



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 21<sup>st</sup>, 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.