



THE COMMITTEE TO PRESERVE THE UPPER WEST SIDE

**Testimony of LANDMARK WEST!  
Certificate of Appropriateness Committee  
Before the Landmarks Preservation Commission  
137 West 74<sup>th</sup> Street  
December 9, 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 rear yard addition at 137 West 74<sup>th</sup> Street, a Renaissance Revival-style rowhouse designed by Edward L. Angell and built in 1890-93.

**Stoop Restoration and Rooftop Addition**

Though not included in the scope of this application, our Committee would like to briefly comment on the proposed stoop restoration and rooftop addition. First, we are pleased to see the applicant's plan to restore the stoop of this historic rowhouse residence. Such an undertaking is a powerful gesture and often sets off a "domino reaction" – once one property owner does the right thing and restores a stoop, neighbors follow suit.

Regarding the rooftop addition, we understand that the design as proposed will be invisible to the public and agree that it will not adversely affect this historic rowhouse. This should serve as example to other applicants that modification to rowhouse residences can be made while operating within the lines of the Commission's *Rules*.

**Rear Yard Addition: Reviewing LPC Rules**

Section 2-16 of the Commission's Rules establishes when a proposal for a rear yard addition exceeds the purview of the staff, necessitating full-Commission approval. Of the eight criteria in this Section, at least three – and perhaps four – are transgressed by this application.

- 1) The applicant proposes to increase the rear yard projection to full-width and to remove the entirety of the rear façade building fabric. This would result in a loss of a tremendous amount of original material. This fully disregards criterion "h."
- 2) In addition, this application breaks with criterion "e." The design, if realized, would entirely erase the punctuated fenestration of the rowhouse and replace it with an aesthetic not at all in keeping with its type. In short, and in contradiction to criterion "e," the rear of the building will *not* retain the character of an individual rowhouse. Further, it will break the continuity of the rest of this row. We recommend a wholesale rethinking of the design for this rear façade.

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- 3) Removing the existing rear façade elevation's crowning corbeled brickwork is in direct opposition to criterion "g." It states that rear additions must "not rise to the full height of the building" so as to preserve corbeled brickwork and other distinctive roof silhouettes.

Presently, a feature of this building's rear façade is a cantilevered wooden projection at the first floor level. Upon review, our Committee noted that this non-original addition bears strong resemblance to the tea parlor additions seen in Lower Manhattan. Before the Commission is asked to evaluate this application, we believe that the applicant should be instructed to undertake additional research to determine the date of construction and intended use of this space. If it was in fact built as a tea parlor, it is an important – and rare – layer of Upper West Side history to be protected and preserved. Its destruction could be premature and, as a significant architectural feature, transgress criterion "b."

### **Rear Yard Addition: Encroachment**

Not only will the simple punched-masonry fenestration that characterizes this rear façade and those of its neighbors be eliminated with the approval of this application, so will additional rear yard space with the intrusion of a rear yard addition. We wish to reiterate our point, made at other hearings in the past and to be made again here today, that midblock rear yards are an historical element worthy of preservation. Encroachments by additions which reduce the area of open space in the rear yard, such as this one does, are fundamentally inappropriate.

The expansion of the rear yard addition to full width would mean that approximately 151 [need to review my calculations to confirm] square feet of rear yard will be taken over – 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 into serious consideration.