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October 21, 2013

Chair Robert Tierney
Landmarks Preservation Commission
One Centre Street
New York, NY 10007

Dear Chair Tierney,


On behalf of the AIA New York Chapter and our almost 5,000 architect and associate members here in New York, we are pleased to offer the following thoughts and suggestions in regard to the proposed Extell development at 217 West 57th Street adjacent to the American Fine Arts Society Building which houses the Arts Students League. Members of the Chapter's Policy Board were able to meet with architect Gordon Gill, FAIA of Adrian Smith + Gordon Gill Architecture and members of his team on Tuesday, October 8th for a presentation of the primary issue - the cantilever question - under discussion at the Landmarks Preservation Commission. We did not have the benefit of seeing the entire building as you have today.

The key issue at hand is the cantilever which we understand will start at a point almost 300' above the street. For the proposed project the question is whether extending over the Arts Student League is appropriate or whether it sets an unacceptable precedent for more contentious sites elsewhere in Manhattan. We want to emphasize that we know of no other cantilever over a landmark building in New York City. But this cantilever, as designed, has small impact on the view of the Art Students League from surrounding streets and sidewalks. The Landmarks Preservation Commission has been careful to define appropriateness as being site-specific. This location is unique, and will not in and of itself translate to less acceptable solutions to be posited elsewhere. We believe that approval today should not set precedent. As importantly, we note that the cantilever is essentially invisible - well above grade and extremely limited in its projection.

The AIA New York Chapter has been a strong proponent of building innovative mixed-use structures in close proximity to mass transit. We recognize that it is difficult to accommodate a department store on a small footprint, especially in a mixed-use building where separate cores are required. At its base we saw that the building respects the street wall of 57th Street and through facade detailing and fenestration does a lot to pick up on the scale and notable features of adjacent structures.

We suggest that the Landmarks Preservation Commission allow the cantilever to proceed to further study as this appears to be a good building, designed by excellent architects who understand the complexity of tall structures.

Sincerely,


Jill N. Lerner, FAIA, President


Rick Bell, FAIA, Executive Director