Historic District Committee

Park Slope Civic Council

P.O. Box 172

123 Seventh Avenue

Brooklyn, New York 11215

July 30, 2015

Hon. Meenakshi Srinivasan, Chair

NYC Landmarks Preservation Commission

1 Centre Street, 9th Floor

New York, New York 10007

Re: 187-191 Prospect Park West, aka 496 – 498 14th Street, and 192-194 Prospect Park West

Dear Ms. Srinivasan:

I am submitting this letter with regard to the design of the Pavilion Theater and the adjacent new building at the above-referenced locations.

While the plans advanced by Hidrock Properties will maintain a historical use by retaining the movie screens in the base of the building, I have serious concerns regarding the design of the new building that will face Bartel Pritchard Square and of the rooftop addition to the theater building.

When the Landmarks Preservation Commission designated the Park Slope Historic District Extension in April 2012, the commission pointedly characterized the west side of the square as an important entry portal into the neighborhood. For that reason, any new construction on the site of the non-contributing one-story building, formerly the Circles restaurant, should complement the existing context of the square. Unfortunately, the Morris Adjmi Architects’ design is not a sensitive addition to the square and would significantly detract from its role as a formal gateway into the Park Slope Historic District Extension.

At the Community Board 6’s Landmarks and Land Use Committee hearing on July 23rd, the development team described the new building as being contextual with other limestone buildings in the Park Slope Historic District. However, the building site bears no contextual relation to its Bartel Pritchard Square location, which should be the proper context for the design of the new building.

The existing three residential buildings on Bartel Pritchard Square form a cohesive ensemble, which was recognized by the LPC in their inclusion in the extension of the historic district. They have a uniform height, a pronounced cornice at the same elevation, facades with a warm brick color, horizontal accent courses throughout their façades that tie them together and accentuate the curved street walls, bases with well defined ground floors, and windows that are “punched” into extensive masonry facades.

By contrast, the proposed new building is taller than these three buildings and its design would be more appropriate to a Soho setting than to the square. It has no horizontal accent courses and its oversized windows relegate its masonry façade to thin vertical and horizontal elements. Further, the belt line that meets the cornice line of the existing buildings is no match to their pronounced cornices and is the only horizontal feature of the building. The top of the new building is not accentuated in either form or color to establish a defined cornice.

The ground floor windows on the new building create large voids and do not harmonize well with the richly textured bases of the existing residential buildings. Its ground floor is more suited to a contemporary commercial building than to making a visual contribution to the square as a formal entry to the neighborhood. This objective would be better served by more strongly defining the base and reducing the size of the ground floor windows.

Finally, the fifth story is out-of-context with the adjacent buildings and should be eliminated altogether. This change would enable the Pavilion Theater to be more visually prominent rather than being overshadowed by the new building from the perspective of the square.

I would also urge the Commission to carefully consider two features of the theater building. The marquee is a signature feature of the building, and as such, should be historically sensitive to the building’s original marquee. In addition, the penthouse addition to the theater deserves to be properly studied along with site lines and potential materials in order to create a stronger relationship with the “cohesive ensemble” of the square and to be more appropriately related to the Pavilion structure without detracting from either.

I appreciate the opportunity to share my concerns with the Commission to achieve a design that is more appropriate to the existing buildings on Bartel Pritchard Square in form, height, and materials.

Sincerely,

Peter L. Bray

Chair, Historic District Committee

Park Slope Civic Council