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**MEMORANDUM**

**TO:** Manhattan Borough Board  
**FROM:** Gale A. Brewer  
**DATE:** August 24th, 2004  
**SUBJECT:** 2 Columbus Circle

The purpose of this memo is to express my support for the Museum of Arts & Design and its plans to renovate the building at 2 Columbus Circle. I urge you to join me to vote in favor of the sale of 2 Columbus Circle to the Museum of Arts & Design at the Borough Board on August 24th, 2004.

I understand that some preservationists have fought to maintain the building's façade on account of its historical significance. However, as per the New York State Supreme Court's recent decision, there is no legal basis for landmarking. I therefore support the sale of the building as part of the overall resurgence of Columbus Circle.

Columbus Circle is being reborn. With the construction of the 80-story Time Warner towers and the adjacent shopping complex contained within, the circle is becoming more of a destination than ever before. As Columbus Circle physically links the culturally rich areas of Midtown and the Upper West Side, it is only logical that the Circle develop a cultural life of its own. In fact, the Museum of Arts & Design would be the first multi-disciplinary art museum on the Upper West Side, offering exhibitions and programs to several neighborhoods and giving a prominent public space a *bona fide* public use.

Built in 1964, the building at 2 Columbus Circle is less than 50 years old, and as such it can only be considered eligible for nomination as a State or National Historic Place if it is "of exceptional importance." While the building, with its famed windowless façade and columns reminiscent of lollipops, is an artistic achievement and an important example of its time, the petitioners' Environmental Assessment Statement (EAS) was unable to get much beyond this as evidence against the building's sale. The New York State Supreme Court ruled on April 15, 2004, that the building's sale and renovation are perfectly legitimate and dismissed all of the petitioners' claims.

This is not to say that the building doesn't have some historical value; it is just that the value is limited. For example, while the State Preservation League and the National Trust for Historical Preservation have advocated landmarking the building, the City's Landmarks Preservation Commission has not even held a hearing on it, (despite my numerous public calls for this to occur). In fact, the current chair of the Commission, Robert B. Tierney, and his predecessor, have reviewed the case and indicated

that the building does not qualify for landmark status. In good part because of the limited historical value of the building, Community Board 5 approved the building's sale to the Museum with the support of Boards 4 and 7, and the Manhattan Borough President similarly recommended the sale.

The community wants this building to be functional again. 2 Columbus Circle has been vacant and closed for eight years. Judge Walter B. Tolub, in his official opinion, referred to the building as an "orphan." As it stands, the building is hardly living up to its billing as the "resource" that its supporters claim, and it is high time for a new phase in its life. The court's decision must stand, and I support it. The Museum will be a resource by extending educational opportunities to the community's youth. It will be a resource for the art and design awareness that it provokes, not merely as a visual specimen of decades past, but as a functioning cultural institution.

Moreover, in addressing the concerns that the Museum will strip the building of its architectural integrity, I would like to note that the proposed construction will alter neither the scale nor the massing of 2 Columbus Circle. The building will retain its unique character as a freestanding object, and the curved façade, which conforms to the shape of Columbus Circle proper, will be maintained. While the construction will add windows, it will respect the structure's character and with the existing materials create a new work of art all its own, very much in keeping with the Museum's creative ideal and the neighborhood's spirit of renewal.

In addition, the 2 Columbus Circle building desperately needs infrastructure renovations. Even the Preservationists supporting façade retention have not denied this. The circulation and climate control systems are overdue upgrades, while the mechanical, electrical, and plumbing systems need to be replaced completely. The Museum also expects to make the building fully handicapped-accessible in accordance with the Americans With Disabilities Act. Finally, the existing cladding and stone on the façade are in disrepair. The Museum's proposed renovations of 2 Columbus Circle will save the building and return it to its original intended use, a museum.

The Museum was able, by November 2003, to raise over \$20 million in committed pledges towards the sale and construction. This project has met with continued support from the community, and I wholeheartedly support the Museum's relocation and renovation of 2 Columbus Circle. This development marks the next step in an important stage for Columbus Circle and New York City, culturally as well as economically.

I have worked hard to preserve many of our community's architectural treasures over the years and remain committed to the cause of preservation. The "lollipop building" may be a nice reminder of a particular architectural place and time, and it would be nice to save the building if we had infinite land at Columbus Circle. However, the historical value of this building is clearly limited. It is my belief that the best way to use this critically located building is to renovate it and reactivate it as something useful to the community. Columbus Circle is rising, and this building must not be left behind.

I hope that you will all join me in supporting the Museum of Arts & Design on this project.