

Citizens For Union Square

A Voice For the Concerned Public

Testimony before the Art Commission of the City of New York on 15 MAY 2006 on the proposals by the Department of Parks and Recreation for the reconstruction of the North End of Union Square in Manhattan.

Madam President and Members of the Art Commission:

Regarding the additional three rows of trees in the current Proposal: the ever-increasing visual din and over-commercialization of the visual environment in the area surrounding Union Square, mandate that as much space as possible be left OPEN between the boundary of the Public Place and the raised landscape of the Park.

Such open space provides a critically important VISUAL TRANSITION ZONE between Union Square Park and the surrounding City. The Park can then be felt and appreciated as the unique visual oasis that it is.

Approached from Broadway, additional trees along the North Plaza at 17th Street would confuse the northwest entrance and obscure the sense of the Park within the Public Place.

By partially obscuring the top of the Pavilion, the proposed trees to the north would detract from its design, would undermine the visual grandeur of the trees beyond, and DISTORT THE VISUAL RELATIONSHIP among the North Plaza, the Pavilion, and the Park. The proposed trees would constrain the extraordinary architectural lighting deserved by THIS MOST PUBLIC OF PUBLIC PLACES.

An experience in Germany is relevant to this discussion. When in Munich, I came across the square and platform where Hitler made speeches. The site is maintained but has NOT been embellished with trees. One feels the seriousness of the place, one hears echoes of awful words spoken and one is immediately struck by the fact that full light has been allowed to shine on this dark place.

Places speak to us of their import and history through their design and maintenance. We need to listen to such places -- for it is our history, it defines who we were -- and our actions determine who we are. The design here should speak to our sense of pride in our history of OPENNESS, in this LANDMARKED place, and not use trees to obscure or beautify that which in itself is beautiful.

On Behalf of Citizens For Union Square,

Ross M. Horowitz
206 W 15th Street
New York, NY 10011
T: 212.206.9216 e: rmhorowitz@nyc.rr.com