



THE COMMITTEE TO PRESERVE THE UPPER WEST SIDE

**Testimony of LANDMARK WEST!  
Certificate of Appropriateness Committee  
Before the Landmarks Preservation Commission  
53 West 88<sup>th</sup> Street  
July 7<sup>th</sup>, 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 construct a rear yard addition at 53 West 88<sup>th</sup> Street, a Romanesque Revival-style rowhouse designed by Neville & Bagge and built in 1892-94.

When the owner of a landmark building applies for exemption from the Commission's *Rules* by way of a Certificate of Appropriateness, the Commissioners owe it to their mandate to ask why *should* the proposed changes be allowed, not why *shouldn't* they. The proposed rear yard addition contradicts criterion "h" from the Commission's *Rules*, and for what beneficial preservation purpose?

The rear façades of No. 53 and its West 88<sup>th</sup> Street neighbors are visually consistent—their existing extensions creating an in-and-out rhythm, emblematic of the pattern of rowhouse growth on the Upper West Side. Much as LANDMARK WEST! regularly cites the "domino effect" as a positive phenomenon—once one property owner does the right thing and restores a stoop or windows, for example, others follow suit—this effect can manifest itself negatively as well. A full-width rear yard addition at No. 53 is inappropriately intrusive, for both the individual residence and the integrity of the larger ensemble of 88<sup>th</sup> Street rowhouses. Approving this initial application would encourage neighbors to consider inappropriate rear yard expansion as well.

Regarding the design of the proposed rear yard extension, our Committee finds stucco to be an inappropriate finish. Too often applicants rely on the existing conditions of their neighbors for design cues. We cannot stress enough how important it is that applicants base their proposals on their own historical research, conditions assessment and probing of materials. Do not allow the misguided, and at times inappropriate, design choices of others to qualify your design. That said, adjacent stuccoed and painted rear yard extensions do not justify a similar treatment for No. 53.