


HISTORIC DISTRICTS COUNCIL



THE ADVOCATE FOR NEW YORK CITY'S HISTORIC NEIGHBORHOODS

232 East 11th Street New York NY 10003
tel (212) 614-9107 fax (212) 614-9127 email hdc@hdc.org

May 13, 2002

Hon. Daniel Doctoroff
Deputy Mayor for Economic Development & Rebuilding
City Hall
New York, NY 10007

Dear Deputy Mayor Doctoroff,

I recently read with interest that plans are moving ahead for the final disposition of 2 Columbus Circle, the former Huntington Hartford Gallery. The Historic Districts Council has advocated for the preservation of this building for many years, and continues to be concerned about it. I have enclosed a copy of our testimony before the Economic Development Committee of the City Council on the occasion of an oversight hearing on the subject last year.

Rather than belabor the point of whom should gain possession of the building or what kind of ultimate use the building should have, instead let me take this occasion to reaffirm HDC's belief, shared by historic preservationists citywide, that this building is truly a landmark of modern architecture and must be treated as such. This building, beloved and berated throughout the city, is an incredibly significant work by an acknowledged modern master, Edward Durrell Stone. More importantly, 2 Columbus Circle is one of the signature buildings of its area – an area that despite the best of intentions has floundered urbanistically for decades. Now, with the redevelopment of the Coliseum site, the restoration of the Merchant's Gate, and the new design of the traffic circle, Columbus Circle is on the verge of becoming what it was always intended to be: one of New York City's great urban spaces.

The off-hand disposal or mutilation of 2 Columbus Circle would sabotage this plan by removing the keystone of the Circle – the only building there that actually respects its flow and shape of the street. Almost as disturbing as the possible demolition of the building, would be an inappropriate façade alteration – which would, in essence, destroy the building as effective as a wrecking ball. Modern buildings, even moreso than more traditional architecture, are defined by their materials and curtain wall treatments. Lever House and the Whitney Museum recently have undergone façade restorations that enhanced their appearance without comprising the building's integrity. Both these are individual landmarks and their restoration was overseen by the Landmarks Preservation Commission, with the end result being attractive buildings that work as solid economic



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investments, both as commercial properties and cultural institutions. 666 Fifth Avenue, the Tischman Building, has not been as fortunate and has suffered through a series of inappropriate alterations to its façade. Due to what the City Review called “architectural decisions made by a marketing manager,” in 1998, the original lobby by Isamu Noguchi – one of our country’s greatest modern sculptors – was eviscerated to make room for a retail store that has already been redesigned once. Had the site been preserved, we could only speculate on its ongoing attractiveness to visitors and renters. Instead, it is only another anonymous space to be buffeted by the vagrancies of the midtown commercial market. Please don’t let 2 Columbus Circle suffer the same ignominious fate.

Speaking on behalf of a wide coalition of preservationists, we would be happy to meet with you to discuss this site or forward you additional information about this building. Please feel free to contact the HDC office at 212 614-9107 if you have any questions.

Sincerely,



Simeon Bankoff
Executive Director

Enc.

cc: Hon. Sherida Paulsen, LPC
Congresswoman Carolyn Maloney
Councilmember Gale Brewer
Councilmember Eva Moskowitz
Assemblymember Scott Stringer
Assemblymember Richard Gottfried
State Senator Tom Duane
Olive Freud, CSED
Kate Wood, LW!
John Jurayj, MAWG