

January 28, 2009

Mr. Marty Markowitz
Borough President
209 Joralemon St.
Brooklyn, NY 11201

Dear Mr. Markowitz:

No 18-story building, no large, new imposing structure of any kind ought to be allowed to crowd the Brooklyn waterfront close to the Brooklyn Bridge. It would be a grave mistake. The present modest scale of the neighborhood -- the human scale of the neighborhood there beside the river -- ought never be violated, for it is essential to the dignity and grandeur of the Bridge.

Dignity and grandeur are rare in the modern cityscape. And rare, too, is the prestige of history. And when all of that is present in one majestic, emblematic work, as it is so supremely in the Brooklyn Bridge, nothing should be permitted to diminish and compromise the effect.

Nor should the consequences of what is at stake be seen as a regional matter, the business of Brooklyn only. The Brooklyn Bridge belongs to all America. It has been photographed and filmed more than any structure ever built in our country. It has been the subject of epic poetry, and of great art. It is itself a great work of art, as well as a technical triumph, the moon shot of the nineteenth century.

The Brooklyn Bridge rises up out of a troubled, extravagant, often greedy and self-indulgent era not unlike our own, as ringing testimony to human ingenuity and the human spirit.

Brooklyn's Bridge is our bridge, all of us. It is a national treasure and we must do our parts as custodians. Please, please let us take this responsibility to heart.

Nothing should be permitted to upstage it, or needlessly crowd its space. Would we wish to see an 18-story building go up beside the Statue of Liberty? Or Independence Hall? Or the Lincoln Memorial?

In his initial proposal for the Bridge, written in 1867, the brilliant John A. Roebling, its designer, said that the finished work would stand down the years as a testament to the community that built it. That was 142 years ago. And there the bridge stands today, just as he said, a testament to those who built it.

Let what is decided now, in the year 2009, be a testament of our appreciation for this rarest of structures, the gratitude we feel as we enjoy it, the pride we take in it.

None of us had a hand in building it. None of us contributed a thing to its architectural grandeur or its pioneering technology. None of us were injured in the effort, or suffered from the bends for our labors beneath the river, or died in accidents. They did all that, those men and women of that vanished time. And they built superbly. They set an example of how things can be done right. They built to last.

We honor and respect them and their surpassing Brooklyn Bridge and let the decisions we make stand as testament to the larger community of our own time that loves the old Bridge as no other in the land.

Sincerely,

David McCullough