

**Testimony of LANDMARK WEST!
Certificate of Appropriateness Committee
Before the Landmarks Preservation Commission
Cherry Hill, Central Park
May 3, 2011**

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 reconstruct the Cherry Hill Concourse within Central Park, an English Romantic style public park designed by Olmsted and Vaux in 1856 and designated a Scenic Landmark in 1974.

Layered History of Central Park

From its English Romantic foundations to its 1960s Modern playground additions to the 21st Century modifications of today and all of the decades in between, Central Park is all about layers. The Park is a compelling example of New York City's historical palimpsest; that is, the tradition of the past accommodating the present. Each layer enriches the story that Central Park tells. Thus, any modifications proposed for the park must appreciate the deep impact it may well have.

Cherry Hill is an archetypal example of the Park's evolution over the decades. In 1873, it was a concourse focused on accommodating horse-drawn carriages and their passengers as they took in Central Park's vistas. In 1945, modifications were made which reflect the increased presence of motorized vehicles in the Park, with the installation of a protective stone ring around the bluestone fountain basin. By 1977, the Concourse had degraded to a full-out parking circle, marred by painted lines. And in 1983, landscape architect Philip Winslow revived Cherry Hill with brick patterning, aligning it with the nearby Bethesda Terrace (also restored by Winslow). These layers reflect the way recreation and how we use the Cherry Hill Concourse have changed with time.

Philip Winslow's connection with this project is significant: Winslow was a landscape architect, member of the Art Commission (appointed by then-Mayor Ed Koch); vice president of the Parks Council of New York (now New Yorkers for Parks); Winslow oversaw the landscape restoration of Gracie Mansion; and he was a distinguished co-author of the book *Rebuilding Central Park: A Management and Restoration Plan* (1987), a publication which marked the first parkwide inventory and analysis effort since Olmsted and Vaux's 1858 Greensward Plan.¹ Cherry Hill Concourse, then, represents the work of an important figure in landscape architecture and in the city's recommitment to restoring its landscape heritage, Philip Winslow.

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¹ Website of Elizabeth Barlow Rogers, co-author of *Rebuilding Central Park: A Management and Restoration Plan* (1987). http://www.elizabethbarlowrogers.com/index.php?t=books&s=rebuilding_central_park_a_management_and_restoration_plan

Restore, Don't Replace, Successful Design

The single-surface design proposed fails to appreciate the range of visitors and means of experiencing Cherry Hill. Pedicabs, carriages, cyclists, joggers, and strollers (both the two-legged and the wheeled kind) are all equally present at Cherry Hill. The Winslow plan of Cherry Hill, with its changes in grade to provide space and safety between larger forms of traffic and pedestrians successfully accommodates these Park users.

That a portion of visitor's to the Cherry Hill Concourse do not respect the intended use zones, as both the Conservancy informed our committee and we observed with an independent informal traffic study, should not be the impetus for the reconstruction of the site. Rather, the challenge is to encourage vehicles to use the spaces intended for them through smart design. As presented, the proposed modifications to the Cherry Hill Concourse would serve only to restore a parking lot-like mono-surface. Bollards installed at both approaches to the Concourse are a far less invasive and a more responsible solution.

Concourse Reconstruction and Concurrent RFP

The parking lot comparison seems a timely one, as the work proposed at Cherry Hill runs parallel with a Request for Proposal (RFP) by the Parks Department for a Mobile Food Unit at this location (dated April 11, 2011). Added to the schedule of film crews who are already known to converge upon the Concourse in trucks, this food truck only serves to strengthen the concern that Cherry Hill is valued more as a parking location than a landscape environment.

New Paving System at Cherry Hill Concourse

As we learned from the Conservancy, the new paving system proposed has never before been used in Central Park. While its success in other landscapes may be celebrated, we have too often witnessed the heralding of a new technology and its subsequent failure to perform as anticipated. In Central Park at West 106th Street, for example, the paving surface at the entrance—believed to be an improvement to the paving systems that preceded it—has quickly degraded to an unsightly and, for park users, uncomfortable mess (see handout). If the Conservancy can demonstrate the viability of the proposed paving system in the Park without sacrificing historic design and materials, it would then seem appropriate to consider its broader use. At Cherry Hill, our committee would approve of replacing the existing asphalt with the new paving system, but only in this incredibly limited scope.

LANDMARK WEST! strongly urges the Commission to deny this proposal.