

April 6, 2005

Chair Amanda Burden
New York City Planning Commission
22 Reade Street
New York, NY 10007

Re: Support for High Line in West Chelsea Rezoning

Dear Chair Burden,

The AIA New York Chapter, the founding Chapter of the American Institute of Architects, which represents nearly 4,000 architects, professional affiliates, and public members, and its Planning and Urban Design Committee strongly supports the New York City Department of City Planning's proposed West Chelsea rezoning. The area west of 10th Avenue in the 20's is currently zoned for manufacturing, and remains largely underutilized. As a result, it offers the entire City, as well as adjacent communities, opportunities for future development. In addition, the High Line has great potential as a civic amenity as well as providing a mechanism for future developments.

We support the proposals for modifying the zoning in parts of this area to accept residential development, along with a general up-zoning in those areas through transfer of air rights from the property underlying the High Line. This innovative mechanism will provide an opportunity for much needed residential growth that will integrate affordable housing and work towards alleviating the housing shortage throughout New York City. We feel that leveraging the value of the High Line itself, along with its air rights as the mechanism to accomplish this, is a valuable strategy. New urban design criteria for building bulk and height should ensure that new development is appropriately inserted, providing accessibility and sunlight to the High Line open space corridor and maintaining the area's scale where it abuts the adjacent historic district. .

The AIA initially reviewed the city's plans for this neighborhood in the fall, and we made a number of specific comments about them at that time.

In the interim, the plans have evolved and improved, answering many of our concerns. There are still a few technical areas to address that we will discuss in a separate letter. However, this in no way detracts from our full support for the plan, both in concept and in execution.

Preserving the High Line as a valuable historic resource brings open space to an area of the city that is sorely lacking in that sort of amenity. It will bring both market rate and affordable housing and development to an underutilized part of the city, and it will contribute to the long term economic health of the city as a whole.

Sincerely,

Susan Chin, FAIA
President, AIA New York Chapter

Rick Bell, FAIA
Executive Director