



THE COMMITTEE TO PRESERVE THE UPPER WEST SIDE

**Testimony of LANDMARK WEST!
Certificate of Appropriateness Committee
Before the Landmarks Preservation Commission
130 West 82nd Street
March 20, 2007**

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 rear and rooftop additions and excavate a portion of the rear yard of a Romanesque Revival-style rowhouse designed by Lamb and Rich, built in 1887 and designated as part of the Upper West Side-Central Park West Historic District.

Rear yard addition

Applications for rear yard additions such as this one are becoming all too frequent. The applicant would like to fill in an existing l-shaped addition to allow for a full width rear yard addition. Based on what the commissioners have approved in the past, this too will be approved. This leads to additional questions: are rear facades in historic districts endangered? The front façade of this building is a wonderful Romanesque Revival composition by renowned architects Lamb and Rich, designers of apartments, schools and banks across New York. Is the non-visible rear façade of a landmarked building something we should care about? The answer to both questions is, absolutely yes.

LW's committee has repeatedly voiced its concern about the filling in of the rear doughnut and the erosion of interior green space. Furthermore, the Commission's own guidelines for rear yard additions prohibit the removal of the original rear façade from the entire width of the building. The stated purpose is to retain original fabric and lessen structural intervention. And yet the Commission routinely approves full-width additions. We urge you to take a hard look at this policy in general, and with regard to this particular application, ask yourselves what unique conditions exist that would merit exemption from the Commission's lawful guidelines.

Stair Bulkhead

We are not opposed to the glass enclosed stair bulkhead. In fact, we frequently advocate for greater use of glass and metal in the design of rooftop additions, so we cautiously praise the applicant for eschewing humdrum stucco. That said, we recommend the applicant use non-reflective glass to avoid creating a nuisance to his rear yard neighbors.



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**Testimony of LANDMARK WEST!
Certificate of Appropriateness Committee
Before the Landmarks Preservation Commission
264 West 91st Street
March 20, 2007**

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 to Renaissance Revival style rowhouse which was designed by Alexander M. Welch, built in 1896-1897 and designated as part of the Upper West Side-Central Park West Historic District.

With respect to this application, we feel that this proposal for a full-width addition that creates a new rear façade bears a striking resemblance to the previously discussed application for 130 West 82nd Street and countless others that have preceded it. With this, we raise the issues that we discussed in our prior testimony.

“The Commission’s own guidelines for rear yard additions prohibit the removal of the original rear facade from the entire width of the building. The stated purpose is to retain original fabric and lessen structural intervention. And yet the Commission routinely approves full-width additions. We urge you to take a hard look at this policy in general, and with regard to this particular application, ask yourselves what unique conditions exist that would merit exemption from the Commission’s lawful guidelines.”



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**Testimony of LANDMARK WEST!
Certificate of Appropriateness Committee
Before the Landmarks Preservation Commission
3 West 73rd Street
March 20, 2007**

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 an elevator bulkhead and alter the rear and side facades of this Beaux-Arts style rowhouse designed by Welch, Smith & Provot and built in 1902-03 and designated as part of the Upper West Side-Central Park West Historic District.

Rooftop Addition and Elevator Bulkhead

We do not object to the combination of the existing rooftop additions since they are only minimally visible through the side alley. Further, we are not opposed to the proposed elevator bulkhead because, again, it is minimally visible from West 73rd Street.

Alterations to the Side Façade

As the building's east elevation is utilitarian in nature, we do not object to the three punched windows proposed for the side façade. For successful execution of the design, the new windows should match the windows on the front elevation in size, color and material and configuration.

Alterations to the Rear Façade

Our committee is primarily concerned with facades that are visible from public rights-of-way, but the Beaux-Arts extravaganza proposed for the rear façade does give us pause. When turn-of-the-century buildings like 3 West 73rd Street were constructed, rear yards were utilitarian spaces used for laundry, gardens and other service functions. Although rear yards are used for more recreational purposes today, the fact remains that the essence of a rowhouse rear façade is unadorned simplicity. Indeed, the overall character of rowhouses is repetition, not individual expression. The present application, with its overly ornate metalwork and windows, sets an entirely different tone. We do ask if the applicant has notified his neighbors whose apartments face the doughnut of the extensive and extroverted alterations that are proposed.

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We close with this thought. In 1901, critic Montgomery Schuyler lambasted the over-the-top Beaux-Arts-style of Welch, Smith and Provot's Benjamin Duke House (Fifth and 82nd) in his article, "The Architecture of the Billionaire District." In the convening 100 years, we've grown to appreciate and cherish this extravagant ornateness for the primary façades. We ask you, the commissioners, are rear yards an appropriate showcase for "billionaire"-style architecture?



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**Testimony of LANDMARK WEST!
Certificate of Appropriateness Committee
Before the Landmarks Preservation Commission
49 West 85th Street
March 20, 2007**

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 legalize painting, replacing windows and installing an areaway wall, awnings and a security camera without Landmarks Preservation Commission permits to this modern apartment building designed by Yeshayahu Eshkar, built in 1968-1972 and designated as part of the Upper West Side-Central Park West Historic District.

While it would be easy to write off this 1960s apartment building as just a typical modern box, originally it was, according to historian Christopher Gray, part of “a striking triplet” of brightly-colored glazed brick buildings designed by Yeshayahu Eshkar. 49 West 85th Street was originally a translucent green, and its sister structures included a blue building at 69 West 85th Street and a brown structure at 55 West 83rd Street. Unfortunately, 49 West 85th Street’s brilliant green brick was painted prior to designation.

An illegal paint job as well as non-permitted awnings, replacement windows, security camera and massive areaway wall are up for your consideration today. As with every application to legalize that comes before the Commission, we ask: would these alterations have been approved had they gone through the normal application process? In this case, the answer would be a resounding “no.”

Of primary concern is the illegal construction of masonry walls enclosing the areaway. These walls create a fortress-like barrier between the building and the sidewalk. As the Commission gives careful consideration to alterations in the areaway, it seems clear that such an elimination of sidewalk space never would have been approved. These obtrusive walls should be not allowed to remain.

Also of concern are the three illegal fixed awnings. The awnings are objectionable on three counts: first, the awnings were not installed according the Commission’s guidelines for size, shape and placement within the window opening; second, the commission specifies “awnings installed on residential windows, doors and porches shall be retractable awnings”; third, cloth, arched awnings are completely out of character with an angular, minimalist Modern building.



THE COMMITTEE TO PRESERVE THE UPPER WEST SIDE

**Testimony of LANDMARK WEST!
Certificate of Appropriateness Committee
Before the Landmarks Preservation Commission
Regarding the New-York Historical Society
March 20, 2007**

LANDMARK WEST! is a not-for-profit community organization committed to the preservation of the architectural heritage of the Upper West Side.

New York's "Triple Crown" Landmark

The New-York Historical Society is sacred ground. Architecturally, historically and culturally, it is the very definition of a Landmark. To paraphrase from the Landmarks Law, Landmarks are places that have special character, interest or value, representing the finest architectural products in our city's history, the destruction of which would be an irreplaceable loss to the people of this city and a detriment to New York's standing as a world-wide tourist center and capital of business, culture and government (Title 25, Section 25-301, "Purpose and declaration of public policy").

The Landmarks Commission felt so strongly about the Historical Society and preserving its relationship to its surrounding context, that it designated this building not only as an Individual Landmark (one of New York's first, in 1966) but also as part of the Central Park West – West 76th Street Historic District (one of the first historic districts to be designated on the Upper West Side, in 1973) *as well as* the Upper West Side/Central Park West Historic District (one of New York's largest historic districts, designated in 1990) encompassing almost the full sweep of Central Park West and its iconic skyline.

Also important to note is that the Historical Society is also certified for the National Register of Historic Places. Its immediate neighbors include the American Museum of Natural History (an Individual Landmark) and Central Park (a Scenic Landmark).

A Mission to Preserve History, or Revise It?

In testimony and letters sent to this Commission back in 1984, when the Historical Society proposed to make radical alterations including a tower designed by Hugh Hardy, the top architectural experts in our city rushed forward to defend the integrity of this Landmark, and to oppose the tower.

Philip Johnson wrote, "If the Landmark Law has any meaning at all, it is to prevent the defacement (really means destruction) of buildings that have historic significance," (letter dated January 18, 1984). Robert A.M. Stern called the Historical Society "one of a series of public buildings erected at the turn of the century on Central Park West which in concert form a chain of monumental gateways to the West Side...These buildings remain as a testament to the low-scale Classical urbanism of the City Beautiful movement" (letter dated January 13, 1984). Paul Goldberger asked, "What, after all, should be more

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a symbol of permanence than a building dedicated to honoring the history of the city?” (*New York Times*, January 22, 1984).

Yet, in information distributed in recent weeks, presumably to its entire mailing list—history lovers in our city and beyond—the Historical Society has referred to its Landmark as a “sarcophagus” and a “mausoleum.” Moreover, these stewards of one of New York’s most significant treasures persist in treating their site just as any real-estate developer would treat any property anywhere. To use the Society’s own term, they consider their Landmark “a development opportunity.”

Such words urge extreme caution moving forward on any application for any changes to this Landmark. At best, they point to an institution still struggling with its mission and identity (most of you have probably seen Kevin Guthrie’s 1997 booklet or his 1996 book, *The New-York Historical Society: Lessons from One Nonprofit’s Long Struggle for Survival*, funded by the Mellon Foundation, on the Society’s history of fiscal and administrative mismanagement). At worst, words like “mausoleum” expose an institution that has irrecoverably lost its way, pursuing change merely for its own sake, even when grave doubts are raised as to the logic and appropriateness of those changes, stubbornly refusing to learn from the lessons of the past.

The Façade Alterations: On the Merits

This application to alter the Central Park West and West 77th Street façades should be denied on the merits. The proposed changes would tamper with almost every significant aspect of the Landmark spelled out in the Commission’s designation report: its “austerely classical” feeling, “fine gray granite,” “bronze grille-work of the large side windows [on West 77th Street],” the “pedimented heroic size main portal on Central Park West.”

Furthermore, the proposed changes would undo a series of appropriate, Landmarks-approved, publicly funded renovations implemented in the 1990s under the direction of Beyer Blinder Belle, including the award-winning barrier-free access ramp on West 77th Street and restored original windows. These renovations, completed barely a decade ago, addressed many of the exact same issues the Society seeks to address today. However, they did so without imposing irreversible changes on the Landmark façade. The Society has not made a convincing case for why such radical façade alterations are now necessary. If the Commission approves them, will we face yet another “do-over” ten years from now?

We reiterate Community Board 7’s excellent, nearly unanimous resolution, which states that “the exterior changes to its classical façade proposed by the Historical Society are unnecessary overkill with respect to the functional aims that drive this proposal, apparently motivated at least in part by the inappropriate decision to seek to ‘modernize’ the façade rather than to make minimally intrusive changes, and to respect above all the very features for which it was designated a landmark.”

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The Need for a Master Plan

The proposed façade alterations simply make no sense. But, indeed, there is more to the story. An email circulated by the Historical Society on January 24, 2007—again, presumably to its entire mailing list—explains that "proceeds from the residential portion of our construction program would be used to help fund the Society's internal growth plans." Only a week later, at a "Town Hall" meeting attended by hundreds, and at subsequent community board meetings, also attended by hundreds, the Society staunchly denied any relationship between the two aspects of their project. No, they said, their plan to build a 280-foot tower, as described in two *New York Times* articles from November and December 2006, was totally separate from the façade alteration proposal.

Such an overtly artificial separation may seem convenient from a public review standpoint, but, in terms of real-world planning, it is completely unrealistic. No institution, particularly one with as troubled a past as the New-York Historical Society, would embark on a major façade and interior reconfiguration project without a comprehensive plan for its entire facility. And, even if they would, this Commission should not allow it.

The Landmarks Commission routinely counsels property owners—whether they seek to replace their windows, add a rooftop addition or change their storefront—to adopt a master plan for "alterations that are not planned to occur all at once, but rather in increments through time" (Title 63, Section 2-02). If this is important for repetitive changes, then it is all the more important for such vast changes as those planned for this Landmark. The façade and the tower are inextricably related—the Commission and the public must have the opportunity to review them as a whole, not piecemeal as they are being presented.

A 74-711 Review?

In a February 7, 2007, email, the Historical Society explained that the "potential expansion project" (a.k.a., the tower) would be subject to Landmarks review and ULURP (Uniform Land Use Review Procedure), most likely referring to the process for obtaining use or bulk modifications established under Section 74-711 of the Zoning Resolution. Section 74-711 requires "that a program has been established for continuing maintenance that will result in the preservation of the [Landmark], and that such #use# or #bulk# modifications, or restorative work required under the continuing maintenance program, contributes to a preservation purpose."

The Society's ability to gain approval for a tower is entirely dependent on their "preservation" of the Landmark. If the Commission approves the current façade alteration application, it will have significantly lowered the bar for approval of the tower.

Conclusion

If today's hearing is truly about an institution's honest efforts to make appropriate changes to its Landmark and not about disingenuous attempts to mislead the Commission

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and the public into accepting—sight unseen—major real-estate development that could have long-term, disastrous effects on this and other Landmark sites (a.k.a., “development opportunities”), then let the Historical Society come forward with a unified, comprehensive, well-reasoned and well-articulated plan.

Let’s not look back and say “if only we’d known.” We do know. The Commission should not approve this application.