



THE COMMITTEE TO PRESERVE THE UPPER WEST SIDE

**Testimony of LANDMARK WEST!
Certificate of Appropriateness Committee
Before the Landmarks Preservation Commission
428 Columbus Avenue
September 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 alter and expand an existing rooftop addition at 428 Columbus Avenue, an Early 20th Century-style office building designed by Charles J. Perry and built in 1900.

Change can sometimes be a very good thing. The existing penthouse addition is a reminder of the negative impact such projects can have on landmark buildings and historic districts; allowing it to pass on into Landmarks Preservation Commission lore is a positive change. When the existing rooftop addition appeared before the Commission in 1990, LANDMARK WEST! cautioned that “the convoluted penthouse would detract from the restrained cast-iron façade of its host building.” Parasitically perched atop 428 Columbus Avenue, the rooftop addition proves that foresight as well as hindsight can be 20/20. The opportunity to correct this circumstance is now before us.

Prior to discussing the new proposed rooftop addition, which is certainly an improvement over the existing condition, it is important to recognize the unique nature of this application. In no way do we – nor should the Commission – advocate in any kind of blanket way three-story rooftop additions in historic districts. That the 1990 structure was approved was a clear mistake. If we were to start from scratch, with no rooftop addition in place, we would raise different issues and questions. However, we find ourselves in the position of judging this application as a rationalization of an existing out-of-character, inappropriate rooftop addition.

Our comments fall into three categories: design, choice of color and choice of material.

Design

Generally speaking, we find the applicant’s approach to this asymmetrical, erratic rooftop structure to be sympathetic to the original building. In relocating the bulk of the addition to the rear, the visual impact will be minimized. Equally, the massing will be more uniformly dispersed. However, the appropriateness of the “downtown,” studio-like sloping windows on the fifth floor is debatable. While the aesthetic is atypical of the Upper West Side/Central Park West Historic District, so are commercial loft buildings. We ask the Commission to keep in mind that a design befitting this building may not necessarily be in keeping with the character of the greater district.

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Color

The Committee would like to see improvement in the way the design is articulated through color. Proposed for the fifth floor is a slanted, glass artist studio-like façade. Tilting the plane away from the street will reduce the addition's visibility, but finishing it in the same color of the original building façade creates a forgery. There should be a visual trigger that the addition is not original to the building and that it is part of the roof, not the façade. By lightening the color of the windows, while remaining within the same color family, a link can be made to the original structure while also signaling the addition as an *addition*.

The railings, to be black-painted metal, are jarring. We recommend a lighter color which would render the railings less prominent, such as one similar to the paint proposed for the larger rooftop addition.

Material

Several material choices made by the applicant merit commendation. The lead-coated copper proposed at the top-most level of the rooftop addition is an appropriate material – a much better choice than aluminum or stucco. Secondly, the wood casement windows proposed on the South façade of the building are a historically sensitive selection.

In conclusion, our committee feels that the minor changes to color recommended here will make for a more wholly appropriate design.