

**MAS Testimony to NYC Planning Commission regarding ULURP Application
No.: C 150438 ZMM, Sherman Plaza Project, 4650 Broadway, New York, NY**

May 25, 2016

The Municipal Art Society of New York (MAS) welcomes the opportunity to provide comments on the Sherman Plaza Project, located directly across Broadway from Fort Tryon Park, at 4650 Broadway. MAS is concerned that the proposed 240-foot development is out of context with the neighborhood both in terms of height and affordability.

Precedent for Similar Development along Fort Tryon Park

MAS maintains that any new development along the Broadway corridor and Fort Tryon Park should be consistent with the existing neighborhood fabric and avoid shadow impacts on the park. Currently, the area east of Fort Tryon Park is characterized by 5- to 7-story residential buildings. Development pressure in the neighborhood has already led to at least one proposed out-of-scale development nearby. Specifically, Largavista Companies is seeking a height and bulk variance from the Board of Standards and Appeals (BSA) to construct a 19-story, multi-family development at 4566 Broadway, less than a quarter of a mile south of the Sherman Plaza site. As such, the Sherman Plaza project presents an important opportunity for the City to champion sound planning that considers the cumulative effect of non-contextual development, reduces environmental impacts, preserves valuable public assets, and offers equitable housing opportunities that reflect the needs of the neighborhood.

Adverse Impacts on Visual Resources and Views

Fort Tryon Park sits at one of the highest elevations in Manhattan accessible to the public. It also features a varied topography and panoramic views of the Hudson River and Palisades. Designed by the Olmsted Brothers, it is one of only ten City-designated scenic landmarks and is listed on the State and National Register of Historic Places (S/NL). The Cloisters, sitting at the highest point of the park, is an individual New York City landmark listed on the S/NL and was designed to be the focal point of the Fort Tryon Park landscape. At the proposed height, the Sherman Plaza development would irrevocably alter these views from both the park and the Cloisters as well as block the views of these landmarks from adjoining neighborhoods.

Housing Affordability

During the public review process, MAS testified many times expressing support in principle for the Mandatory Inclusionary Housing (MIH) zoning text amendments. However, MAS's position has always been that affordable housing should be targeted to accurately address the needs of individual neighborhoods.

As one of the first projects to incorporate MIH, MAS is concerned that the affordability level proposed under the Sherman Plaza project does not meet the needs of the community. As proposed, thirty percent of the development's residential floor area would be allocated for residents with incomes at eighty percent of the Area Median Income, or approximately \$65,000 per year for a family of three. However, the median household income of the

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surrounding neighborhood is only approximately \$52,000, making the affordable units in this project out of reach for those that currently live in the neighborhood.¹

Critical Need for Sound Planning and Development

The broader Inwood-Washington Heights neighborhood is facing major changes, evidenced by the Inwood NYC Planning Initiative, a comprehensive planning study currently underway to guide the future rezoning and redevelopment of a 100-acre area northeast of the Sherman Plaza site. MAS applauds the efforts by elected officials and City agencies to engage the community in a vision for developing and preserving affordable housing, creating jobs, improving streetscapes, and reclaiming the waterfront and open space. Although it is not part of the initiative, the Sherman Plaza project exhibits a microcosm of the issues that the entire neighborhood will need to address as development pressures mount.

Mindful of the proposal at 4566 Broadway and the prospect of a large-scale rezoning of the easternmost portions of Inwood, it is imperative that the City carefully examine all facets of the Sherman Plaza development, including the potential long-term impacts on the neighborhood, Fort Tryon Park, and the socioeconomic conditions of the area. As such, MAS asserts that this project, as currently proposed, would set a harmful precedent for inappropriate development in this neighborhood and strongly urges the CPC to reject the proposed zoning map amendment and request an alternate design.

¹ Median income for neighborhood based on census tracts within a one-quarter mile radius of the project site. Source: U.S. Census 2010-2014 America Community Survey 5-Year Estimates.