

TERI FRIEDMAN & BABAK YAGMAIE
16 EAST 71ST STREET
NEW YORK, NY 10021

Chair Meenakshi Srinivasan
NYC Landmarks Preservation Commission
David N. Dinkins Municipal Building
1 Center Street, Ninth Floor North
New York, NY 10007

Dear Chair Srinivasan,

As a third generation of owners and residents of 16 East 71st Street, which neighbors the wondrous Frick Collection, we write to express our deep disappointment and vehement objection to the plans submitted by the Frick's current management to once again undertake an expansion plan borne out of commercial intent at the expense of the integrity, and historic and cultural architectural significance, of the Frick Collection.

Bigger is not better.

Expansion plans, even when carefully and meticulously veiled behind a slick, high-dollar public relations campaign with a pretense for the advancement of the arts, education and accessibility, must be closely scrutinized and examined to assess whether the expansion plans, in and of themselves, do more harm than good by denigrating the historic landmark structure that is at the core of why the Frick Collection is widely viewed as a "jewel" within the New York City landscape.

We implore the Commission to carefully examine the underlying expansion plans and recognize the self-necessitated and gratuitous desire to enlarge the museum's operational and commercial footprint at the expense of one of our city's most cherished landmarks.

In your examination, you should be aware of the fact that despite the public relations campaign and the pretense about community engagement and interaction, these plans were in fact prepared behind closed doors without any consultation within the neighborhood and are being marshaled through a

hurried and carefully managed process that is not intended to garner input in a collaborative conversation with neighbors and those across the city that care deeply about the Frick Collection. Instead, it is abundantly clear that the management of the Frick has devised a clever tactical plan to spring these new plans on its neighbors and to rush the approval process through as expeditiously as possible to avoid the need to assimilate input from the engaged community beyond its own Board.

Having said that and without having had the benefit of being provided with sufficient amount of information and plans to be informed of many of the details that are in fact critical to an informed view on the Frick's presented plans, there are a number of alarming components within the plans as presented that form the basis of our vehement objection and we would respectfully implore you to lay greater focus upon.

The Garden

First, the grotesque expansion of the Frick Art Reference Library (FARL), which, as a whole, transmutes the Frick's architectural magnificence into the shape of a poorly-conceived, layer cake of expanded edifice upon edifice that lacks any true coherence within the original architectural design of the building. The original architects of the museum would surely shudder at the Lego-like growth of the building in differing directions in a manner that reduces the magnificence and significance of the original structure.

Setting aside the overall incoherence introduced to the original structure by the proposed FARL plans, the destruction of the historic garden's north wall and its tree-filled planters through the expansion of the building's footprint and a towering façade further into the coveted garden space, is nothing short of a complete disregard for the architectural designs that render the gardens so magical. In other words, the plans make it very clear that current design team views the gardens as "outdoor space" and not an intricately designed garden that creates a sense of space and openness beyond its four corners by taking advantage of differing geometries to create a sensation of depth that renders the current Frick garden so magical and not simply an "outdoor green box." The intrusion created by the expansion of a unitary wall that will rise squarely up from the edge of the gardens, marked by modern windows will absolutely obliterate the landmarked beauty, serenity and magic of the gardens. Yes, the students in the classrooms (assuming that these rooms are ultimately used as classrooms and not social halls rented out

for revenue generation) will have magnificent views of the gardens but the general public, looking northward on to the gardens will forever lose the sense of a grand, textured garden that creates the illusion of depth much greater than its geographic boundaries. Again, we implore you to reject the destruction of the garden by permitting the expansion of the FARL in the manner presented.

The Connecting Building

Similarly, the proposed “new building” atop the “music room” that will connect the Frick Collection to FARL (and which is described as being 70 feet high) with its modern, “glass walkways” is not only entirely out of character with the existing landmark architecture, but also will cover many of the building’s original windows. It is not conceivable how such a proposed edifice is in keeping with the spirit of maintaining the building’s landmark beauty.

Second Floor Passageway

The notion of a second floor passageway, with views into the gardens by meandering visitors eating ice cream cones (more on proposed café below) is so out of touch with the history and heritage of the Frick Collection that it leaves one speechless. Setting aside the absolute intrusion into the architectural integrity and serenity of both the 70th street façade to the gardens, and the gardens themselves, by the building of a walkway atop the west-facing façade, the plan highlights the proposal’s failure to deeply appreciate the architectural integrity of the current structure and the intent of the museum’s founder, Henry Frick, to invite guests into his “home” to see a small collection. The Frick Collection was never intended to be a commercial museum, whose structural and landmark integrity would be compromised in the name of furthering the museumgoer experience. In fact, a thoughtful view could very well suggest that these changes ultimately alter the museumgoer experience in a manner that is well outside of, and entirely inconsistent with, what the Frick Collection is and was intended to convey.

Proposed Café

Last but not least objective element of the proposal is the creation of a café. The notion that the Frick’s management would entertain a plan in which much of the building and much sought after space would be used for a

commercial food business is outrageous at best. Again, the entire idea that the Frick needs to be in the food business and to provide its patrons with drink and food is so antithetical to the history and heritage of the Frick that it leaves one aghast in wonderment around management's insights and intentions. If space is so scarce that it merits a proposal in which the north wall of the garden is to be demolished, then should such precious space really be used for a café? It defied good sense.

Lastly, management's cries for additional space and a desire to undertake a massive capital expenditure for incremental additional space rings hollow given the lack of any compelling presentations and materials on space efficiencies that can be introduced into the Frick's operations, including locating certain non-core assets and people in offsite locations, as well as the refusal to carefully consider the available additional space at a fraction of the proposed costs by acquiring the abutting vacant building at 11 East 70th Street that is currently on the market for sale.

In closing, we sincerely hope that the Commission will undertake a more careful and thorough analysis of the plans submitted. While couched in public relations niceties, unfortunately, the proposals in their current form will do irreparable harm to one of New York City's most cherished institutions and will forever destroy many of the Frick's most vaunted and prized architectural landmarks in the vainglorious pursuit of expansion for the sake of expansion; and not in pursuit of true artistic betterment.

As such, we urge the Commission to reject the submitted plans.

Sincerely,

Teri Friedman & Babak Yaghmaie