

PETER JENNINGS

July 1, 2003

Dear Mr. Tierney:

You do make it tough. For the second time a hearing on this issue is being held on a day when so many people in the neighborhood can be expected to have other plans. Some of us are unable to leave work; I am one of those. Others with a deep interest in the outcome believe that the hearing has again been held conveniently close to a national holiday when they have long standing plans to be somewhere else. I regret that in my case this letter must suffice.

First may I say that if the synagogue is permitted to build, my view of Central Park will not be affected. Much more importantly, I write as a neighbor, who grew up believing that when neighbors wished to do something that would have an effect on other neighbors, they would discuss it with the neighbors.

It has not happened in this case. The synagogue gives the impression of having worked to bypass the neighbors, to have its way whatever the neighbors think.

No wonder that I find the neighbors frustrated, even angry, feeling as if they don't matter.

In New York City we pride ourselves on a sense of community, the strength of which is a collection of communities. There is no sense of community in this case – and I am afraid that the synagogue's behavior appears to be the reason.

Here's what else I hear on the street: That people have lost faith in the process - the governing process – because they believe "the fix is in." It's a horrible phrase, but many of my neighbors are convinced it is true.

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In this case my neighbors believe that people over whom they have no influence have been working against the best interest of the neighborhood, even though the neighborhood is overwhelmingly, overwhelmingly opposed to the project.

Jack Rudin's name comes up a lot. He's done a great deal for New York City but in this neighborhood these days I hear him discussed as a member of the synagogue who wishes to have his way, and the synagogue's, no matter what the neighbor's think. ~~Surely not.~~

Sherida Paulsen's name comes up. Is it true that she is carrying out some commitment that former Chair Jennifer Raab made to the synagogue, as many are speculating? Can she tell the neighbors what the Landmark Commission's basis is for supporting the synagogue's building plan?

The neighbors don't understand.

I was really surprised to hear a member of the City Council tell me that she thought the fix was in. So many neighbors believe that they have been kept in the dark deliberately.

I am certainly not an expert in city planning, but people keep telling me that twenty years ago the City Planning Commission changed the zoning precisely to prevent this kind of project that will so alter a neighborhood. What has happened to change this? Why then? Why now?

I realize we may all be a bit paranoid at the moment, but I must tell you that those of us who harbor productive feelings about government - and the governing process - feel that in this instance our rights - yes, it is not too strong a word - are being ignored by people who wish to serve their own interests at the expense of the community.

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Recently I asked one of the more activist neighbors if anyone in the neighborhood was in favor of this. "Other than the congregants," she said, "no." Other people ask me how many members of the congregation live in the neighborhood. I do not know the answer. May I petition you to have these questions answered publicly?

MORE

I know there are many questions, but I have taken your time. It will be very sad if in wanting to have things their way members of the synagogue, and perhaps city officials involved, ignore and alienate so many people, so many neighbors, so many citizens of a city that holds itself up as a symbol of the democratic process.

Respectfully...

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'R. Tierney', is written over a large, hand-drawn oval. A horizontal line is drawn through the oval, extending to the right.

Mr. Robert Tierney
Chair
Landmarks Preservation Commission
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9th Floor North
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