



THE COMMITTEE TO PRESERVE THE UPPER WEST SIDE

**Testimony of LANDMARK WEST!
Certificate of Appropriateness Committee
Before the Landmarks Preservation Commission
258-262 West 88th Street
September 23rd, 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 rooftop and rear yard additions on these three Renaissance Revival style rowhouses designed by Nelson M. Whipple and built in 1884.

Too often, historic rowhouse rear yards are thought of as venues for excess; an applicant seeks permission for a design that would be considered completely inappropriate for a building's primary façade. But as LANDMARK WEST! has argued on many previous occasions, the rear yard doughnut is an important historic context in its own right. And the rear yard component of this proposal is the epitome of inappropriate excess.

Whereas the architect has successfully designed rooftop additions to be minimally visible from the public way, the rear yard additions, as proposed, severely and negatively affect the historic character and integrity of these buildings.

Looking to the Commission's eight criteria for rear yard additions, we see that criterion "e," which instructs that the rear of the buildings must retain the scale and character of individual rowhouses, is not satisfied. We understand that these three buildings will soon be joined internally to create one massive living space. Still, it is important that they retain their historical identity as three individual buildings. By contrast, the additions read as a single three rowhouse-wide structure, providing no articulation or distinction between the three historic facades.

Time and time again, diminutive rowhouse structures such as these are pushed to their max. So much is being asked of these buildings which they are not historically meant to accommodate. Our committee opposes this proposal. We urge the Commission to protect the character of these rowhouses and to deny this application.



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**Testimony of LANDMARK WEST!
Certificate of Appropriateness Committee
Before the Landmarks Preservation Commission
67, 69, 71, and 73 West 71st Street
September 23rd, 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 this application to install new storefront infill, install a storefront at Number 67, and construct rear yard additions at Numbers 67 and 69.

Our Committee's comments relate, first, to the proposal for storefront infill and alterations and, second, to the proposal for rear yard construction.

Storefronts

From the first floor up, these four Thom & Wilson rowhouses stand as proud examples of the neo-Grec style – their windows crisply punched, their lintels classically stylized. At the basement level, however, discontinuity runs rampant. The applicant proposes to unify the four commercial spaces under a streamlined design aesthetic. Our Committee agrees with this approach in principle, as it will reflect the uniformity of the residential rowhouse façades above. Problems arise, we believe, in the details.

The current proposal is an oversimplification of the historic model. With the circa 1940s tax photo available, the architect has a clear guide for appropriate design. Each storefront featured two large display window bays on bulkheads with a recessed center entrance. Today's proposal should take closer direction from this layer of the building's history, unambiguously represented in the tax photo.

Our Committee encourages the architect to revisit the design for these storefronts and to consider adopting a storefront master plan for these buildings. A master plan would enforce a historically sensitive design across the three buildings that interrelate appropriately. In addition, it would protect these four rowhouse storefronts from the future introduction of out-of-step design.

The project architect was not forthcoming with information for this proposal, and likewise did not provide materials samples for the Commission's public review session on Friday. Our Committee is unable to support any new storefront infill without knowing more about the proposed materials.

Over, please



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Rear Yard Infill

We recognize that the full-width, full-depth rear yard additions are permitted by the Zoning Resolution (see Article III, Chapter 3, sub-heading 33-301). Regardless, green-lighting this massive concrete slab, which decks over the entire rear yard of two of these rowhouses with a single, impermeable surface, is reckless urban policy – and, frankly, contrary to the ideas behind Mayor Bloomberg’s 2030 plan. Look to the architect’s own photodocumentation of the rear yard: a sizeable, healthy-looking tree occupies the yard, providing all-too-scarce greenery and shade. Green spaces such as this are increasingly fewer, not only on the Upper West Side, but in Manhattan and across the five boroughs, as additions gradually eat up rear yards.

The Commission has a responsibility in conjunction with other city agencies to take a stand against such brazen and cognizant de-valorization of rowhouse rear yards, if not for environmental reasons than because the rear yard is one of the hallmarks of historic rowhouse design. The front stoops and areaways of these four rowhouses have already been compromised. The identity of these buildings is, therefore, even more reliant on the historic footprint and rear façade integrity. For example, the projecting bay windows would be completely engulfed by the proposed additions.

Whether the use of the lower levels has been altered from its original intent or not, the fact remains that these buildings were, historically, residential spaces. The rear yards are one of the last indications of this and should not be compromised to accommodate contemporary non-characteristic use.

**Testimony of LANDMARK WEST!
Certificate of Appropriateness Committee
Before the Landmarks Preservation Commission
428 Columbus Avenue
September 23, 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 alter and expand an existing rooftop addition at 428 Columbus Avenue, an Early 20th Century-style office building designed by Charles J. Perry and built in 1900.

Change can sometimes be a very good thing. The existing penthouse addition is a reminder of the negative impact such projects can have on landmark buildings and historic districts; allowing it to pass on into Landmarks Preservation Commission lore is a positive change. When the existing rooftop addition appeared before the Commission in 1990, LANDMARK WEST! cautioned that “the convoluted penthouse would detract from the restrained cast-iron façade of its host building.” Perched atop 428 Columbus Avenue, the rooftop addition proves that foresight as well as hindsight can be 20/20. The opportunity to correct this circumstance is now before us.

Prior to discussing the new proposed rooftop addition, which is certainly an improvement over the existing condition, it is important to recognize the unique nature of this application. In no way do we – nor should the Commission – advocate in any blanket way three-story roof top additions in historic districts. That the 1990 structure was approved was a clear mistake. If we were to start from scratch, with no rooftop addition in place, we would raise different issues and questions. However, we find ourselves in the position of judging this application as a rationalization of an existing out-of-character, inappropriate rooftop addition.

Our comments fall into three categories: design, choice of color and choice of material.

Design

Generally speaking, we find the applicant’s approach to this asymmetrical, erratic rooftop structure to be sympathetic to the original building. In relocating the bulk of the addition to the rear, the visual impact will be minimized. Equally, the massing will be more uniformly dispersed. However, the appropriateness of the “downtown,” studio-like sloping windows on the fifth floor is debatable. While the aesthetic is atypical of the Upper West Side/Central Park West Historic District, so are commercial loft buildings. We ask the Commission to keep in mind that a design befitting this building may not necessarily be in keeping with the character of the greater district.

Over, please

Color

The Committee would like to see improvement in the way the design is articulated through color. Proposed for the fifth floor is a slanted, glass artist studio-like façade. Tilting the plane away from the street will reduce the addition's visibility, but finishing it in the same color of the original building façade creates a forgery. There should be a visual trigger that the addition is not original to the building and that it is part of the roof, not the façade. By lightening the color of the windows, while remaining within the same color family, a link can be made to the original structure while also signaling the addition as an *addition*.

The railings, to be black-painted metal, are jarring. We recommend a lighter color which would render the railings less prominent, such as one similar to the paint proposed for the larger rooftop addition.

Material

Several material choices made by the applicant merit commendation. The lead-coated copper proposed at the top-most level of the rooftop addition is an appropriate material – a much better choice than aluminum or stucco. Secondly, the wood casement windows proposed on the South façade of the building are a historically sensitive selection.

In conclusion, our committee feels that the minor changes to color recommended here will make for a more wholly appropriate design.