

December 3, 2021

Andrew Lassiter
New York City Council Land Use Division
250 Broadway, 16th Floor
New York, NY 10007

The Municipal Art Society of New York Letter in Support of the Morningside Heights Rezoning

Dear Mr. Lassiter,

The Municipal Art Society of New York (MAS) supports the Morningside Heights rezoning being proposed by the City Council Land Use Division, Manhattan Borough President Gale Brewer, and Manhattan Community Board 9. We find the Planning Study that informed the rezoning and subsequent proposal present a refreshing planning approach that empowers local stakeholders in land use deliberations and leverages the support and resources needed to develop their vision. With a new mayoral administration and City Council arriving in 2022, we hope this proposal can chart a path for how future community-led rezonings are considered.

MAS has long advocated for community-based planning. Our Livable Neighborhoods Program, engagement in comprehensive planning reform, and coverage of all City-led neighborhood rezonings under the de Blasio administration underscore the need for sound and equitable planning that prioritizes people and community needs. As the applicants begin the City Environmental Quality Review (CEQR) process together—a first for a rezoning—their work with the Morningside Heights Community Coalition (MHCC) and Council Member Mark Levine on the Planning Study points to the potential benefits posed by such collaborations.

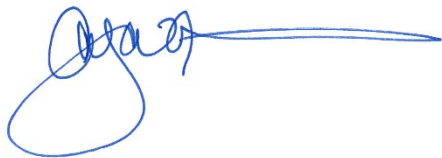
The rezoning proposal comes at an important juncture for Morningside Heights. The area has been saddled with an aging housing stock and soaring rents, luxury development pressure, storefront vacancies, and uninviting and disconnected building fronts along its major avenues. Area zoning, which has remained unchanged since 1961, does not include height limits. The Planning Study and rezoning proposal target specific and well-considered sites for increasing density, affordability, and new commercial space through the land use process. We are hopeful that this partnership will realize the community's vision for building affordable housing, protecting rent stabilized housing units, revitalizing retail, and preserving the area's character.

The next administration and City Council have the chance to reimagine the planning process in our neighborhoods. The Morningside Heights proposal also poses an early opportunity to test the recently passed Racial Impact Study legislation and to consider a neighborhood-level plan in the context of an evolving comprehensive planning agenda for New York.

This type of community-led rezoning proposal should be supported by our elected officials for its pairing of a community vision with technical support. We urge the Department of City Planning to assist the applicants in support of the proposal and, looking to the future, to facilitate similar planning efforts in all

neighborhoods. Like all applications, this proposal should get the opportunity to be reviewed under the CEQR and ULURP processes on its merits and through the guidance of public discussion and review.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Elizabeth Goldstein', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Elizabeth Goldstein
President

cc: Council Member Mark Levine; Barry Weinberg, Manhattan CB9 Chair; Signe Mortensen and Liz Waytkus, Manhattan CB9 Housing, Land Use, and Zoning Committee Co-Chairs