



THE COMMITTEE TO PRESERVE THE UPPER WEST SIDE

**Testimony of LANDMARK WEST!
Certificate of Appropriateness Committee
Before the Landmarks Preservation Commission
Apthorp Apartments
390 West End Avenue
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 install rooftop mechanical units and an acoustical screen on this Italian Renaissance-style apartment building, designed by Clinton and Russell and built in 1906-08.

As the *Real Estate Record and Builder's Guide* wrote in its July 4, 1908, edition, "the two features which impress one before entering the [Apthorp apartment building] are, first, its massive appearance from the street and, second, the beautiful court in the center of the site."¹ The integrity of these two seminal aspects of the palatial residence's design is undermined by this proposal.

Visibility: From Broadway

The Apthorp apartment building was designed with monumentality in mind. Commanding impressive views along Broadway, the Apthorp is representative of a small handful of grand apartment houses centering on interior landscaped courtyards. Along with its comrades the Belnord, the Dakota, and the Astor Court, the Apthorp adds architectural richness to the both Upper West Side and Manhattan at-large. With such few examples of this building type in New York City, any proposals made for the Apthorp must be examined with strict scrutiny.

The silhouette of the Apthorp calls out to onlookers from tens of blocks away. That said, any rooftop mechanical equipment which is visible from the public way compromises the architectural integrity of the building. As the applicant stated at the October 16th Parks and Preservation Committee meeting of Community Board 7, the proposed cooling towers are visible along Broadway from as far South as West 71st and as far North as West 91st Street. The only acceptable solution to this problem is the replacement of the proposed 14 foot tall cooling towers with those in a lower profile.

¹ "What a Tenant Gets for \$6,000 a Year: Conveniences in the Largest Apartment House on This Continent." *Real Estate Record and Builder's Guide*, 4 July 1908. p. 19.

Visibility: From the Interior Courtyard

Pushing the proposed cooling towers westward closer towards the courtyard is no quick-fix solution. This may mitigate the visibility of the rooftop equipment from Broadway, but it propagates the problem of the equipment and screen's visibility from the courtyard itself.

The courtyard is a hallmark of the Apthorp's design. A respite from the busyness of the city waiting just beyond the massive coffered archways, the garden courtyard was originally designed with "a display of horticulture that would grace a select botanical garden."² Indeed, the importance of the courtyard was not thought of as secondary but rather complimentary to the exterior character of the Apthorp. How the proposed cooling towers will affect the interior courtyard is no less important than how they affect the building as it is viewed from Broadway or any other public thoroughfare.

Though set back from the building's original parapet, two to three feet of the proposed acoustical screen would still rise above the Apthorp's parapet and be visible from the West End Avenue entrance of the Apthorp. This is inappropriate. Any additional intrusion – especially something that will become permanent – is visually polluting and a great detraction from the building's design. As much care must be devoted to siting rooftop mechanicals to be out of site from the interior courtyard as is given to the exterior.

The Apthorp is not the first of the aforementioned courtyard apartment houses to have explored the installation of rooftop mechanical equipment. It is noted in the Belnord apartment's 2005 Certificate of Appropriateness permit that 11'6" cooling towers were permitted atop the historic building's roof. While the appropriateness of those towers to the Belnord is not for discussion here, that this building of similar type found 11'6" cooling towers for use is evidence that alternative cooling units may still be identified.

² *Real Estate Record and Guide* 1908, 19.