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BODY:

'TM all for a public [landmarking] hearing on Madison Square Garden."

So (according to Christopher Gray of The New York Times) wrote Kate Wood, the executive director of **Landmark West**,

in commenting on a nascent movement to seek protected status for the Garden - the ugliest scab ever inflicted on Manhattan and literal tomb of the great, original Penn Station.

With that mind-boggling utterance, Wood voided whatever mirage of legitimacy existed to justify her organization's many lawsuits to block the sale of 2 Columbus Circle by the city to the Museum of Arts & Design.

It hardly matters: That deal is going down no matter what **Landmark West** and fellow tantrum-throwers think.

But Wood's endorsement of public hearings before the Landmarks Preservation Commission on the Garden - a universally acknowledged affront to eye, intellect and architecture - exposes the quest for public hearings on 2 Columbus Circle for what it is: a fraud in service of pathological preservationism alienated from the real world.

Landmark West's

demand for public hearings at Columbus Circle has been at the heart of its campaign to block the museum from replacing Edward Durell Stone's window-less marble facade with a rational one of terra cotta and glass.

Of course, the need for public hearings on the site has always been moot because the Landmarks Commission long ago made clear it does not regard Stone's monstrosity as worthy of immortality, and is unlikely to change its mind just because a bunch of activists stomp their feet at a meeting.

And in fact, **Landmark West**

& Co. have clamored for a "public" hearing for one purpose only: to throw yet another monkey wrench in the path of the already delayed sale of the building to the museum.

But however pernicious their cause, the plaintiffs raised what almost sounded like a rational point: that some architects and preservationists regard 2 Columbus Circle as an important milestone in Stone's career and meaningful in the context of the Post-Modernist movement.

Even if one disagreed with their assessment - or agreed but still considered it insufficient reason not to get rid of an

obvious eyesore - the argument possessed a veneer of reasonableness. Hey, what's so bad about a hearing? Let the "public" decide whether the architects and preservationists have a point.

But of course no such veneer of reasonableness can possibly be adduced in defense of Madison Square Garden, which might be torn down if the sports arena is moved to a proposed new development just to the west.

Not only did the doughnut-drum Garden enter the old Penn Station, whose very demolition spawned the city's landmarks law; it was and is one of Manhattan's most ghastly structures - tacky, anti-urban and "unforgivable by any standard," as architectural critic Paul Goldberger told the Times.

How can anyone take seriously a case for public hearings on landmarking 2 Columbus Circle when the leader of the organization most forcefully calling for them also supports hearings for Madison Square Garden?

Kate Wood has done the city a great service. Her statement on the Garden - however qualified and narrowly framed - gives away what **Landmark West** is really about: radical preservationism is blind not just to fine distinctions, but to elephantine ones.

Public hearings for 2 Columbus Circle? Sure! Madison Square Garden? Why not? How about for junkyards, too?

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