyles-Mulligan

Vice Presidents: Marvin Kohl and Luke McAuliffe; Secretaries: Carla Nordstrom and Linda Longstreet

Treasurer: Paul J. Groncki

Speakers in favor of the GTS proposal, largely associated with the Seminary, emphasized the historic importance of the Seminary in Chelsea.

Some of the contentions of the community were:

- City Planning's ceiling of 7½ stories for the Chelsea Historic District would be violated to the detriment of the District and to its neighbors.
- Any building higher than 7½ stories would create a precedent for other developers who want to come into Chelsea.
- The 12 story glass structure atop the five story brick and granite base would conflict as to materials used and as to scale with the rest of the Seminary and with its neighbors and was thus inappropriate in the Historic District.
- The condition of the Seminary's finances is not as serious as stated and the information so far available from the Seminary does not convincingly justify this proposal. The Seminary should provide more information on financing and engineering realities.
- The condition of Sherrill Hall is not as serious as stated and should be reviewed by an independent engineer.
- The proposal will not provide sufficient funds for the Seminary to repair and maintain its other deteriorated buildings while providing major profits for the developer.
- There are alternative construction possibilities that would raise needed funds but do less damage to the Historic District.

The Seminary has been part of the neighborhood since its beginning and CRDC hopes it will remain.

The Chelsea Reform Democratic Club demands that any formal decision on this project be based on more information than has currently been made available to the community. Among the needed data are current and projected Seminary finances, especially how the costs of repairing and maintaining the existing historic buildings are to be funded; how the revenue stream from the project is to be divided among the parties; detailed rehabilitation cost projections; pro forma cost and income data on buildings of various size and height; additional engineering data on Sherrill Hall, etc. We trust that the City agencies involved will seek this information to use in their deliberations and that it will be available to the community if and when the matter is proposed formally.

We are gratified that City Landmarks and City Planning have been the community's partners in creating the Historic District and the low rise zoning necessary to protect it from the current onslaught by developers. We are very appreciative that this year City Planning, as part of the West maintaining the 75-foot height restrictions of the Chelsea Plan in the Historic District, and that the

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Chelsea Plan, agreed to limit buildings on the west side of 10th Avenue, across from the Historic District, to a height no greater than eight stories. The community is very seriously concerned about built form of the Chelsea community and the integrity of the Historic District and its heart, the General Theological Seminary block, remain intact.

CRDC is interested not only in the buildings that make up Chelsea, but also in the wonderful heterogeneity of the people who live here. We are deeply concerned that this proposal will, if successful, form a dangerous precedent and contribute to the reduction of the rich diversity of the community.

Sincerely,

CHELSEA REFORM DEMOCRATIC CLUB

(ll)

Steven Skyles-Mulligan, President

SSM:ll

This letter was approved by the general membership at our January 19, 2006 meeting.

cc: Hon. Michael Bloomberg, Mayor  
Hon. Scott Stringer, Manhattan Borough President  
Hon. Thomas Duane, State Senator  
Hon. Richard Gottfried, State Assembly  
Hon. Christine Quinn, City Council  
J. Lee Compton, Chair, Manhattan Community Board No. 4  
Edward S. Kirkland, Co-Chair, Chelsea Preservation & Planning Commission  
Walter Mankoff, Co-Chair, Chelsea Preservation & Planning Commission  
General Theological Seminary  
Brodsky Organization

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