



CITY OF NEW YORK

**MANHATTAN COMMUNITY BOARD FOUR**

330 West 42<sup>nd</sup> Street, 26<sup>th</sup> floor New York, NY 10036  
tel: 212-736-4536 fax: 212-947-9512  
www.nyc.gov/mcb4

**JOHN WEIS**  
Chair

**ROBERT J. BENFATTO, JR., ESQ.**  
District Manager

June 1, 2011

Hon. Robert B. Tierney  
Chair, Landmarks Preservation Commission  
Municipal Building, Ninth Floor  
One Centre Street  
New York, NY 10007

**Re: General Theological Seminary  
West 20<sup>th</sup> Street between Ninth and Tenth Avenues  
Proposed New Residential Building and Renovation of West Building**

Dear Chair Tierney:

At the May 18, 2011 of Manhattan Community Board 4's (CB4) Landmarks Committee, representatives of The Brodsky Organization and Beyer Blinder Belle Architects & Planners presented their plans for the renovation of the West Building and construction of a new residential building on the campus of the General Theological Seminary. The Board commends the carefully thought out plans for the restoration and adaptation for residential use of the historic West Building but has concerns in other areas, especially about the mass and design of the proposed new residential building to be constructed just to the west of the historic West Building..

**Background**

The General Theological Seminary occupies the entire city block between West 20<sup>th</sup> and West 21<sup>st</sup> Streets and 9<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> Avenues in the Chelsea neighborhood of Manhattan. Clement Clarke Moore donated sixty lots of his Chelsea estate for the land, which he intended to be the centerpiece of the upscale development he planned for much of the estate he had inherited.

The East Building, the first building constructed on the campus of the General Theological Seminary, was completed in 1827. The West Building was completed in 1836 and is the oldest remaining building on the campus. It is an important intact monument of early Gothic Revival in America and is built of local stone. In 1883 the architect Charles C. Haight devised for the then Dean a master plan that called for enclosing most of the block in the buildings of brick and brownstone in the English Collegiate Gothic style in which he specialized. Both the East and West Buildings were to be demolished, but the death of the

Dean, the force behind the plan prevented its completion, so that at least the West Building survived.

In 2007, after years of deficits, the General Theological Seminary found itself lacking sufficient funds to restore and maintain the deteriorated buildings of the campus or “close”. It entered into a partnership with the Brodsky Organization, as a part of which it transferred the eastern entire end of the block, on which a large residential building, approved by this Commission, was erected. Eventually much of the south side as well was transferred: the small building called “234” that has been the object of a recent application, the West Building, and the location immediately to the west of the latter called the “tennis court site” from its most recent use. .

### **Restoration of West Building**

The West Building is a historically important building both for its connection with Clement Clarke Moore and the history of the Seminary and as a monument of early Gothic Revival Architecture. The board commends the applicant and the architect on its careful restoration and adaptation. In particular, CB4 is glad that:

- The ivy is being removed from the façade as it is deteriorating the masonry of the building;
- The wooden tracery in the windows is being restored where possible and recreated in exact replica where unable to be salvaged;
- The glass is being altered from double to single, which will help preserve the historic character of the tracery, which is the an important and historic feature;
- The masonry is being re-pointed;
- The stoops are being restored;
- Only the minimal alterations necessary to accommodate new uses are being made to doors and windows, and the historic forms of the tracery will be preserved and if necessary adapted to the new location ;
- As part of this process a quatrefoil door will be ingeniously and sympathetically converted into a window;
- The space immediately in front of the building will be divided into small garden plots for adjacent apartments, which will sympathize well with the building and the close.

### **Proposed New Residential Building**

The proposed new residential building is to be located just to the west of the West Building and approximately on the site of a now disused tennis court. The footprint is consistent with the current contextual zoning and with the streetwall of the building currently occupied by the Tutu Center near the corner of Tenth Avenue to the west. The treatment is based on elements of Haight’s design such as the historic brownstone and brick wall at the street level and a red brick façade, but explicitly economic forces for more bulk appear to have entailed not only more height but also heavy rectangular massing, rather than the

lighter and more broken massing of the corresponding residential building (234 Chelsea Close) designed by Haight to occupy the corresponding location near the eastern corner of the campus.

This square massive design with its chimney dominates this end of the campus and detracts not only from the historic West Building, which should be the true focal point of the immediate streetscape, but also Haight's carefully planned design for the west end of the campus both on the inside and outside. The Refectory and the Deanery here were planned to make this the heart of campus life, and the Board believes that least the new building should be restudied to make it more fit better into the area in openness and character.

CB4 has the following specific concerns about the design of the new building:

- The massive design with its seven floors creates an additional amount of height and bulk on the east elevation which tends to dominate the historic West Building and Haight's buildings to the west and north;
- While we recognize the economic motives for adding on a seventh floor, the proposed building is inconsistent with nearby buildings as well as too heavy in design and should be reduced by at least one floor;
- The articulation of the design and the chimneys is too heavy;
- The new courtyard created between the new building and the important cluster of Seminary buildings at the northwest corner of the close is excessively closed in.

Finally, the glass passageway between this building and the West Building is inconsistent with the masonry buildings on either side. It owes too much too much to the earlier design, when the function of the new building was campus offices rather than residential.. Lightness is desirable, but glassiness was not.

Sincerely,



John Weis  
*Chair*  
Manhattan Community  
Board 4

Edward S. Kirkland  
Co-Chair  
Landmarks Committee

John D. Lamb  
Co-Chair  
Landmarks Committee

CC: applicant