

RODEPH SHOLOM SCHOOL

PROJECT DESCRIPTION

163 WEST 78th STREET

Rodeph Sholom School has purchased 163 West 78th Street, the townhouse adjoining their existing school facility at 168 West 79th Street. The proposed renovations and additions to the townhouse will add approximately 8,000 square feet to the school's existing facility to better accommodate the existing student body (grades 2-8). No increases in the student body are planned.

The front facade will be protected with restoration work performed as needed. The townhouse's front door will be replaced with a historically appropriate design but the school will continue to use only the existing 79th Street entrance. The interior will be renovated to accommodate four new classrooms, a new library, office space and a movement studio. The existing penthouse addition will be enlarged to accommodate an indoor play space that will remain invisible from the street. In the rear, the footprint of the school's existing one story gymnasium will be enlarged by approximately 800 square feet. A new glass facade in the rear will allow light into the classrooms while a new garden on the roof of the gymnasium addition and a new vertical "green screen" will contribute to the green space at the center of the block and serve as a buffer between the school and the neighboring buildings. The school plans to pursue LEED certification for the project. When combined with the existing school facility, this new space will allow the school to make better use of the facility as a whole.

The proposed project requires a Certificate of Appropriateness from the Landmarks Preservation Commission. In addition, because the 79th Street building was the subject of a zoning variance, the Board of Standards and Appeals must approve an application to enlarge the zoning lot to include this property (no new or additional variances are being requested).

July 15, 2008

Kenneth K. Lowenstein
Bryan Cave LLP
1290 Avenue of the Americas
New York, New York 10104-3300

RE: 163 West 78th Street, Upper West Side/Central Park West Historic District

Dear Mr. Lowenstein:

Thanks to you and the rest of the Congregation Rodeph Sholom for presenting your plans for expanding the school on West 78th Street to LANDMARK WEST's Certificate of Appropriateness Committee at our meeting on Tuesday, July 1.

We appreciate your approaching LW! in the spirit of early consultation and collaboration, during your design development phase and prior to formally submitting your application to the Landmarks Preservation Commission. We look forward to meeting with you again in the near future to discuss further evolution in this project.

Based on the drawings you showed us and our discussion about your proposed expansion into an adjacent rowhouse at 163 West 78th Street, in the Upper West Side/Central Park West Historic District, our Committee believes that the project is generally heading in a positive direction.

Front Façade Restoration

We especially commend Rodeph Sholom's intention to restore the front façade of this 1890 Thom & Wilson rowhouse. For your next presentation to LW!, we request that you provide our Committee with more detailed drawings showing exact treatment specifications for each element of the façade, including window and door sections. Material boards and color samples should be provided as well as any plans for signage.

Rooftop Addition

It is our understanding that the additions to the school will not be visible from the street. It will be helpful to see sightline studies and the physical mockup, when it is put in place, of the addition, including mechanical equipment, to ensure no visibility from the public way.

Impact on the Rear Yard

Since the school also owns and operates the neighboring property immediately to the north, the proposed community-facility encroachment will most likely have a discrete and minimal impact on the integrity of the larger rear yard "doughnut" (the open space traditionally formed by

adjoining, 30-foot-deep rear yards of rowhouses). We also understand that the design will incorporate extensive greenery to compensate for the “filling in” of the rearyard open space.

Curtain Wall Design

At its next presentation to our Committee, Rodeph Sholom should provide more complete photodocumentation of the existing rear façade to demonstrate whether any significant historic fabric would be impacted by the proposed new rear façade.

In addition, we would like to see fully developed details for the design of the glass curtain wall since the appropriateness of this feature ultimately depends on its execution.

Physical Maintenance

One telling photograph in your presentation raised questions among our Committee members about Rodeph Sholom’s long-term maintenance plans for its school. The photograph showed the streaked and stained concrete/stucco rear façade of the existing school building on West 78th Street. Cleaning and repair of the existing building should be included within the scope of the renovation and new construction project. Rodeph Sholom also needs to create and budget for an ongoing maintenance plan for the entire facility.

Glass curtain walls and greenery—hallmarks of the current proposal—rely especially on meticulous upkeep and cannot be considered the right solution for this site unless Rodeph Sholom makes maintenance a priority.

We look forward to continuing this conversation when you come back to present your more developed proposal to our Committee. Please be in touch as early as possible so that we can schedule a second presentation well in advance of any public hearing on this proposal.

Sincerely,

Arlene Simon
President

Kate Wood
Executive Director

On behalf of LW’s Certificate of Appropriateness Committee

cc. Community Board 7 Parks & Preservation Committee