

May 8, 2003

Iris Weinshall  
Commissioner  
Department of Transportation  
40 Worth Street  
New York, New York 10013

Jean Parker Phifer, AIA  
President  
Art Commission  
City Hall  
New York, New York 10007

**Re: Petition for DOT Revocable Consent and Application to Art Commission for Installation of Sidewalk Bollards at AOL Time Warner Center, 10 Columbus Circle, Manhattan (Art Commission #21440)**

Dear Ms. Weinshall and Ms. Phifer:

We are grateful to the Art Commission for delaying action on this matter to allow for the proposed installation of sidewalk bollards at the AOL Time Warner Center to be presented to the public. The Clinton Land Use and Zoning Committee of Manhattan Community Board No. 4 held a public meeting on the matter on April 22, 2003, which was attended by approximately 45 members of the public.

At the Committee's request, presentations were made by representatives of the building owner, Columbus Centre LLC, and its architects, Skidmore, Owings and Merrill, concerning the bollards and concerning vehicular and pedestrian circulation matters.

### **Design and Placement of Sidewalk Bollards**

At the meeting, SOM presented its design for sidewalk bollards and their placement around the site perimeter. The bollards, according to the owner, are necessary as protection against terrorist attack from a motor vehicle. This conclusion was based on the advice of the owner's security consultant and insurer.

The AOL Time Warner building will contain various components: offices, residential apartments, a shopping mall, a grocery store, concert space, a hotel and a media company. The

media company component and the overall prominence of the building are apparently the justification for placing bollards around the perimeter of the entire building.

The bollards will be 30 inches tall, 12 inches in diameter, and spaced on 5-foot centers. Along West 60<sup>th</sup> Street, Broadway and West 58<sup>th</sup> Street, they will be placed 18 inches from the curb, and along Columbus Circle they will follow the line of trees closest to the building. The bollards will consist of steel tubes embedded in the sidewalk, covered by a decorative metal cover painted a warm gray color. The architect characterized the design as “subdued,” and “intended to recede” against the background of the building and the sidewalk. Public comment at the meeting generally concurred with this assessment; if these bollards are necessary, a subdued and receding design is the best alternative.

We take the threat of terrorism in Manhattan seriously, and we recognize that the security concerns at this location are real. At the same time, we are concerned that the monotonous lines of bollards around the building’s perimeter (86 in a row along 58<sup>th</sup> Street, for example) will effectively create a fence separating the building from passersby, rather than inviting them in. We do not think that “Fortress New York” or “Fortress Columbus Circle” is the image that a vibrant and open city and a remarkable new building would wish to project. We are discouraged that so much public open space on the sidewalks around the building will be lost to the essentially private purpose of protecting the building. And, we wonder whether the owner’s security needs could have been more creatively satisfied by using potential sidewalk amenities such as planters, benches, mailboxes, newsboxes and more trees in place of some of the bollards.

We are being asked to accept the need for the bollards on the basis of the private advice of the owner’s security consultant. For understandable reasons, this advice has not been held up to public scrutiny. But we wonder whether an independent adviser would have concluded that less oppressive measures could have satisfied the owner’s security needs.

For these reasons, we cannot endorse the installation of the proposed bollards, but, considering the urgency of the present applications and the importance of the underlying security concerns, we do not oppose the applications. We do, however, request that particular attention be given to the spacing of the bollards at crosswalks; they should be spaced far enough from the edges of all crosswalk landings so that they are not hazardous to the visually impaired or people in wheelchairs.

Security measures such as these appear to be becoming a fact of life in many parts of Manhattan. We urge the City agencies with overlapping jurisdiction over our sidewalks – the Department of Transportation, the Art Commission and the Department of City Planning – to work together to establish design guidelines for bollards and other sidewalk security measures that encourages their integration with other street furniture and ensures that aesthetic decisions related to sidewalk security are made logically and not out of irrational fear.

### **Traffic and Pedestrian Circulation Matters**

Pedestrian and vehicular traffic issues related to the AOL Time Warner building were presented and received extensive public comment. These included traffic flow and the provisions for buses, taxis, private and black cars (hired cars and limousines) to drop off, wait for and pick up

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the employees, clients, guests, shoppers, residents, service providers and other visitors at the AOL Time Warner offices and residential apartments on 58<sup>th</sup> Street, the hotel on West 60<sup>th</sup> Street, the Jazz at Lincoln Center entrance on Columbus Circle, and the various entry points to the project's retail components. The drop-offs, waiting and pick-ups must be choreographed so as not to impede traffic flow or make unbearable the lives of nearby residents on West 58<sup>th</sup> and West 60<sup>th</sup> Streets. We have the following suggestions and requests:

- Routine black car queuing (i.e., the cars that come on a regular schedule) should use space in the parking garage as much as possible.
- We have previously been assured that the bus stop at Columbus Circle and Eighth Avenue, which has been temporarily eliminated to allow Columbus Centre LLC to complete site work in the area, will be restored. This bus stop is heavily used by area residents and will be even more heavily used when the new building is open. The temporary elimination should not become permanent.
- Traffic to and from the hotel on West 60<sup>th</sup> Street must be efficiently managed. We will be seeking a meeting with the hotel manager to discuss this important issue, and request DOT's participation at that meeting.
- Aggressive traffic enforcement may be necessary, and the area should be closely monitored for traffic and parking violations.
- As always, local parking regulations should not be changed without public review.
- Making 58<sup>th</sup> Street a 2-way street, which was suggested in the EIS for the project, strikes us as problematic, and must be carefully considered and subject to ample public review if it is to be implemented.
- We will welcome the opportunity to work with DOT, Columbus Centre LLC and the building's tenants to manage traffic issues that arise as the building becomes occupied.

Sincerely,



Simone Sindin

Chair

Manhattan Community Board No. 4



Anna Hayes Levin

Chair

Clinton Land Use & Zoning Committee

This letter was approved at the May 7, 2003 full board meeting of Manhattan Community Board No. 4.

cc: Amanda Burden, DCP  
Doug Woodward, DCP  
Margaret Forgione, Manhattan Borough Commissioner, DOT  
Bruce Warwick, Columbus Centre LLC  
Elise Wagner, Paul Hastings  
NYPD – Midtown North PP and 13<sup>th</sup> PP  
Local Elected Officials  
CB5  
CB7