

LANDMARK WEST!

THE COMMITTEE TO PRESERVE THE UPPER WEST SIDE

West End Avenue Historic District
Testimony for Community Board 7
Thursday, May 8, 2008

LANDMARK WEST! is a not-for-profit community organization committed to the preservation of the architectural heritage of the Upper West Side.

We would like to voice our strong support for the research and advocacy for a historic district centering on West End Avenue.

Landmark West! already takes a keen interest in at least two sections of the West End Avenue corridor that are not already designated, but are on our Wish List of landmark designation priorities. For the past several years, we have been studying the area between 96th and 110th Streets bounded by Riverside Drive and Broadway. The rise and fall of this corridor's large apartment buildings, houses of worship, educational institutions and private homes is a distinguishing feature and indicative of its history. Here, the buildings vividly retell the story of development from the 1880s to the 1930s.

Today, pieces of the harmonic ensemble of Riverside Drive, Broadway and their spine, West End Avenue, are in danger, their integrity potentially compromised by insensitive development. Last summer, working with volunteers from the community, Landmark West! began an intensive building-by-building, block-by-block survey of the 96th to 110th Street area. In making ourselves more aware of the architectural resources in our midst, we can be more effective and proactive in their protection. Thanks to the pavement pounding of volunteers, this initial investigation of materials, styles and conditions promises to inform us all of these remarkable architectural resources. Already, volunteers have shed light on 285 buildings, over 200 of which reside in the proposed West End Avenue Historic District. We would be pleased to share the preliminary findings of our survey project with Community Board 7, the West End Preservation Society, elected officials, and other interested members of the community.

The second West End Avenue site on our Wish List is The Hohenzollern, an apartment house at 491 West End Avenue and 84th Street, designed in 1908 by architect George F. Pelham. Our committee felt that this buildings merits Individual Landmark status, but we are also very interested in the idea of protecting it as part of a larger historic district ensemble.

Already, several Individual Landmarks exist in the vicinity of the proposed district such as West End Collegiate Church at 77th Street and West End Avenue, the Master Apartments on Riverside at 103rd Street, the imaginative Church of St. Paul and St. Andrew on West End at 86th Street, and the Red House on West 85th Street between Riverside Drive and West End Avenue. Furthermore, apartment buildings by such significant designers as George and Edward Blum and Ralph Townsend can be found on West End Avenue as well as others by the equally prolific Thom and Wilson, Clarence True, Clinton and Russell, Janes and Leo, Schwartz and Gross, and C.P.H. Gilbert on nearby Broadway and Riverside Drive. An expanded, more inclusive, West End Avenue Historic District would weave all of these buildings together into one powerful, comprehensive narrative.

This neighborhood is a treasure to be protected and Landmark West! applauds the grassroots community movement taking the actions necessary to do just that.