

Testimony of Assembly member Deborah J. Glick Before Landmarks Preservation Commission
Regarding the Revised St. Vincent's/Rudin Development Plan

July 15, 2008

Thank you for this opportunity to testify before you today regarding the revised St. Vincent's/Rudin plan which would create a new hospital as well as luxury condominiums on the east side of 7th Avenue. This Spring, I joined scores of community residents in expressing that the initial St. Vincent's/Rudin application would have been extremely detrimental to the character of the Greenwich Village Historic District. Aside from its overall aesthetic, the proposed demolition of 9 buildings in a historic district without an application for hardship was very troubling and would have set a dangerous precedent citywide. This revised proposal being considered today is a hardship application, which- it is my understanding- would not be precedent-setting and would allow LPC to weigh St. Vincent's particular circumstances.

Let me express first that I have always believed that a hospital located within our neighborhood is very beneficial for our community, particularly as we are positioned between the heavily congested Holland and Lincoln Tunnel areas. But this benefit must not be outweighed by the potentially negative impacts that many residents have feared. Accordingly, I was pleased that the hospital's design team attempted to address the immediate concerns of the hospital's neighbors regarding air, light, and view corridors through the use of an ovoid shape hospital tower. Although this shape may have necessitated additional height, St. Vincent's did subsequently find ways to narrow and reduce the height of its building by 30 feet from its original plan. However, I still have concerns about the 2 feet window inserts in the base of the podium. As the Community Board has pointed out, this distance seems too great and makes the general façade feel too far removed from the street.

The new Rudin design has also taken some concerns of the community into account, mainly through the reuse of Smith-Raskob, Nurses, and Spellman. Yet, I still have many serious concerns about the Rudin project. First, the 7th Avenue residential tower is simply too large and its height and bulk should be reduced. As it stands now, the proposed building would dwarf surrounding apartment buildings. Second, while the addition of retail along 7th Avenue seems appropriate, that retail should not wrap around 12th Street, which is a residential street. The placement of retail on 12th Street would be intrusive and undermine the residential character of the block.

Third, I am concerned that the materials in this design are not consistent with the historic district. There is an excessive amount of channeled glass and patinated copper in a manner that does not mesh well with surrounding buildings. The use of glass also is problematic in the rear facades of Nurses and Smith, in the ground floor of the townhouses and in the rooftop addition for two of the townhouses. Further, the townhouses are inappropriate for the district in that their staggered fronts and lack of ornamentation make them appear awkward in relation to the elegant townhouses located further down 11th Street. Although it is understandable that the applicant wishes to have each house be distinct, uniqueness should not trump attractiveness.

Fourth, I am disappointed that the Rudin project still includes the demolition of the Reiss building. As I stated in my original testimony, the Reiss building contributes to the history of the Village and should be reused instead of demolished. At the very least, a replacement building should be no taller than the current building and should not be dominated by a horizontal ribbon of windows. In general, whenever possible, masonry should be used, rather than the copper and glass that are planned.

Finally, I am concerned about the inclusion of balconies in this proposal. Functional balconies in Greenwich Village are outliers and, while an architect might be able to point to some examples of buildings with functional balconies, those structures are aberrations and should not be used as markers for the general tone of the neighborhood.

In closing, I thank LPC for its diligence and hard work on this project. The proposal before you will have a monumental impact on Greenwich Village and I appreciate the care and consideration with which you have thus far treated this unprecedented project and urge such continued attention.