



THE COMMITTEE TO PRESERVE THE UPPER WEST SIDE

**Testimony of LANDMARK WEST!
Certificate of Appropriateness Committee
Before the Landmarks Preservation Commission
163 West 78th Street
September 9th, 2008**

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

The Certificate of Appropriateness Committee wishes to comment on the application to construct rooftop and rear yard additions at 163 West 78th Street, a Renaissance Revival-style rowhouse with neo-Grec elements designed by Thom & Wilson and built in 1890.

The Congregation Rodeph Sholom School met with Landmark West! in July 2008 for a preliminary presentation, prior to its formal application to the Commission.

Following our July meeting, our Committee provided Rodeph Sholom with feedback which we hoped would be helpful in guiding the continuing development of the project. To our knowledge, there have been no changes to the proposal since that time, neither incorporating our comments nor turning in another direction. That said, we offer again many of the same suggestions already received by Rodeph Sholom.

First, the positives:

Rooftop Addition

Sightline studies and photodocumentation of a physical mockup confirm our understanding that the additions to the school will not be visible from the street.

Impact on the Rear Yard

Since the school also owns and operates the neighboring property immediately to the north, our Committee concluded that the proposed community-facility encroachment will most likely have a discrete and minimal impact on the integrity of the larger rear yard “doughnut.” We also understand that the design will incorporate extensive greenery to compensate for the “filling in” of the rearyard open space.

Front Façade Restoration

We commend Rodeph Sholom’s intention to restore the front façade of this 1890 Thom & Wilson rowhouse. Replacing the existing vinyl windows with new ones in wood is a positive change and will bring the rowhouse closer to its historic character.



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A few points remain, however, which we feel could benefit from additional reflection. One of our Committee members, an architect whose work frequently involves historic structures, questioned the appropriateness of the window moldings' profile. In addition, the color of the windows should be verified through paint analysis of the historic brick molds, rather than looking to replacement aluminum window colors as an example.

Curtain Wall Design

The proposal for the rear façade of both Rodeph Sholom's existing facilities as well as their newly acquired rowhouse property continues to give us pause. Lacking adequate photodocumentation, it has not yet been established if any significant architectural features would be lost from the rear façade of the rowhouse structure. In addition, our request to see fully developed details for the design of the glass curtain wall was not met, and because the appropriateness of this feature ultimately depends on its execution, our Committee continues to have reservations about this aspect of the proposal.

Physical Maintenance

One telling photograph in Rodeph Sholom's July presentation raised questions among our Committee members about the school's long-term maintenance plans for its site. The photograph showed the streaked and stained concrete/stucco rear façade of the existing school building on West 78th Street. Cleaning and repair of the existing building should be included within the scope of the renovation and new construction project. Rodeph Sholom also needs to create and budget for an ongoing maintenance plan for the entire facility.

Glass curtain walls and greenery—hallmarks of the current proposal—rely especially on meticulous upkeep and cannot be considered the right solution for this site unless Rodeph Sholom makes maintenance a priority.

In revisiting this and the additional points noted by LANDMARK WEST!, we believe that Rodeph Sholom can continue in the right direction towards a wholly appropriate design.