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**Statement of Council Member Daniel R. Garodnick
Certificate of Appropriateness Application for 980 Madison Avenue
Landmarks Preservation Commission
June 17, 2008**

Chairman Tierney and members of the Landmarks Preservation Commission, thank you for the opportunity to testify on the certificate of appropriateness application for the Parke-Bernet building located at 980 Madison Avenue.

I represent the East Side of Manhattan, including the site of the Parke-Bernet building. This building sits within the borders of the Upper East Side Historic District and the Madison Avenue Preservation Special District. The area's distinct sense of place therefore is protected by both landmark regulations and zoning laws. According to the City Planning Commission, the purpose of the Special District is to "preserve and reinforce the unique character of Madison Avenue."¹ Alterations of buildings are allowed, but they must meet stringent standards and preserve the historic integrity of the surrounding neighborhood. In that vein, I have several concerns about the application before you.

First, I fear that the enlargement will overwhelm the original design of the Parke-Bernet building, and set an unwelcome precedent for significant rooftop additions in this protected district. Generally, the Landmarks Preservation Commission has permitted only minimal rooftop additions to landmark buildings. This allows for the protection and preservation of the existing composition of these buildings. In specific circumstances, however, this Commission has made more significant allowances where the design enlargement was significantly set back and was not highly visible from the street. Madison Avenue is only 80 feet wide and therefore sensitive to the addition of significant bulk to any building along the Avenue. Whether this is considered a rooftop addition or simply a new building, the appropriate size for such a structure should continue to be significantly limited with enough of a setback to allow the original character and design of the building to remain intact from the street view.

Second, the proposed materials like glass and bronze are not congruous with the stone and brick materials of other buildings in the area. The use of these materials will

¹ New York City Department of City Planning, ZONING HANDBOOK (New York, NY, 2006); 78.

stand out even more because of the bulk of the addition, which will create a solid wall along the entire block with no setback to offset the additional height.

Finally, I ask that you remember that you are not comparing this proposal to the 355 foot modern glass tower previously proposed and rejected by this Commission. That building obviously did not respect the aesthetics and historical nature of the neighborhood and Upper East Side Historic District. While in contrast to the original proposal, this is indeed an improvement; we are not comparing the two proposals here. Rather, you are considering only the single proposal before you — and this proposal doubles the size of a landmark building, uses materials that are not congruous with the district, and does not have any setback from the street. Those are the factors to be considered here.

Last night, the Landmarks Committee of Community Board 8 disapproved this application by a vote of 6-2. The Committee did, however, unanimously approve the portion of the application that will restore the Parke-Bernet building to its original form. I would like to join the Community Board in recognizing the applicant's commitment to the historic preservation of this site.

I am the first to appreciate that a historic district is not supposed to be a "museum town," and that there is no *per se* rule against vertical building additions in a historic district. In fact, change can be welcome in historic districts in order to allow them to remain vital. Nevertheless, when new development is proposed in a historic district, we must take great care to ensure that the distinct character of the building and our neighborhood is preserved. I encourage you to modify this proposal in a reasonable fashion to allow for some development to proceed, but to keep it in sync with the district that surrounds it.

Thank you for consideration of my views.