



THE COMMITTEE TO PRESERVE THE UPPER WEST SIDE

**Testimony of LANDMARK WEST!
Certificate of Appropriateness Committee
Before the Landmarks Preservation Commission
190 Riverside Drive
October 21st, 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 a rooftop addition on this Beaux-Arts style apartment building designed by Townsend, Steinle & Haskell and built in 1909-10.

The powerful and distinguished cornice that crowns 190 Riverside Drive is a sight to behold, and not just from the Drive itself. Visible from several vantage points within Riverside Park, this apartment building – and its projecting metal cornice, in particular – commands the attention of the thousands of New Yorkers and tourists who visit the park every day. Any changes to the top of this very public building must be weighed carefully. Any addition must also take into account not only visibility but also the hierarchy that needs to exist between the addition and the original building.

Since this project's earlier July 2007 incarnation, our Committee believes positive strides have been made, and in the right direction. Whereas the last proposal ignored the prominent cornice line and called on inappropriate architectural models for this building – namely a faux-mansard roof – the proposal before us today acknowledges the primacy of the cornice. Also, instead of forcing an outside aesthetic on this building, it is beginning to explore a new/old, past/present dialogue by using contemporary materials in a contemporary design.

While overall our Committee recognizes the improvements made here, there remain points that merit serious discussion among the Commissioners today.

Number of Stories

First, and most importantly, the number of stories allowable for a rooftop addition to this building should be limited to one at the most. At present, the applicant proposes a second floor largely for the purpose of tidying up the existing rooftop projections, such as the water tower and elevator bulkheads. By enveloping these rooftop structures inside the proposed second floor, no substance is added to the design, yet the building's character, especially as experienced from Riverside Park, would be compromised.

Over, please



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As proposed, two monolithic boxes of metal and glass would be visible atop the apartment building. While penthouses along Riverside Drive are nothing new, setting the precedent of two-story additions should not be permitted, and certainly not for buildings with such prominent locations and points of visibility.

Design

By omitting the second floor from its design plan, the applicant will discover a new range of solutions to address rooftop visibility. That the addition will be seen from Riverside Park regardless of its height is understood – the challenge is to design a structure that contributes architecturally but that is, simultaneously, secondary to the existing 1909-10 building.

Deepening the addition's setback from the cornice line is the first way to achieve this. Secondly, using the new roofline as a way to manipulate shadow would alter the nature of the rooftop's visibility. Further setting back the penthouse's glass wall as suggested would allow the roof a gracious overhang and create a shadowy illusion that the new roof was floating above the historic cornice. The long-distance read of this type of rooftop addition would be subtle yet clearly distinct.

This is a critical moment for this proposal. With input from the community and guidance from the Commission, we believe that an appropriate design is within reach.



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**Testimony of LANDMARK WEST!
Certificate of Appropriateness Committee
Before the Landmarks Preservation Commission
Apthorp Apartments
390 West End Avenue
October 21st, 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 install rooftop mechanical units and an acoustical screen on this Italian Renaissance-style apartment building, designed by Clinton and Russell and built in 1906-08.

As the *Real Estate Record and Builder's Guide* wrote in its July 4, 1908, edition, "the two features which impress one before entering the [Apthorp apartment building] are, first, its massive appearance from the street and, second, the beautiful court in the center of the site."¹ This proposal places these two seminal design components of the palatial residence at risk.

Visibility: From Broadway

The Apthorp apartment building was designed with monumentality in mind. Commanding impressive views along Broadway, the Apthorp is representative of a small handful of grand apartment houses centering on interior landscaped courtyards. Along with its comrades the Belnord, the Dakota, and the Astor Court, the Apthorp adds architectural richness to both the Upper West Side and Manhattan at-large. With such few examples of this building type in New York City, any proposals made for the Apthorp must be examined with strict scrutiny.

The silhouette of the Apthorp calls out to onlookers from ten or more blocks away. Any rooftop mechanical equipment that is visible from the public way compromises the architectural integrity of the building. As the applicant stated at the October 16th, 2008, Parks and Preservation Committee meeting of Community Board 7, the proposed cooling towers are visible along Broadway from as far South as West 71st and as far North as West 91st Street.

Because of this prominence, the placement and height of the mechanical equipment should be designed and selected with the lowest possible visibility. We recognize that the cooling towers will need to be placed on dunnage for support; this is often between two to three feet high to allow for pipe connections and maintenance. Additional height is added by steel framing and finally there is the height of the cooling tower unit itself. These combined installation factors add up to a large piece of equipment. Therefore, the applicant should look for equipment that has both a low profile and is made up of multiple smaller units rather than single larger unit.

Over, please

¹ "What a Tenant Gets for \$6,000 a Year: Conveniences in the Largest Apartment House on This Continent." *Real Estate Record and Builder's Guide*, 4 July 1908. p. 19.

Visibility: From the Interior Courtyard

Pushing the proposed cooling towers westward closer towards the courtyard is no quick-fix solution. This may mitigate the visibility of the rooftop equipment from Broadway, but it perpetuates the problem of the equipment and screen's visibility from the courtyard itself.

The courtyard is a hallmark of the Apthorp's design. A respite from the busyness of the city waiting just beyond the massive coffered archways, the garden courtyard was originally designed with "a display of horticulture that would grace a select botanical garden."² Indeed, the importance of the courtyard was not thought of as secondary but rather complimentary to the exterior character of the Apthorp. How the proposed cooling towers will affect the interior courtyard is as important as how they affect the building as it is viewed from Broadway or any other public thoroughfare.

Even when set back from the building's original parapet, two to three feet of the proposed acoustical screen would still rise above the Apthorp's parapet and be visible from the West End Avenue entrance of the Apthorp. This is inappropriate. Any additional intrusion – especially something that will become permanent – is visually polluting and a great detraction from the building's design. Screening – with trellis or various densities of mesh – often reduces cooling unit efficiency and serves to further call attention to the objects rather than disguise them.

Our Committee cannot support this proposal. It is the burden of the applicant to identify equipment that does not compromise the integrity of the building – not the burden of the public to concede a landmark's degradation. If no alternative is available, then the solution seems to present itself: cooling towers are not appropriate for the Apthorp apartment building.

² *Real Estate Record and Guide* 1908, 19.



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**Testimony of LANDMARK WEST!
Certificate of Appropriateness Committee
Before the Landmarks Preservation Commission
610 West End Avenue
October 21st, 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 install a sidewalk canopy and alter the front courtyard at 610 West End Avenue, a neo-Renaissance style apartment building designed by George & Edward Blum and built in 1910.

Two individuals connected with this application are also affiliated with LANDMARK WEST!: the project architect, Françoise Bollack, and a LANDMARK WEST! Board member. Because of their connection, neither participated in the discussion or decision making of this item.

610 West End Avenue, also known as The Evanston, is experiencing a rebirth. In 2007, the building embarked on the careful restoration of the Viennese-inspired wrought iron fence surrounding the apartment house; a project which LANDMARK WEST! honored with the Architectural Detail Restoration Award at our 2008 Preservation Awards ceremony. Now complete, the railing pays tribute to the creative prowess of its designers, George & Edward Blum. Following this impressive effort is today's proposal to replace the existing canvas canopy with a new one in metal and glass and to improve the interior courtyard by removing non-historic paving and restoring windows and vault lights.

Canopy

Our Committee commends the applicant for undertaking such deep and thoughtful research to inform this proposal. Using another Blum-designed apartment house as their guide – the Admaston, located at West 89th Street and Broadway – the applicant has designed a canopy that is sensitive to the aesthetic of George & Edward Blum as well as reflective of our own time. The canopy will be a new layer of history, distinct from and unique to the original building.

The proposed canopy is successful in several respects. First, it fulfills preservation's credo that all alterations to a historic structure should be reversible. Indeed, the canopy proposed here displays a light touch. Further, the design pays close attention to detail. The new canopy will make a subtle connection with the newly restored fence by using small rounded fasteners that connect the composite metal columns. These same details are found on the fence and provide continuity between these two architectural elements.

Realizing the new canopy in glass will open up and illuminate the interior courtyard. And finally, the proposed canopy's extension into the sidewalk has been reduced. In doing so, the sidewalk is less obstructed and reclaimed as public space.

Over, please



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Courtyard Alterations

We find the granite colored-cement paving proposed to be an appropriate replacement for the existing, non-historical terra cotta-colored pavers. The proposed treatment for the courtyard windows and vault lights is equally successful. Our Committee applauds the applicant's decision to restore rather than replace the existing windows. In addition, the glass proposed for the vault lights is an appropriate treatment for this courtyard space.



THE COMMITTEE TO PRESERVE THE UPPER WEST SIDE

**Testimony of LANDMARK WEST!
Certificate of Appropriateness Committee
Before the Landmarks Preservation Commission
312 West 88th Street
October 21st, 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 312 West 88th Street, a Flemish Revival-style rowhouse designed by Joseph H. Taft and built in 1889-90.

Architectural historian Andrew S. Dolkart has noted that the rowhouses of the Riverside – West End Historic District constitute a dynamic collection of rich texture and striking silhouettes.¹ The row of houses at 304-314 West 88th Street are excellent examples of these architectural qualities. Enlivened by stepped gables and pitched roofs, they typify the architecture of the West End area, which once had a large number of neo-Flemish rowhouses. The restoration of Number 312 will go a long way towards reunifying the houses at 304-314 West 88th Street.

Though the façade restoration of this rowhouse is not included in the proposal before us today, our Committee feels that its thoroughness and sensitivity to historical precedent merit commendation. Through exploratory probing and testing, original materials have been clearly identified and will be restored and reproduced to bring the front façade back to its historic character.

Rooftop Addition

At present, the strong roofline of 304-314 West 88th Street is interrupted by the gaping hole created by Number 312's absent roof. Though the proposed rooftop addition is clearly visible, in this instance it is appropriate. By reconstructing the pitched roof, the applicant will restore the broken roofline and Number 312.

We are pleased that the applicant proposes to layer a diamond-shaped tile rather than employ a one-dimensional roofing alternative, such as a singular expanse of metal or asphalt. As we've already noted, the texture of these rowhouses is one of their defining characteristics. The overlay of the roof tiles will again provide this rowhouse with just such a textural quality.

Over, please

¹ Andrew S. Dolkart. "Supplemental Research Material on the Proposed Riverside – West End Historic District," prepared for LANDMARK WEST!, April 1987.



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Rear Yard Addition

In light of LANDMARK WEST's ongoing concerns about rear yard encroachment, we are concerned about the significant open space in the rear yard "doughnut" that would be consumed by this proposed addition. The proposed addition restores the yard's depth to the thirty-foot minimum required by zoning by retreating four feet back. However, this is coupled with the enlargement of the extension to full-width.

The new addition constitutes the rearranging of 50 square feet and the creation of another 45 square feet – not an insignificant amount, considering the small size of this and other rowhouse rear yards. Such an addition would perpetuate the steady erosion of the historic footprint and openness of rowhouse midblock interiors. We urge the Commission to take this under careful consideration.

Regarding the design of the addition, our Committee is pleased to see much of the original building fabric being preserved. Further, the applicant proposes to clean and reuse original brick as much as possible, as well as maintain original façade openings.



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**Testimony of LANDMARK WEST!
Certificate of Appropriateness Committee
Before the Landmarks Preservation Commission
117 West 81st Street
October 21st, 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 alter the rear façade and to construct a rooftop addition at 117 West 81st Street, a Renaissance Revival-style rowhouse designed by Henry L. Harris and built in 1884-85.

LANDMARK WEST! first testified on this application at its July 22nd public hearing. We noted then that the proposed rooftop addition would be minimally visible to the public and agreed that it would not adversely affect this historic rowhouse. As the modified proposal presented today renders the rooftop addition even less visible to the public, we have no additional comments on that aspect of the proposal.

However, we would like to take this opportunity to reiterate our concern about the rear yard. The proposed addition restores the yard's depth to the thirty-foot minimum required by zoning, but couples this modification with the enlargement of the now-L-shaped extension to full-width. Such an addition would perpetuate the steady erosion of the historic footprint and openness of rowhouse midblock interiors. We urge the Commission to take this into serious consideration.