



THE COMMITTEE TO PRESERVE THE UPPER WEST SIDE

**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



THE COMMITTEE TO PRESERVE THE UPPER WEST SIDE

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.