



The Cloisters and Palisades

New York and New Jersey, United States of America

The Cloisters Museum and Gardens are situated high above the Hudson River in New York City's Fort Tryon Park, with magnificent, unobstructed views of the Palisades, the river, the George Washington Bridge, and the park. The land was given by John D. Rockefeller Jr. to the Metropolitan Museum of Art, along with the funding needed to establish the Cloisters Museum and Gardens in 1925. With the gift, Mr. Rockefeller explicitly sought to preserve this significant cultural landscape and viewshed. Each year thousands of visitors, including over 10,000 schoolchildren, make the trek to northern Manhattan to experience the Cloisters and its rare panorama of the Hudson River and the Palisades greenway.

The Cloisters Museum itself houses the Metropolitan Museum of Art's collection of European medieval art and incorporates monastic architectural elements in its design including stone and stained-glass panels for the doors, and windows. Since its opening in 1938, a defining feature of visiting the Cloisters is an extraordinary vista across the Hudson River to the Palisades. Plans are underway to construct a corporate headquarters and a residential complex on the New Jersey side of the Hudson River, modifying zoning legislation to accommodate towers that rise above the once protected tree line of the Palisades. Proponents of the project have sought to emphasize the economic and environmental benefits of the new development, especially job creation and energy efficiency. But there are significant social costs that have not been adequately considered in the debate. These zoning modifications will alter the landscape and viewshed of the Palisades and will potentially set a precedent for more municipalities to build above the tree line. A coalition of community groups and conservation organizations concerned with the loss of this important natural and cultural resource filed suit to curb the proposed building height, but the court has allowed the development to move forward. An appeal is underway, and it is hoped that inclusion on the Watch will raise awareness about the loss to future generations posed by this development and others that may follow.