

General Theological Seminary Plan to Begin Approval Process

by Andrew Berman, CRDC Member

As we go to press, the General Theological Seminary (GTS) has announced plans to file its application on December 22nd to demolish the current Ninth Avenue building and replace it with a 15-story building, and to build a new five-story building on 20th Street. This means it is likely that the first public hearings on the plan will be held in committee at Community Board in late January (check www.manhattancb4.org/calendar.html), with a vote by the full Board in early February. GTS' plan would have to be approved by the Landmarks Preservation Commission, the City Planning Commission and the City Council, all of which would have hold public hearings. To see an image of the proposed developments go to www.savetheseminary.org/project/description/, a website of a group supporting the development.

There is much at stake in this project, which has gained considerable attention, much of it negative, from the Chelsea community. The plan needs two basic kinds of approvals; one for new development in the Chelsea Historic District, and one to allow the proposed Ninth Avenue building to exceed by more than 100% the 75-ft. height limit for this area prescribed by the Chelsea Plan, a community-initiated zoning plan. Neighbors fought very hard to get the Chelsea Historic District enacted in 1970 (and expanded in 1981) and to get the Chelsea Plan enacted in 1999. Since then Chelsea has seen an almost-unprecedented wave of new development, almost all of it luxury housing, much of it facilitated by rezonings

which encouraged new large-scale, high-rise luxury development. Even the preservation-oriented Chelsea Plan included some of these "upzonings" at the insistence of the City, in exchange for these few zoning protections for this central part of Chelsea which the GTS plan falls within.

This application will no doubt be watched closely not only by Chelsea residents but by groups citywide concerned about the precedent this project may set. GTS is seeking to utilize an obscure provision in city zoning which allows developers to get waivers from zoning requirements by claiming they are helping to preserve landmarked buildings; this provision has recently been used to get approval for a high-rise on the Upper West Side and is being used to seek permission for 30-story glass towers on Madison Avenue on the Upper East Side.

Here's How To Start The New Year Right

**FLASH! SEE LAST
PARAGRAPH FOR LATEST!**

From Friday's *New York Times*, "...421—a tax program was started in the 1970's to spur housing of all sorts."

I clearly remember the 1970s and '80s when homeless population was soaring and landlords were using

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GENERAL MEETING

THURSDAY, JANUARY 18, 2007

7:00 P.M.

Hudson Guild, 441 West 26th Street
Between 9th and 10th Avenues

AGENDA:

Guest: Speaker of the City
Council Christine Quinn

Annual Meeting and Election of Club Officers and Executive Committee

The following people have been nominated:

President: Steven Skyles-Mulligan
Executive Vice President: Marvin Kohl
2nd Vice President: Lynn Kotler
Treasurer: Paul Groncki
Recording Secretary: Marc Krasnow
Corresponding Secretary: Linda Longstreet
Members-at-Large: Maarten de Kadt,
Tim Gay, Dan Gettleman, Luke McAuliffe,
Carla Nordstrom, Judy Richheimer,
Elyce Roberts, Lee Sinovoi, Jay Stockman,
Steve Kolodny, Gloria Sukenick

Further nominations will be taken from
the floor for uncontested offices.

Please note: in order to vote, your 2007 dues must be paid. 2006 members may pay at the January meeting. New members – and those who were members in previous years — must have been a member in good standing for 30 days prior to the meeting in order to vote.

MARCH ON WASHINGTON

Join United for Peace and Justice for a massive march on Washington to ask congress to act to end the war and bring our troops home NOW. SATURDAY, JANUARY 27, 2007. See website or call for more information:

www.unitedforpeace.org / 212.868.5545

For information from local groups call
Estelle Katz of Chelsea for Peace at
212.727-1871, or Chelsea United Against
the War at 212.726.1385 /
www.chelseaneighborsunited.org.

Here's How To Start The New Year Right

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the most egregious—not to mention illegal—methods to empty apartments. There's always been an assumption that if you build enough housing, market pressures acting alone will increase the amount of affordable units. To me it's obvious that this assumption is false. In Chelsea, one looks around to see "luxury" units rising up one after the other and long-time residents disappearing. New stores are replacing small neighborhood businesses and offering items available only to those with hefty bank accounts and very high end tastes.

Finally there's an opportunity to get the affordable housing we need in our gentrifying neighborhoods. Let's not blow it; support Intro 490, the Palma bill. This proposed legislation calls for 30% of new development to be affordable to families earning no more than 50% of the median income (family of four earning up to \$35,000 a year) in order to qualify for the 421-a tax break. That housing must be at the site, not in some distant neighborhood, and must remain *permanently* affordable. We should have learned something from the displacement produced by privatized Mitchell/Lama developments that have exacerbated the housing crisis.

Those 421-a tax breaks should be related to community benefit and address the dire shortage of affordable housing. As it stands, developers would surely make a substantial profit without the tax incentive. Those tax dollars now being made available to developers of market rate housing could be used to create affordable housing. Councilmember Palma's bill offers a real opportunity. Let's not waste it. Support the bill that offers some real hope of sustaining neighborhoods and building the housing needed by low and moderate income families

FLASH... here's the scoop. Wednesday 12/20 the City Council voted on the reform of the 421-a tax abatement program. The bill that passed was based on one sponsored by Speaker Christine Quinn. Although this was substantially better than the Mayor's plan, it did not go as far as the Palma bill. Fortunately, however, through the amendment process, the Palma bill did create some improvements in the Quinn bill. Now the next push will be at the state level; because of Urstadt, the state will have the final say. If we're organized we can push for even more of an opportunity for the development of affordable housing.

Gloria Sukenik, CRDC Housing Chair

New Year, New Faces, New Initiatives and New Roles

I always have a sense that the New Year presents an opportunity to do some things differently and, I hope, better. I don't go so far as to make resolutions, but I do spend some time thinking about what I want to be better in the coming year, and I make a new set of goals for my business.

At CRDC for the past couple of years, we have had a tradition of each incoming Executive Committee designating some things it wants to work on, as well as reviewing last year's list. We will do that again this year and share the lists. I expect to say major pushes in the areas of new member recruitment and communications, and perhaps an interesting new approach to programming. I also expect to see some new faces on the Executive Committee and in the club's offices. These include Marc Krasnow, who stepped up to the plate and agreed to run for the essential (but largely thankless) post of Recording Secretary, and Lynne Kotler who is running for Second Vice President. It's always exciting to see new people get involved or to see people get involved in new ways.

As new people get more involved, people who have been involved move on to focus on other things or to contribute in different ways. I want to thank three people in particular who fall into this category. Carla Nordstrom has been an extraordinary Recording Secretary for the past two years, helping us stay focused on what we are trying to do and lighting a fire under the club from time to time when we get too deliberative. Katharine Roberts has been a member of the Executive Committee for many years and a tremendous confidential advisor to me over the past four years. Luke McAuliffe has brought a lot of energy and fresh perspective to the club in the past few years, and has been indispensable as Second Vice President, a role that other commitments has led him to relinquish. Fortunately, all three of these individuals have agreed to continue serving in other ways; Katharine will continue serving as Chair of the Health Committee and both Carla and Luke are candidates for at-large seats on the Executive Committee. Please join me in thanking all of them for the work they have done.

While you're at it, why not think about what you can do? Drop me a line and let me know; the club needs you!

Happy New Year!

Steven Skyles-Mulligan, CRDC President