

March 3, 2009

Commissioner Robert Tierney
Landmarks Preservation Commission
Municipal Building
1 Centre Street, 9th Floor
New York, NY 10007

RE: Certificate of Appropriateness application for 190 Riverside Drive

Commissioner. Tierney:

190 Riverside Drive, a Beaux-Arts style masterwork designed by Townsend, Steinle & Haskell and built in 1909-10, has been a fixture on the Commission's agendas for nearly a decade. In that time, the Certificate of Appropriateness application for a rooftop addition on this landmark building has undergone a handful of critiques and revisions. At Public Meeting on Tuesday, March 10, the applicant will present its most recent redux of this proposal.

LANDMARK WEST's Certificate of Appropriateness Committee had the fortunate opportunity to discuss this newest design proposal with the architect, Howard Spivak, in advance, and we are writing to share our thoughts with you.

Our Committee would like first to recognize the applicant's and architect's commitment to open dialogue as a mode for the successful stewardship of our treasured landmarks. Throughout the revision process, the architect has maintained regular contact with our Committee to schedule presentations and discuss the design's continuing evolution. Along with recommendations from the Commission, constructive criticism from our own Committee has helped to push the proposed rooftop design in the right direction. We believe it is entirely due to this collaborative process that the proposal now under consideration successfully merges the past with the present. In short, this is good preservation.

It has been nearly ten years since the first proposed rooftop addition at 190 Riverside Drive (190 RSD) stirred justified concerns among members of the Upper West Side community. Along with concerned 190 RSD neighbors and residents, LW! has testified at each and every Public Hearing. Incrementally, the design has advanced to what our Committee feels to be an appropriate harmonizing of historical and contemporary design.

A review of the previous rounds of changes to the proposed addition will help to understand how far this design has come:

1999: The first proposed rooftop addition resembled a pyramid, climbing three stories (almost thirty feet) towards the sky. 190 RSD residents, neighbors and LANDMARK WEST! pushed for an architecturally sensitive design, one that would not destroy the beauty and integrity of this landmark.

Over, please

2006: The second proposed design took the form of an industrial-looking pitched roof. From points along the Drive and especially from within Riverside Park – a Scenic Landmark in its own right – views of the addition were extremely conspicuous. The Commission denied the proposal.

2007: The third incarnation engulfed the rooftop of 190 RSD, pushing out in all directions to the very edge of the building and rising two full stories. While the architect explained that the design drew upon other rooftop addition models from across the Upper West Side and throughout Manhattan, it ignored the original architect’s intent for 190 RSD. Architect Ralph S. Townsend had crowned the building with an elegant and robust metal cornice. All agreed, including the Commission, that no new rooftop addition at 190 RSD should be allowed to overshadow the powerful, character-defining, metal cornice.

2008: The last proposal was for a two-story, contemporary structure. Set back from the cornice line and constructed in tinted glass and grey metal, it would have been somewhat less visible from the sidewalk and Riverside Park than previous design proposals – but visible, nonetheless. After listening to testimony from 190 RSD residents, neighbors and LANDMARK WEST! at Public Hearing on Tuesday, October 21, 2008, the Commission unanimously agreed that two stories are too much atop this important landmark building, and the proposal was not approved.

Now, in **2009**, the architect has responded to the Commission’s and our Committee’s concerns: the proposed addition is one story in height, in recognition of the primacy of the building’s robust original metal cornice; the visibility from Riverside Park has been significantly minimized; and the choice of materials clearly identifies the addition as a contemporary structure, distinct from architect Townsend’s original structure.

Initially, our Committee questioned the use of glass for the metal railing on the mezzanine level. However, we understand from conversation with the architect that the material will be high-quality and minimally reflective. Though we would initially have suggested a more common picketed railing in black metal, we understand that the architect is consciously avoiding a heavier horizontal line that the pickets would create.

Our Committee considers this revised proposal for 190 RSD exemplary of responsible design in historic districts, and the collaboration between the architect, the Commission and LANDMARK WEST! a model for future applicants. We recommend approval of the application for a rooftop addition at 190 Riverside Drive, and thank the Commission for its diligence during this extended review process.

Sincerely,

Arlene Simon
President

Kate Wood
Executive Director

CC: Comm. Pablo E. Vengoechea, Vice Chair ; Comm. Frederick Bland; Comm. Stephen Byrns; Comm. Diana Chapin; Comm. Joan Gerner; Comm. Roberta Brandes Gratz; Comm. Christopher Moore; Comm. Margery Perlmutter; Comm. Elizabeth Ryan; Comm. Roberta Washington



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



THE COMMITTEE TO PRESERVE THE UPPER WEST SIDE

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.