



THE CITY OF NEW YORK  
**OFFICE OF THE PRESIDENT**  
BOROUGH OF MANHATTAN

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BOROUGH PRESIDENT

**Testimony to Landmarks Preservation Commission  
on the Proposed Redevelopment of the St. Vincent's Hospital Complex  
July 15, 2008**

I would like to thank Chair Tierney and the Commission for this opportunity to testify on the redevelopment of St. Vincent's Hospital's campus in the Greenwich Village Historic District.

By holding this additional hearing, as I requested in my previous testimony, the Commission will benefit from hearing additional comments on the residential component of the redevelopment plan, and has allowed time for the community board to submit an official recommendation.

***Development East of Seventh Avenue***

The plan to develop the hospital's properties on the east side of Seventh Avenue has significantly improved since the original proposal was submitted only a few months ago. These changes would not have occurred without the involvement and advocacy of members of the local community, the Landmarks Commission and my fellow elected officials. Standing together, we worked together to achieve significant improvements to the proposed plan that ensure that the development will better reflect the history and context of the Village. Specifically:

- a reduction in height by 30 feet of the Seventh Avenue frontage;
- a reduction in the width by 50 feet of the Seventh Avenue frontage;
- improved façade treatments that relate better to the historic district;
- preservation of the majority of buildings; and
- a readjustment of bulk in mid-block areas to better reflect existing conditions.

There is still more work that can and should be done. The community has raised legitimate concerns regarding the introduction of balconies to the streetscape, as well as other façade details, the location of retail spaces, and the maximum height of the project. While these concerns remain outstanding, they are issues that can and should be resolved within the context of the current application, as long as all parties continue working collaboratively in good faith. I urge the Commission to continue working with the applicant, the Community Board, and preservation advocates to make sure the final design is as contextual as possible with the surrounding community.

***St. Vincent's Mission and History***

It is important that this process now move towards resolution. At risk is the mission of a hospital that has operated in the Village for 150 years, but can no longer operate within its historic

building layouts. Without some form of modernization, the hospital will continue down the path of obsolescence.

At countless public meetings, Saint Vincent's Hospital's excellent work has been hailed by the community it serves. The hospital provides:

- the only Level 1 Trauma Center serving the entire West Side up to 59<sup>th</sup> Street.
- multilingual health services to immigrant populations,
- 40 million dollars worth of free health care a year,
- health care to 32 homeless shelters, and
- primary care for many thousands of Village residents.

This profound charitable mission is all the more important in light of the decisions of the New York State's Commission on Health Care Facilities in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century, known as the Berger Commission. While many of us protested the Commission's proposals for hospital closures, the report was adopted and its recommendations are in the process of being implemented. One of the central assumptions of the report was that Saint Vincent's would remain to serve as the area's only Level 1 Trauma Center. Without this service, the health and livelihood of Villagers and other Manhattanites would be unnecessarily put at risk.

St. Vincent's history is an essential component of the history and character of Greenwich Village. To keep that history alive, it is critical that the hospital be allowed to modernize.

### ***O'Toole Site and the Hospital's Future***

Obviously, there are many questions as to how modernization should occur. In the hardship process that will determine the fate of the O'Toole building, the Commission will consult health care and development experts to determine whether the application can satisfy the findings required to be granted a "hardship" waiver. I ultimately defer to their expertise in reaching that conclusion.

However, the application materials make it clear that it would be difficult, if not impossible, to find any location as suitable as the O'Toole site for the hospital's modernization. The site has many characteristics necessary for a new hospital:

- it is centrally located within its service area between Lower Manhattan and Hells Kitchen, allowing for faster ambulance responses;
- it is large enough to accommodate dense development;
- it is located near three subway lines and a bus line, which provide critical access for hundreds of thousands of Manhattanites;
- it removes the cost of purchasing land, which would be potentially prohibitive for large-scale new construction;
- it does not require the relocation of the cancer center, which must be located 327 feet from the hospital to qualify as a Medicare eligible 'on-campus' provider according to Federal Law; and,
- it does not require emergency services to be relocated during construction.

Unless a similarly situated site can be located, it seems that this is exactly the sort of situation for which the hardship waiver exists, which is to allow rare exceptions to landmark protections when an applicant cannot satisfy its long-term mission within those constraints.

*Precedent for Historic Districts*

Community leaders and preservation advocates have raised a legitimate concern that this application could set as a dangerous precedent that would undermine the force and effect of historic district designation. It is critical that this not occur.

Therefore, I urge the Commission to examine closely the critical facts that differentiate this particular application from other potential situations involving nonprofits seeking hardship exemptions. St. Vincent's has a state mandate to serve as the west side of Manhattan as the primary trauma center and a federal mandate to be located in close proximity to its other ambulatory care facilities. St. Vincent's complex is also the only hospital wholly located within a historic district. In making its determination, the Commission should be clear that its consideration is limited to this one unique situation, and must protect the strength and integrity of our City's landmarks laws.

Finally, let me note that even though this is probably the final Landmarks Commission hearing on the proposal, this is far from the final hearing on this project. After the landmarks process, land use review, ULURP, will begin. As part of ULURP, the potential environmental impacts of the neighborhood will be analyzed and reviewed. While I am thankful that the Rudin Family and the Sisters of Charity have agreed to build and open a new school in the immediate neighborhood to address school overcrowding impacts of the proposed developments, I believe that there are still many concerns over density, shadows, and traffic that can only be addressed once the landmarks review phase is completed. I will continue to work with the applicant and the community on these issues once environmental review of the project has occurred.

It is time for the Commission to work with this applicant and the community to develop a plan for St. Vincent's long-term modernization that allows the hospital to fulfill its critical mission while preserving the historic integrity of Greenwich Village.

Thank you.