



THE COMMITTEE TO PRESERVE THE UPPER WEST SIDE

**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 1850s English Romantic foundations to its 1960s Adventure playground additions to the 21st-century modifications of today and all of the decades in between, Central Park is 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.

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 the 1980s, landscape architect Philip Winslow revived Cherry Hill with brick patterning. *(See pages 1 and 2 of photo packet.)*

At Cherry Hill, Winslow and his team transformed what had been an exclusionary space for the City's privileged class into a truly democratic space that could gracefully accommodate a broad range of contemporary park visitors. The ornamental paving designed by Winslow's team also relates beautifully to other historical paved areas in Central Park (ie: Cherry Hill engages in a visual dialogue with neighboring Bethesda Terrace).

Work of Landscape Architect Philip N. Winslow

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). He 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 Unfortunately his career was cut tragically short by AIDS in 1989.

Continued ...

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

Work of Landscape Architect Philip N. Winslow (cont.)

Cherry Hill Concourse, then, represents the work of an important figure in landscape architecture and in the history of Central Park itself. We must not allow Philip Winslow's contributions to Central Park to be dismissed and destroyed.

Restore, Don't Replace, Successful Design

The Central Park Conservancy proposes to remove the Philip Winslow-designed decorative brick paving bands, and the lower-graded macadam that separates them, and to repour the site with a porous resin cement aggregate pavement. The single-surface design proposed fails to appreciate the range of visitors and means of experiencing Cherry Hill. Strollers (both the two-legged and the wheeled kind), horse-drawn carriages, pedestrians and joggers, cyclists, and pedicabs 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.

The hierarchy of spaces designed by Winslow visually divides the broad expanse of the Cherry Hill concourse into flexible use zones. People can choose to lounge around the fountain on the brick and bluestone inner ring, or circulate the concourse on the brick paved outer ring. Horse-drawn carriages also promenade around the concourse. Vehicles and bicycles are given a visual message to stay on the asphalt while moving through the concourse. That a portion of visitors to the Cherry Hill Concourse do not respect the intended use zones, as both the Conservancy informed our committee, should not be the impetus for the reconstruction of the site as a parking lot-like mono-surface.

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 unit only serves to strengthen the concern that Cherry Hill is valued more as a parking location than a landscape environment. *(See page 3 of photo packet.)*

As we learned from the Conservancy, this specific aggregate system proposed for Cherry Hill has never before been used in Central Park. While its success in other landscapes may be noted, we have too often witnessed the heralding of a new technology and its subsequent failure to perform as anticipated. Indeed, Central Park was regarded as a ground breaking, innovative design for its day, but experimenting in Central Park can become poor preservation practice. At West 106th Street, for example, the aggregate paving at the entrance—believed to be an improvement to the paving systems that preceded it—quickly degraded to an unsightly and, for park users, uncomfortable mess *(see pages 4 and 5 of photo packet)*. LANDMARK WEST! sees no rational reason to tear apart the elegant and well-functioning Philip Winslow-designed Cherry Hill concourse.

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