



THE COMMITTEE TO PRESERVE THE UPPER WEST SIDE

**Testimony of LANDMARK WEST!  
Certificate of Appropriateness Committee  
Before the Landmarks Preservation Commission  
131 Riverside Drive  
January 6, 2009**

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 replace an iron ramp and stairs and alter masonry openings at 131 Riverside Drive, a neo-Renaissance-style apartment building, designed by Neville and Bagge and built in 1908-09.

**Maintain and Restore**

The constant goal of all work performed on landmark buildings should be:

- Maintaining the greatest amount of original building fabric as is possible and;
- Restoring a landmark to its original condition.<sup>1</sup>

Approving this proposal would result in both a loss of original building fabric and the introduction of inappropriate architectural elements. As proposed today, the replacement of the ramp would be in direct opposition to this fundamental preservation principle.

The job of the full Commission is not to determine “Why shouldn’t we allow work that deviates from the Rules?” but rather, “Why should we?” Efforts to research and preserve the existing ironworks at 131 Riverside Drive have been scant. Prior to our Committee’s meeting on 12/9/08, the applicant was unaware that two distinct metal motifs exist on and about the ramp (see handout), nor had they completed materials testing and conditions assessment. A naked-eye examination alone is not acceptable; the applicant does not yet know what components of the metal ramp can be restored and reused. The Commission must not reward an insufficiently prepared and premature proposal with a Certificate of Appropriateness.

**Ramp Design**

This application suggests that the wholesale replacement of the ramp is the only way to address handicap access, which seems to be driving the feature’s redesign. We disagree with this approach. The Commission should not be asked to choose between the preservation of this architecturally significant building feature and the access of handicapped individuals to the building.

While our Committee finds the use of concrete to be appropriate, we believe that a more historically inspired design for the ramp supports is possible. Installing vertical posts, as proposed, is not in keeping with the historic character of the cantilevered ramp. The applicant might consider angled supports that extend to where the building meets the ground, rather than the wall as they currently do. This alternative would be reminiscent of the original design as well as structurally sound.

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<sup>1</sup> Section 2-17 of the Commission’s *Rules* state that appropriate restoration “would not cause the removal of significant historic fabric ... [including that which] may have been added over time and that are evidence of the history and development of a building, structure, or site.” Source: Landmarks Preservation Commission *Rules*, Section 2-17: Restoration of a Building and Building Façade Features, paragraph “c” entitled “Restoration work,” page 2-20.