

**Testimony of LANDMARK WEST!  
Certificate of Appropriateness Committee  
Before the Art Commission  
Regarding the Prototype Wrap for Existing Double Telephone Kiosks  
Monday, April 12, 2004**

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 prototype wrap for existing double telephone kiosks.

Public payphones can no longer be placed in the same category of “background,” utilitarian street furniture as mailboxes and fire hydrants – invisible, except when you need them. They are now very much “foreground” objects, their designs informed not by the function they serve, but by the amount of advertising they can accommodate. Advertising is now, in fact, their primary reason for being.

In historic districts, the integrity of a whole environment, not just one landmark building, is at stake. The current proliferation of phones, individually and collectively, creates unnecessary clutter that ultimately erodes the visual character of historic neighborhoods and detracts from a historic district’s sense of place, thereby undermining the City’s own legislation designed to protect historic resources in context.

The proposed “wrap” design is not so much disappointing as discouraging—it is an advertisement on stilts that happens to have two telephones attached to it. This prototype proves that advertisers will continue to grow ever more ingenious in creating billboard opportunities. If the Commission approves this design for one pay telephone company, there is nothing to prevent others from following suit.

Furthermore, this proposal undermines DoITT’s own recent proposal to prohibit new payphones with advertising south of 110<sup>th</sup> Street in Manhattan in an effort to mitigate the impact of ubiquitous advertising. The wrap design, in a very real sense, magnifies rather than mitigates the visual impact of existing installations.

Real reform is needed to reduce the number of payphones cluttering our sidewalks, to locate them where they are truly needed, NOT simply where advertisers want them, and to limit their size—billboard-scaled phone enclosures clearly benefit advertisers, not the public. On behalf of those who share the Art Commission’s concern about our city’s sidewalks—our principle and most precious public spaces—we urge you to draw the line.