



THE COMMITTEE TO PRESERVE THE UPPER WEST SIDE

**Testimony of LANDMARK WEST!
Certificate of Appropriateness Committee
Before the Landmarks Preservation Commission
59 West 71st Street
October 20, 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 enlarge a rooftop penthouse at 59 West 71st Street, a neo-Renaissance style apartment building designed by George F. Pelham and built in 1924.

Rooftop Vernacular

For rooftop additions, our committee advocates that materials and finishes keep within a rooftop vernacular. That is to say, rather than propose an addition that distorts the original architecture by extending a cornice line without any delineation of old and new, or attempt to cloak rooftop space in wood siding and other accoutrements of a prototypical country home—a little cottage atop an urban apartment building—we recommend using materials that clearly delineate a contemporary addition as something new and apart from the existing building. On that front, we believe this applicant is on the right track.

Linking Color and the Environment

Given the highly visible nature of the proposed addition from Columbus between West 70th and 71st Streets, the dark corrugated metal currently proposed could read as being quite bulky. As our Committee discussed the possible recommendation of a lighter material, a few members directed our attention to recent articles in journals and newspapers discussing the link between rooftop paint colors and environmental issues. The maintenance and reuse of our existing architectural resources is inherently green. These articles helped inform both our thoughts on color and environmental sustainability.

In the most recent issue of *The Atlantic Monthly*, architect and author Witold Rybczynski writes that proposals for green roofs—a component that we see regularly paired with projects involving historic resources—are well and good, but such design is “not as energy- and cost-efficient as simply painting the roof white.”¹ A light color will do double duty: it reflects light and increases building efficiency, while setting the addition apart from the building atop which it is perched. In such an instance, the white (or light) colored roof stands out more, but for good reason. Similar articles appeared in the *New York Times*, which argues that white roofs are more effective than high-technology solutions to heat and energy use reduction,² and in the *Independent*, which proclaimed this concept the “white revolution.”³

A minor design modification that would have major long-term benefits for this historic district.

¹ “Home Truths: Forget the Solar Panels and the Rain Barrels—If you want to go green, leave the suburbs for the city.” Rybczynski, Witold. *The Atlantic Monthly*. October 2009. p. 34.

² “By Degrees: White roofs catch on as energy cost cutters.” Barringer, Felicity. *The New York Times*. 30 July 2009.

³ “Obama’s Climate Guru: Paint your roof white!” Connor, Steve. *The Independent*. 27 May 2009.