



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

C. VIRGINIA FIELDS
BOROUGH PRESIDENT

November 22, 2002

Ms. Sherida E. Paulsen
Chair
Landmarks Preservation Commission
One Centre Street, 9th Floor
New York, NY 10007

Re: **Congregation Shearith Israel; 8 West 70th Street**

Dear Chair Paulsen:

I am writing to request that the Commission postpone the hearing on Congregation Shearith Israel (The Spanish and Portuguese Synagogue), scheduled for November 26th

Built in 1892, the glorious synagogue is an individual landmark, and within the Upper West Side/Central Park West Historic District. Congregation Shearith Israel (CSI) has plans to have an unknown developer build a 157ft. building on its property at 8 West 70th Street. The preservation purpose of the project remains in question, as does its potential for setting a bad precedent for development within historic districts.

In addition, the Congregation has apparently been working on this proposal for quite sometime, but only now has reached out to area residents and community organizations for their input. The full board of Community Board 7 will not have adequate chance for review before the November 26th Public Hearing.

Given the extent of concerns surrounding the proposal, I am hopeful that you will consider postponing the Commission's hearing until January, so that alternatives can be adequately researched and the proposed project thoroughly evaluated by the Community Board, area residents and local organizations.

Very truly yours,

C. Virginia Fields
Manhattan Borough President

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THE CITY OF NEW YORK
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C. VIRGINIA FIELDS
BOROUGH PRESIDENT

July 1, 2003

Hon. Robert B. Tierney
Chairman
Landmarks Preservation Commission
Municipal Building - 9th Floor
New York, NY 10007

Re: Congregation Shearith Israel
8 West 70th Street
Upper West Side Historic District
Manhattan

Dear Mr. Chairman:

I have recently reviewed the revisions to the application that Congregation Shearith Israel will be presenting to the Commission at its public hearing on July 1, 2003. As you know, I had previously expressed my reservations about the original design. However, I find the revisions to be a significant improvement over the original plans. I now therefore recommend that the Commission approve the requests for a Certificate of Appropriateness and a report to satisfy the requirements of Section 74-711(1) of the Zoning Resolution. I regret that my schedule does not permit me to personally appear in order to elaborate on the reasons for my support.

In reviewing these revisions, I believe that Congregation Shearith Israel has successfully integrated its new building with each of the three important preservation objectives. First, the building is now an elegant partner with the Synagogue, which is an individual landmark. Second, the new building will be a sympathetic and contextual addition to the Central Park West skyline as viewed from Central Park, the City's premier scenic landmark. Thus, the building is appropriate to the context of the Upper West Side Historic District in two important respects. The southeast portion of the Historic District consists primarily of multiple dwellings and commercial structures, and as such the proposed building sits amidst structures of similar height and bulk. And with regard to the eastern edge of the Historic District, the proposed building extends west into the midblock to approximately the same distance as the other Central Park West buildings in the District.

The proposal appears to be suitable candidate for the Commission's assistance in pursuing a Section 74-711 Special Permit. Its stewardship of the landmarked Synagogue has earned praise from preservationists throughout the City. There appears to be more than enough preservation work ahead to warrant the Commission's involvement in pursuing the zoning waivers required to promote a preservation purpose.

I remain concerned, as do many of my constituents, with the fact that over 50,000 sf of zoning floor area remains unutilized in the present development plans. Local residents should not be required to remain in fear of further development on this site, nor of the sale of the unused development rights to another party. I ask the Commission to take whatever steps it can to assure that the remaining development rights cannot be used. I also ask that the Commission require the Congregation to adhere to the best practices for excavation of this site so that the other historic buildings in the Historic District are protected.

Very Truly Yours,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "C. Virginia Fields", is written over a horizontal line. The signature is stylized and somewhat cursive.

C. Virginia Fields
Manhattan Borough President

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Transcript of the Public Hearing
before the
LANDMARKS PRESERVATION COMMISSION
on Tuesday, November 26, 2002
at
One Centre Street, 9th floor
New York, New York

ORIGINAL

AR-TI RECORDING COMPANY, INC.
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1 proposal.

2 CHAIRMAN PAULSEN: Thank you.

3 Dr. Alan Singer and then James Greer.

4 DR. SINGER: My name is Alan Singer, I
5 am the Executive Director of Congregation Shearith
6 Israel.

7 I believe that the proposed building is
8 not only appropriate, but it is a necessity. I
9 would like to explain several ways that Congregation
10 Shearith Israel serves the community since it is the
11 community house that we now seek permission to
12 replace.

13 First and foremost, our religious
14 services are open to the public twice daily, 365
15 days a year, even on the high holidays we go out of
16 our way to accommodate visitors who make prior
17 arrangements with our security department. We
18 provide many classes and lectures open to the
19 public.

20 Second, tour groups. Thousands of
21 individuals per year from across the United States
22 of all ages, of all religions, participate in guided
23 tours of our historic landmark. In addition to
24 taking great pride in showing others our beautiful
25 sanctuaries, we proudly fulfill our responsibility

1 to explain the history of America's first Jewish
2 congregation. Our one of a kind archives are made
3 accessible to scholars and museums worldwide. In
4 fact, the new space that we are proposing will allow
5 us to better serve the academic community by
6 returning 50 percent of our historic documents back
7 to our facility from the off-site warehouse on 110th
8 Street where we currently rent space.

9 Throughout our history, we have been
10 asked by communal and governmental bodies to host
11 community-wide events which we were always happy to
12 accommodate. In June 2002 at the request of the
13 Manhattan Borough President, C. Virginia Fields,
14 Shearith Israel hosted an evening of Jewish Heritage
15 Commemoration, which was attended by over 200 people
16 and the general public was invited.

17 In March of 1997, having just completed
18 the restoration of our Tiffany glass windows, our
19 synagogue hosted a workshop in stain glass
20 restoration at the request of the New York Landmarks
21 Conservancy which was attended by 185 individuals.
22 This past May, at the request of the New York
23 Landmarks Conservancy, Shearith Israel for the first
24 time in anyone's memory opened its historic West
25 21st Street cemetery to the general public to

1 provide hands-on experience in a program titled
2 "Preserving Historic Burial Grounds." 50
3 reservations were received in advance of the
4 workshop and over 180 people actually participated.

5 And this coming January, Shearith Israel
6 has gladly agreed to host another program of the New
7 York Landmarks Conservancy which is a forum on
8 decorative paint finishes to which we will, again,
9 be happy to invite the entire community.

10 Thank you.

11 CHAIRMAN PAULSEN: Thank you.

12 Mr. Greer, and then Jonathan Baker.

13 MR. GREER: Members of the Committee, my
14 name is Jay Greer. I reside at 101 Central Park
15 West, where I am a director of the
16 board of directors and immediate past president.

17 I am under a considerable disadvantage,
18 both I and my directors. Our first notice of this,
19 as far as I can tell, came about five weeks ago.
20 Our first board meeting came before the first
21 meeting. That board, having heard the information
22 that was in the press and some that we gleaned from
23 our friends at 91, took the unanimous view that this
24 was not an appropriate building to be put in across
25 the street on 70th Street, for all the reasons that