

**Testimony of LANDMARK WEST!
Before the Landmarks Preservation Commission
6 West 83rd Street
June 10, 2008**

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 rear yard addition on this neo-Grec style rowhouse designed by Christian Blinn and built in 1881-82.

This three-story, full width extension would significantly alter the façade rhythm and context of this landmarked rear yard doughnut while gaining little usable square footage. The proposed addition would intrude into the rear yard of open space on the interior of this rowhouse block of adjoining backyards—also called the doughnut—and will completely eliminate the simple punched-masonry fenestration that characterizes this rear façade and those of its neighbors. At least two provisions of Section 2-16 of the Landmarks Preservation Commission Rules for rear yard additions would be violated:

First, the Rules require that “...the rear of the building (or buildings) involved retains the scale and character of an individual rowhouse.” The proposed addition will most certainly considerably alter the scale of this particular rowhouse by the size of the addition, and the proposed fenestration pattern is not in keeping with ones in the adjacent rowhouses, nor in other buildings in this historic district.

Second, the Rules require that “...the rear facade will not be removed from the entire width of the building.” In this case, the rear facade of the existing building *is* proposed to be removed from the entire width of the building, resulting in the loss of original fabric.

Inappropriate Rear Facade

Architects and their clients are often enamored of glassy, sunroom additions as a foil to traditional masonry with punched windows. Yet, the Commission’s Rules are intended to prevent the erosion of this traditional character and its replacement by such misguided architectural “statements.” The design of this proposed rear façade is architecturally out-of-step with its sibling rowhouses, 4, 8 and 10 West 83rd Street, which are characterized by simple, more opaque facades. A lone, fully glazed rear façade extension would be a most unwelcome departure from the staid brick rear facades of this row. While other residences have undertaken rear yard additions, they have done so with a regard for the

materiality of the original structures, opting for brick and wood for the most part. In addition to its jarring disregard for context, we also note the Audubon Society estimate of 1 billion birds in the United States alone that die due to collisions into windows and reflective glass.

Rear Yard Incursion

And while we are discussing the intersection between historic preservation and the environment, we reiterate what we have stated many times in the past, that we are gravely concerned about the cumulative impact of rear yard additions on the open space in the interior of historic rowhouse blocks. Today, this doughnut of adjoining rear yards between 82nd and 83rd Street is mostly intact and maintains much of its late 19th century footprint. Many of the other owners of the neighboring rowhouses have enhanced their existing backyards by planting trees, shrubs and flower beds, attracting birds and other migratory and residential wildlife. It is notable that rear yard landscaping and environmental enhancement are absent at 6 West 83rd Street. If this proposal is approved, the rear yard would be dominated by a large, out-of-context glass addition.

The proposed addition would extend 6' 1" into the rear yard, result in an 89 square foot loss in open space for this mostly pristine doughnut and would reduce the reach of light and air to neighboring 8 West 83rd Street. Most dramatically, it will lock 4 West 83rd Street into a shadowy, isolated keyhole begun by two adjacent large apartment houses and completed by this addition. This neighbor's rear yard will be reduced to a sun-starved alley, wedged between the large Central Park West apartment building to the east and the new addition to the west.

Given the negative historical and environmental impacts, we see no reason for the Commission to overlook its official Rules for rear yard additions. We recommend denial of this application and, in the spirit of creating a more sustainable New York, urge the Commission and the property owner to take a harder look at opportunities for preserving the historic integrity of the "doughnut" and maximizing its potential environmental benefits.