

**Testimony of LANDMARK WEST!  
Certificate of Appropriateness Committee  
Before the Landmarks Preservation Commission  
43-45 West 86<sup>th</sup> Street  
May 19, 2009**

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 combine two buildings, construct rooftop and rear yard additions, and alter the façades of two Georgian Revival-style rowhouses at 43-45 West 86<sup>th</sup> Street, designed by John H. Duncan and built in 1895-96.

Speak plainly: this is no alteration; this is façadism and demolition in their most basic of forms. The two handsome rowhouses at 43-45 West 86<sup>th</sup> Street are slated to begin a new phase in their existence, no longer as residences but as institutional buildings. The burden is on the applicant to ensure that while the use may change, these rowhouses retain their historical residential character and their integrity. To achieved its desired interior programming, the applicant is demolishing all but the skins of 43-45 West 86<sup>th</sup> Street, fundamentally altering both the front and rear façades, and rendering the ensemble institutional in appearance.

**86<sup>th</sup> Street (front) façade**

The proposal modifies the front facades of Nos. 43 and 45, eliminating the stoop-level entry still in place at No. 45 and basement-level entry at No. 43, replacing them both with entry at the sidewalk level. By no means a small change. This intervention would destroy the limestone organization of the existing facades and, further, allow for the major reorganization of the lots the rest of the application puts forward.

**Rear yard addition**

Though categorized as a rear yard “addition,” what is proposed for 43-45 West 86<sup>th</sup> Street is most certainly the definition of façadism. The existing rowhouse rear facades are not being altered; they are being demolished and an entirely new building is being inserted behind the screen of the historic 86<sup>th</sup> Street façades. The integrity of these rowhouses is not being undermined, it’s being destroyed. As proposed, the new rear façades completely disconnect themselves from the larger donut formed by 86<sup>th</sup> and 87<sup>th</sup> Streets.

**Rooftop addition**

The finishing horizontal component of the proposed rooftop terrace fence could easily be modified to render it invisible. By extending the fence vertical up to just below the line of site, and then angling the fence towards the roof up to the mandated height required by the DOB, the applicant can nullify issued of rooftop visibility.

### **Institutions in historic districts**

This proposal comes on the heels of another fundamentally inappropriate proposal for institutional expansion on the Upper West Side: the Dwight School on West 88<sup>th</sup> Street. Dwight and today's 86<sup>th</sup> Street proposal try to make us believe that institutions can only fulfill their function at the expense of our architectural heritage. But the applicant for 43-45 West 86<sup>th</sup> Street need look only to its southerly neighbor, the Bard Graduate Center at No. 36, to see first-hand an example of successful and sensitive institutional presence in historic residential neighborhoods. When Bard was reviewed by this Commission in April 2007, LANDMARK WEST! testified that their proposal for a rear yard addition was contextual, and that:

While it presents a welcome contemporary design statement, the currently proposed addition is also ... modest and subtle ... We are pleased to note that Bard has achieved significant programmatic improvements by logically re-organizing interior spatial configurations, rather than by seeking to build outward.

It can be done, it has been done, and a prime example is a stone's throw away. We hope the applicant can learn from Bard's trial-and-error expansion experience. We urge the Commissioners to deny this application as proposed today.