

Straphangers' Campaign / NYPIRG
Transportation Alternatives • Tri-State Transportation Campaign

Office of Manhattan Borough President Scott M. Stringer
1 Centre Street, 19th Floor
New York, NY 10007

April 26, 2010

Dear Borough President Stringer,

We request that the Riverside Center residential project (from 59th to 61st Streets) follow the principles of a sustainable, transit-oriented development to promote the health of its future residents and of our neighborhood in general. The project is currently under consideration for certification by the New York City Department of City Planning.

In particular, automotive use and storage should be carefully calibrated to ensure a clean air environment and conform to the Active Building guidelines recently adopted by the New York City Department of City Planning, the Department of Health, the Department of Transportation, the Department of Design and Construction, and the Department of Buildings.

The site's developer, Extell Corporation, is requesting a total of 1,800 parking spaces for a 2,500-residence complex – 1,200 spaces for use by site residents and visitors and 600 for public parking. However, all 1,800 spaces will effectively be open to the public.

A residential area with more than 2,500 residences and a school is a poor location for a commuter parking garage for the Central Business District. Further no persuasive argument has been made for why Riverside Center should add any additional parking to the current commercial supply.

With a documented decrease in car commuting from the DOT's Sustainable Streets Index 2009 and the planned Metro North station two blocks to the south, there should be ample reasons to reduce the amount of public parking rather than increase on these blocks. This is especially true since 2,600 parking spaces, all accessible to the public, have already been built north of 61st Street and at least 590 and possibly many more, exceed the demand for 875 public parking that existed south of 61st Street in 1992.

Meanwhile, the developer's projected residential parking as a ratio of spaces to apartments is 43 percent – 4.3 spaces for every 10 apartments – a 22% increase over the 35 percent zoning limit on the Upper West Side-and is far higher than existing Central Business District (below 60th Street) cap of 20 percent established to comply with the Clean Air Act and the actual district-wide (above 60th Street) ratio of 26 percent.

It is well-documented that parking supply is directly related to the level of driving. Expanding the supply of available parking spaces only induces more travel by private automobile and discourages walking. At the same time, increased car use exacts a host of indirect costs that are especially damaging to a dense urban environment like New York City. These costs include: lost productivity from traffic congestion; diseases stemming from vehicle emissions; costly crashes that result in fatalities and injuries to pedestrians, cyclists and other motorists; and environmental effects such as storm-water runoff and the urban "heat island" effect.

As our awareness of the local and global harms produced by auto dependence grows, the current parking request for Riverside Center is a throwback to a 1960's Tower in the Park design prized in a suburban and automotive-centric era of planning. Well-served as it is by public transit and within walking distance of many destinations, Riverside Center should be designed as a transit-oriented and Active Neighborhood which minimizes car trips and offers its residents and the surrounding community amenities that enrich rather than degrade the urban environment.

We encourage you to consider all of these issues when your office undertakes a full review of the Riverside South proposal.

Sincerely,

Transportation Alternatives
Tri-State Transportation Campaign
NYPIRG Straphangers Campaign

cc:
Manhattan Community Board 7
New York City Council Member Gale Brewer
New York Assembly Member Linda Rosenthal
New York State Senator Thomas Duane
New York Congressman Jerold Nadler
Extell Corporation