



THE COMMITTEE TO PRESERVE THE UPPER WEST SIDE

**Testimony of LANDMARK WEST!  
Certificate of Appropriateness Committee  
Before the Landmarks Preservation Commission  
Loeb Boathouse, Central Park  
September 28, 2010**

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 construct a new structure and a ramp, and alter railings and decking at the Loeb Boathouse, within Central Park, an English Romantic style public park designed by Olmsted and Vaux in 1856 and designated a Scenic Landmark.

***Rus in urbe***

*Rus in urbe*: bringing an element of the *country* into the *city*. Much as the Commission wrote in its 1974 Designation Report, “Central Park literally brought the open country into the heart of the City ... All structures...should blend harmoniously with this natural setting.”<sup>1</sup> Far from adhering to the park’s *rus in urbe* character, the proposed bar design imitates Anywhere, Suburbia USA. It is wholly antithetical to the aesthetic of Central Park as a landscape and the selection of buildings already found therein. With memories of a separate proposal for tennis bubbles in Central Park fresh in our collective mind, this dramatic proposal is the latest in the perpetual attempts by concessionaires to drive the design of this landmark landscape.

**Relation of bar structure to the Loeb Boathouse**

Designed by Stuart Constable in 1954, the Boathouse’s long and low Neo-Classical silhouette and use of bricks and stone—rustic materials—harmonize with the surrounding environment. Satellite buildings added later, such as the bar in question, the ticket booth and a utilitarian shed, are constructed in dark tones and wood, to both blend into the larger context of the Boathouse and its surroundings, and not compete with the prominence of the Boathouse.

Relocated, the bar reads (as you can see on “Area View A” and “Area View B” of the applicant’s packet provided to our committee) inappropriately as an extension of the Boathouse proper. The delineation between the two structures is entirely lost.

**Materials of bar structure**

White-painted copper and reflective glass are inappropriate materials for a structure in Central Park. An attempt may have been made for transparency, but the glass-paneled roof and overhang will bounce light in all directions. The white-painted copper will only exacerbate the unwanted and inappropriate effect, rather than open any vistas to the Boathouse and Lake.

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<sup>1</sup> “Central Park Designation Report,” Landmarks Preservation Commission, 1974, pp. 5-6.

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## **Design of bar structure**

Again: *rus in urbe*. Imbuing the city with the rusticity of the country. A bright-white, glassy structure (with illuminated liquor bottle display included [seen on attached “Details” drawing]) immediately alienates the viewer from the calm of Central Park into any non-specific downtown watering hole. Cue the ambient music and close your eyes; the special naturalness of Central Park melts away to be replaced by the gaudy glitz of a high-end cocktail lounge ... as a duck paddles by and the boats complete laps around the Lake? Something is out of place here.

Sedate though it may be, the bar structure should remain in dark tones and wood. Its silhouette should be refined over what is proposed today. Presently, the square housing for the roll down security gates adds a significant amount of unnecessary bulk to the profile. At our September 14<sup>th</sup> review session with the applicant, our Committee recommended exploring a security gate *sans* housing. This would both reduce the bulk of the bar’s roof profile, and itself be a rustic and appropriately simple aesthetic.

## **Expanded terrace**

Currently, the terrace accompanying the bar at the Boathouse is close to the water, only a low wood-and-rope fence stand between an individual and the water’s edge—perfectly rustic. The occasion to experience the Lake’s wildlife is ideal—the proposed new railing would obscure the landscape and dissuade the occasional duck from climbing on deck to join patrons for a drink. This would be further compounded by the proposal to raise the terrace height away from the surface of the water. The level of the terrace, and its configuration, is appropriate as-is.

We strongly urge the Commission to deny this application, and as such protect the rusticity of the City’s first Scenic Landmark, Central Park.