

Hearing Date: 3/20/2007

LPC Docket Number: 074783

Manhattan, Block: 1238, Lot: 58

264 West 91st Street - Riverside - West End Historic District

A Renaissance Revival style rowhouse designed by Alexander M. Welch and built in 1896-1897.

Application is to construct a rear yard addition.

HDC Testimony

HDC finds the proposed fenestration changes to the rear of this rowhouse very inappropriate. The basement level with double doors flanked by large windows and the full glazing on the first floor make the rear of this building appear to be the front entrance. The proposed double hung windows with transoms to replace regular double hung windows on the second floor are also awkward. We recommend the applicant works further to design a rear façade that looks like a rear façade.

Hearing Date: 3/20/2007

LPC Docket Number: 074562

Manhattan, Block: 1126, Lot: 28

3 West 73rd Street - Upper West Side/Central Park West Historic District

A Beaux-Arts style rowhouse designed by Welch, Smith & Provot and built in 1902-1903. Application is

to construct an elevator bulkhead and alter the rear and side facades.

HDC Testimony

HDC finds that the proposed elevator bulkhead acceptable. We have different feelings for the alterations to the rear and side facades which drastically change the nature and character of this rowhouse. In particular the proposed west elevation is quite gaudy for a secondary façade with its repeated oval windows and heavily detailed, three-floor oriel window.

Hearing Date: 3/20/2007

LPC Docket Number: 075170

Manhattan, Block: 1129, Lot: 29

170 Central Park West - Individual Landmark Historic District

A Roman Eclectic style museum and library, designed by York and Sawyer and built in 1903-1908, with wings added in 1937-1938 by Walker and Gillette. Application is to alter the Central Park West and West

77th Street facades, modify the entrances to create barrier-free-access and install kiosks.

HDC Testimony

HDC is opposed to the proposed changes to the New-York Historical Society's landmarked building for a number of reasons.

Firstly, this proposal and the elusive “phase two” are an extreme example, in their size and scope, of segmentation. The Historical Society’s web site already has a list of elements of their strategic plan, not part of this proposal, including development of the vacant back lot on the southwest side of the building with an addition that would provide “three floors of much-needed new library stacks below grade, space for educational activities at grade and, for the first time ever, an adequate loading and receiving dock to support special exhibitions and other events.” LPC provides for the creation of a master plan, a smoother process than individual approvals that results in a unified, well-thought-out goal. When so many changes, the success of many of which are dependent upon one another, are called for, a master plan is the most logical route to take.

Secondly, HDC finds many of the alterations to the façade inappropriate given their rather modern, commercial style. The extended windows on the West 77th Street façade amount to show windows with no real museum function and only seek to benefit a café and shop. By enlarging these windows, the Society is creating a hardship for itself. Already stating that it does not have enough exhibition space, the Society is eliminating potential space for this important function. The large, transparent entrance similarly gives the building a department store appearance. Three entries are not called for on this façade. From personal experience visiting the Historical Society over the years, members of HDC’s Public Review Committee noted that any problems with traffic flow is not due to exterior architecture, but to issues of crowd control and planning on the interior. In addition, the bronze cheekwall with sign on the 77th Street entrance and the bronze knee wall with laser cut letters on Central Park West’s ramps both feel like excessive branding.

The building’s designation report describes it as “austerely classical in feeling, and displaying great dignity in its composition.” While the Society now deems its main entrance too small and unnoticeable, the report says the “pedimented heroic size main portal on Central Park West makes a very grand entrance to the building.” Too much historic detailing, including the great bronze entry doors and the bronze grill above, and the overall dignified, classical design would be lost to this proposal. It is also important to note, since this building is not only an individual landmark but in a historic district too, that these retail-like alterations do not fit into a streetscape of residences and educational and religious institutions.

Although a nice thought, two barrier free access entries (and three ramps) are not needed on a building this size. The handicap accessible entry on West 77th Street, approved by the LPC in 1990’s, is the most appropriate location, in part because there is a much wider sidewalk. The ramps purpose on the Central Park West façade appear mainly to be advertising on their bronze knee walls. Many other museums including the Metropolitan Museum of Art and the American Museum of Natural History do not have handicap accessible main entrances. Their secondary entries are also used by visitors without physical disabilities who find them more convenient and less congested, proving that such entrances are not lesser entrances.

An historical society of all institutions should be able to respect its building’s history and purpose. New-York Historical Society has made great strides over the years to open its doors to all New Yorkers and should be commended for this. At its heart, though, the Society is a repository, a repository of knowledge, history and culture, and that is nothing to be ashamed of. The Historical Society’s classical building, reminiscent of ancient libraries and museums, reflects this very noble function and deserves to be protected.

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