



THE COMMITTEE TO PRESERVE THE UPPER WEST SIDE

**Testimony of LANDMARK WEST!
Certificate of Appropriateness Committee
Before the Landmarks Preservation Commission
472 Columbus Avenue
July 18, 2006**

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 the installation of storefront infill and signage without Landmarks Preservation Commission permits on this neo-Grec style tenement building designed by Jacob H. Valentine and built in 1884-85.

In general, the LANDMARK WEST! Certificate of Appropriateness Committee rejects the option of after-the-fact legalizations of alterations to landmark properties. We have a number of specific concerns regarding the existing illegal storefront and the proposed changes at 472 Columbus Avenue.

Our Committee is pleased that the applicant is willing to work with the Landmarks Preservation Commission to improve their existing illegal storefront and to better comply with design guidelines. However, the proposed alterations do not go far enough in remedying the highly inappropriate and illegal infill of this storefront. Overall, the signage at 472 Columbus Avenue is too bright, cluttered, and overbearing. The proposed re-design does not resolve these signage issues. Currently, there are a total of three different signs that advertise Ricky's, all of which are illuminated in neon pink and turquoise and take up a disproportionate amount of space. The main pink "Ricky's" sign is internally illuminated, which is not listed as a permitted sign type in the *Guidelines from the District Master Plan for Storefronts on Madison Avenue in the Carnegie Hill (and extension) Historic District*. This sign should not remain illuminated.

We also feel strongly that that the applicant should remove the "Looking Good! Feeling Good!" slogan below the Ricky's sign. It further clutters the storefront's overall appearance, and it is not part of the store's official name. The re-designed plans for the storefront propose removing the illuminated feature of the tube-shaped logo sign and placing it flush against the sign band. However, our Committee feels that the entire sign should be removed, as it overwhelms the storefront and detracts from the building's primary façade.

The existing storefront has a large sign band which is out of scale with the building and with the rest of the block. Furthermore, our Committee feels that existing transom is too large and that the bulkhead should be raised. Finally, our Committee has strong concerns



THE COMMITTEE TO PRESERVE THE UPPER WEST SIDE

about the storefront's metallic finish. The metal should be painted a color that complements the building above.

We recommend that the application for legalization be denied, and that the applicant submit a revised proposal that addresses the above concerns and reflects compliance with established guidelines.



THE COMMITTEE TO PRESERVE THE UPPER WEST SIDE

**Testimony of LANDMARK WEST!
Certificate of Appropriateness Committee
Before the Landmarks Preservation Commission
Ancient Playground
July 18, 2006**

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 binding report to enlarge a masonry opening at the comfort station, reinstall gates, modify an existing playground and replace pathways in the English Romantic-style public park designed in 1856 by Frederick Law Olmsted and Calvert Vaux.

Since the mid-1990s, LANDMARK WEST! has collaborated with the designer Richard Dattner and the Central Park Conservancy in the preservation of Dattner's Modernist playgrounds in Central Park, including the Adventure Playground at West 67th Street, the Heckscher Playground and the East 72nd Street Playground. As with these other successful restorations, we have worked with Dattner and the Conservancy to represent preservation interests for the Ancient Playground. In the restoration of this playground, we advocate for a sensitive preservation approach to ensure that the treatment of details does not compromise the preservation intent, specifically with regards to the Osborn Gates, tree turrets, water chute and obelisk.

The Ancient Play Garden is a hallmark of the Adventure Playground movement that started in Europe after World War II to encourage creative, participatory play. At the playground's opening in 1972, August Heckscher, the city parks administrator, noted that "for the first time, such a facility takes a historic theme as its base in blending education and enjoyment." Dattner's abstracted Egyptian forms were influenced by the work of Louis Kahn and are a response to the Metropolitan Museum of Art's extensive Egyptian art collection and acquisition of the Temple of Dendur. Over 30 years have passed since the playground opened and we can now look at the playground as a paramount work of modern design. We strongly urge you to consider the architectural merits of this significant New York modernist landscape and the significant changes that are proposed in this application.

We are pleased with the Conservancy's sensitive consideration of the original design elements of this and other Adventure Playgrounds in Central Park. The Conservancy's decision to reconstruct the pyramidal forms with red brick is an important victory for preservation as this was part of the playground's original design as well as a reference to an ancient building material.



THE COMMITTEE TO PRESERVE THE UPPER WEST SIDE

Despite our overall approval of the restoration, we have concerns about the following elements:

The Osborn Gates Designed by Paul Manship: We are pleased about the reintroduction of Paul Manship's masterful Tortoise and Hare and Wolf and Lamb gates, but the current proposal sites the gates as a flat sculptural element at the park's entryway. Instead, we advocate that they should be restored as an operable entryway to the playground. Each gate tells a separate fable, and they would be better used as functioning gates to create a wonderful entrance to the playground instead of as static sculpture. Another concern is that children will use these magnificent gates as play elements as their function will no longer be clear. The precedent for functioning, artist-designed gates is already well-established in Central Park with the Manship gates at the Lehman Children's Zoo and the Levy Gates at the Pat H. Hoffmann-Friedman playground.

Tree Turrets: In the original design, concrete turret-like structures surround some of the trees on the eastern side of the playground. These turrets also become entry points into the playground. The turret-like shapes recall design from this era (most famously in Louis Kahn's Capital Complex in Bangladesh), and they also work well with children's imaginative "fortress" play that is fostered in the Ancient Playground.

Water Chute: This is an outstanding element of the original design, and in the proposal it has been lopped off. It is important to preserve the cantilever of this element as it creates a waterfall effect, and, as the designer has pointed out, allows children to go below and experience the wonder of going behind a waterfall. The water chute in its trough-like form also relates well to the ancient theme of the playground.

Toddler Circle & Obelisk Slide: In Richard Dattner's original design, there is a focal point at the end of the entry axis that is created by an obelisk inside a circle. This circle defines a toddler area where parents can sit on benches on supervise toddlers completely safe and segregated from older children. The Obelisk contains a gentle slide for very small children, and, most importantly, sand for their creative play. At this age, children cannot climb on equipment but they can shape things with their tiny hands - and this is important for their cognitive development.

An original design element that recalls the nearby Cleopatra's Needle, the Obelisk is in good condition and does not pose any safety hazards. Therefore, it is best to retain and preserve the obelisk *in situ* as original fabric of the playground and as the focal point of the main axis. The proposed redesign would demolish the obelisk, rebuild it nearby, as well as remove all the sand and add new climbing equipment suitable for slightly older children.

LANDMARK WEST!

THE COMMITTEE TO PRESERVE THE UPPER WEST SIDE

For the reasons outlined above, we are opposed to removing this original, intact and beautiful part of the original design.

In conclusion, we ask the Commission to take a closer look at these specific design elements. These features may seem to be minor alterations to the Conservancy's proposal, but they are integral elements to the original design and their inclusion will ensure a more sensitive restoration of this historic playground.



THE COMMITTEE TO PRESERVE THE UPPER WEST SIDE

**Testimony of LANDMARK WEST!
Certificate of Appropriateness Committee
Before the Landmarks Preservation Commission
Riverside Park Playground, 117th to 118th Street
July 18, 2006**

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 binding report to modify playgrounds at West 117th and 118th Streets in Riverside Park in the Riverside Park and Riverside Drive Scenic Landmark.

Our committee encourages the applicant to use green play equipment to reduce the visual impact and to resemble other tot lots in Riverside Park. Multi-colored equipment will detract from the park by calling undue attention to itself.