



THE COMMITTEE TO PRESERVE THE UPPER WEST SIDE

**Testimony of LANDMARK WEST!
Certificate of Appropriateness Committee
Before the Landmarks Preservation Commission
Riverside Park and Riverside Drive,
Between West 88th and West 89th Street
February 6, 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 redesign a plaza in Riverside Park, an English Romantic-style park and parkway built in 1873-1902 and designed by Frederick Law Olmsted, with modifications and additions by Clifton Lloyd and Gilmore Clarke between 1934-37.

Having seen the presentation by the NYC Parks Department, you, the landmarks commissioners, are faced with two options:

-The first is to take the "bird in hand" approach, approve the design as presented, perhaps with some minor modifications

-The second is to hold out for a design that truly considers the historical significance of the Monument, the importance of its relationship with the Hudson River, and the strength of the promenade axis with Riverside Drive.

We urge you to take the second route, for this is no ordinary city park. And this is no ordinary monument. Designed by Stoughton and Stoughton and Paul E.M. Duboy in 1902 as a memorial to Civil War dead, it is a site of national significance and a destination for New Yorkers and visitors from all over the country. Memorial Day events attracted crowds of thousands. Set on a high bluff in the picturesque Riverside Park, the monument and promenade form a strong visual axis paralleling Riverside Drive to the north and south. The three cannons placed along the promenade recall a military embankment protecting the monument from invading vessels combing the Hudson River.

Historically, visitors approaching along the promenade framed by an allee of trees would first encounter a gradual sloping lawn leading to the Hudson before experiencing the formality of the monument plaza. As old photographs and postcards romantically convey, picnickers and park revelers took in sweeping views of the Hudson while recreating on the park's grassy slope.

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Enter the 1937 Gilmore Clarke design for the promenade. Converting the sloping lawn into a paved terrace, the redesign traded greenery for asphalt and paving stone and interrupted visitors' experience of the majestic Hudson with a metal fence.

A New Beginning

In numerous conversations with the Parks Department over the past few months, LW! has joined residents and other community stakeholders in asking Parks to consider a return to the grand vision of the 1902 design, reinstating the magnificent original setting for this national monument and Individual Landmark and complementing dramatic river views from the bluff, a unique landscape feature along Riverside Park. Unfortunately, the Parks Department has adopted a far less visionary approach.

Parks argues that their plan would preserve the various design "layers" of this space. Landmark West! frequently supports this kind of approach. Here, however, we believe there is a real opportunity to restore this space to something that is truly authentic and unique. We also believe that the "layered" approach, in this case, is simply a convenient rationalization for "band-aid" design and short-sighted planning.

Extending the lawn east to the promenade, eliminating the two islands and creating a more gracious setting for the three historic cannons, would add to the sense of openness and go a long way towards striking a better balance between "park" and "plaza" in this space. For too long, the public has endured a hard, barren, unwelcoming space that no more resembles a park than the surface of the moon. The current schematics show much of this area as still paved over, with only a small area of grass kept off-limits behind a permanent fence, plus rigidly delineated islands of trees and ground cover.

As redesigned, the eastern edge of the lawn, where it interfaces with the promenade, could be lined with a continuous row of benches, much in keeping with historical photographs and illustrations. The benches could be placed back-to-back or in an alternating pattern, some facing east and some facing west—or indeed the benches could be backless, allowing users to sit facing either the promenade or the river, allowing for a variety of experiences. The benches would also create a barrier dissuading heavy use of the lawn without preventing more passive uses.

In our 2002 testimony before the Landmarks Commission, Landmark West! urged that the design be kept simple and respect the separate and contrasting aesthetics of the City Beautiful-era Monument, including the formal plaza immediately surrounding it, and the historically less formal area to the south. The current schematics show a simplified layout, more appropriate paving materials, and enhanced vistas to the Hudson River, but in other ways, the plan risks making some of the same missteps that evoked criticisms from the community and public review agencies in 2002. When reviewing this application, some Landmarks Commissioners and most Art Commissioners agreed with Landmark West's criticism that the then-plan was overly formal and blurred the

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distinction between the City Beautiful Monument plaza and the more naturalistic park. Since this proposal was withdrawn, several Parks Department officials have stated to Landmark West how grateful they are that the plan did was not implemented.

The current scheme introduces formal elements such as an east-west axis, running perpendicular to the north-south promenade that leads up to the monument. Furthermore, the schematic drawings show “cutouts” or exedra at the corners of the two tree islands. This treatment is too fussy and not in keeping with the Parks Department goal of making the edges of the plantings soft and inconspicuous. The beds should be read as an incidental element in the overall scheme and not draw attention to themselves.

Safety and Accessibility

Among the concerns for improving this site—appropriate restoration and reestablishing a dignified setting for a national monument/landmark, concerns have been raised about safety for children and ADA-accessibility.

Returning to the 1902 design appropriately addresses both constituent groups. Certainly reducing the amount of paving, particularly around the cannons, decreases the possibility of injury for playful children. Furthermore, the generously wide promenade is amply accessible for wheel-chair bound users to enjoy views of the Monument and the river.

Maintenance

Maintenance will be an ongoing issue, whatever the ultimate design. We understand that the West 89th Street Block Association has offered to raise funds to support the maintenance of the restored lawn. The prospect of such a public-private partnership, in furtherance of a community-driven and -supported restoration plan for this important and long-neglected public space is truly exciting. We trust that the Parks Department will fully explore this opportunity, and we hope that the suggestions above are helpful as you continue to evaluate design options.



THE COMMITTEE TO PRESERVE THE UPPER WEST SIDE

**Testimony of LANDMARK WEST!
Certificate of Appropriateness Committee
Before the Landmarks Preservation Commission
Central Park – East Side Landscapes between East 96th to East 108th Streets
Tuesday, February 6, 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 remove existing pathways and install new pathways.

In 2002, LANDMARK WEST! testified on the Central Park Conservancy's application to reconstruct the East Meadow Landscape, a plan that has never been implemented. When the commission reviewed this application, we raised the following issues as possibilities for concern:

- Attention to the possible endangerment of specimen trees during excavation
- The visual discordance of the hard-edged clay ovals proposed for casual sports games
- The need for policy restrictions to prohibit destructive uses, such as large scale and the trampling by foot and truck they bring
- Recommendation that the commission approve the application with the caveat that t that perimeter fencing be restricted from the East Meadow.

We urge you to consider these issues as the application moves forward.

Diversity of Paths in Central Park

Because of the tremendous importance of Central Park as a Scenic Landmark and a shared historic resource in the heart of Manhattan, our Committee consistently testifies on proposals affecting its integrity. And because it was designed in multiple stages over the course of its 150-year history, this integrity is complex. LW! is fundamentally concerned with preserving the physical evidence of the Park's evolution—the many layers that tell the story of its development through time and at the hand of some of New York's, and America's, most important landscape architects: Frederick Law Olmsted, Calvert Vaux, Samuel Parsons and Gilmore D. Clarke.

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Unfortunately, the Central Park Conservancy has chosen a route that would eradicate historic Park fabric to achieve a “continuous Park experience” that frankly never existed. The Commission is presented today with conceptual plans, but we urge you to consider also the details, which are far more than utilitarian. Indeed, their treatment will ultimately determine the appropriateness of this landscape renovation.

At stake are three beautifully intact, contiguous layers representing three significant eras of Central Park history. The Conservancy’s proposal to reconstruct the paths within these landscapes would remove many key elements, including original curbing and railings, and replace them with standard, contemporary materials.

As an ensemble, the East Side Landscapes embody the Park’s multi-layered history and the founding vision of Olmsted and Vaux, whose plan purposefully juxtaposed different types of landscapes, with distinct details, to create a variety of unique experiences for park users. Historically, there was never a “continuous park experience” (to borrow the Central Park Conservancy’s phrase). The park experience was, in fact, intentionally discontinuous. Examples include use of rustic furnishings and winding paths in woodland areas, and more formal furnishings and paved, axial paths in areas such as the Mall. Olmsted and Vaux delighted in creating irregular paths, wonderful elements of surprise, and juxtapositions of smooth and rough surfaces, custom-tailored to specific landscape conditions.

This pastoral space surrounding the East Meadow exists in striking contrast to the more rugged landscapes to the north. Yet, the landscapes seem to flow seamlessly into one another, a tribute to the strength of the Olmsted/Vaux vision and how it was later carried out by Parsons and then Clarke.

Frederick Law Olmsted and Calvert Vaux

Early photographs of Central Park document the 102nd Street carriage drive entrance, a remarkably intact relic of Olmsted/Vaux era. This is not officially part of the application presented today, but promotional materials circulated by the Central Park Conservancy depict redesign of this entrance to create a plaza similar to the one at Merchant’s Gate near Columbus Circle. This kind of “City Beautiful” gesture is inappropriate at the 102nd Street location and blurs the deliberate boundary between “city” (outside the wall of the Park) and “country” (inside the wall). Such a drastic intervention in this original entrance should be avoided as the application you are considering today moves forward.

Also worth noting is the boulder edging that lines the path north of the 102nd Street drive. Characteristic of Vaux, this boulder edging is widely used in Morningside Park, which was just calendared by the Commission. Replacing this original, historic fabric with a standard granite curb is destructive and unnecessary.

Samuel Parsons

Vaux protégée Samuel Parsons worked on the area between 97th and 102nd Streets as well as the Harlem Meer in the 1890s. He was justly proud of his work here and cited it in his books. Much of it has survived intact, including his signature grand specimen trees from the Parsons family nursery in Queens, iron stair railings, bluestone and rustic boulder path edging and treads, asymmetrical path layout, rocky escarpments and windy paths among pine knolls—all Parsons design hallmarks. Again, the Conservancy proposes to replace these distinct, characteristic features with modern elements—granite blocks and steel railings—used elsewhere in the Park.

Gilmore D. Clarke

Current exhibitions are shedding new light on the Robert Moses era and indeed the Landmarks Commission has held public designation hearings for several landscapes designed by Gilmore D. Clarke, the city's chief landscape designer in the 1930s and 40s.

While the WPA period was defined by major design interventions, the landscape that Clarke created is understated—a rare survivor of his pastoral design. Characterized by well-defined paths set graciously into the hilly topography, this landscape is located just north of and contiguous to the Conservatory Garden, arguably Clarke's finest design contribution to Central Park. As with the Conservatory Garden, the network of paths and stairs in the Forts area are completely intact and bear his design hallmarks. Here Clarke relied on modest, non-intrusive gestures, including the namesake fort-like overlooks above the Meer and fan-shaped, ashlar-laid bluestone staircases, well-integrated into the Olmsted/Vaux design, and including his signature “set-in” pathways impressed in the landscape. Both recall Clarke's work in Riverside Park. Distinct and resonant of Works Progress Administration design, Clarke's extensive network of paths through rolling topography would be reconfigured in the Conservancy's plan; concrete aggregate curbing and benches—typical of the Clarke/Moses era—would be replaced, yet again, with the standard granite blocks.

In conclusion, removing existing material is something that should only be done if necessary. In the absence of any compelling reason to remove these path details and because the curbing is historically appropriate and appears to be in generally excellent condition, we recommend that the existing historic fabric of this section of Central Park be preserved as this proposal for path construction moves forward.



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**Testimony of LANDMARK WEST!
Certificate of Appropriateness Committee
Before the Landmarks Preservation Commission
467 Columbus Avenue
February 6, 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 the construction of a rear yard addition and storefront alterations without Landmarks Preservation Commission permits at this neo-Grec style tenement building designed by Ernest W. Schneider and built in 1885-86.

Rear Yard Addition

This application to legalize a rear yard addition should not be approved as presented. The applicant flouted Landmarks Preservation Commission guidelines by proceeding, without permits, to build a bulky rear yard addition that spans the entire width of the building and projects twenty feet into the rear yard and comes within inches of the lot line. Based on its size, it is clear from the commission's guidelines for rear yard additions that this proposal never would have been approved had it gone through the appropriate approval process. Such flagrant disregard for the rules should not be rewarded by allowing this addition to remain in its current form. In the past, the commission has required applicants to scale back much larger additions than this that were constructed before necessary approval was in place. The proposed faux infill window and brick cladding do nothing to offset the unimaginative bulk of this addition. A more appropriate design for a rear yard addition would incorporate a greater proportion of solid and void by using glass and metal to break up and variegate the massing.

Storefront Awning

The committee does not object to the retractable awning that has been proposed for the storefront.



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**Testimony of LANDMARK WEST!
Certificate of Appropriateness Committee
Before the Landmarks Preservation Commission
200 West 84th Street
February 6, 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 the installation of windows and an awning without Landmarks Preservation Commission permits on this neo-Grec/Queen Anne-style flats building designed by Jacob Valentine and built in 1889-90.

As we have stated many times before this commission, our committee urges the Landmarks Preservation Commission not to reward property owners who flout landmarks guidelines by working without permits. The practice of legalizing alterations after the fact, in essence, penalizes property owners who comply with landmarks guidelines by rewarding those who flout the law. In this instance, the awning that has been installed is inappropriate for the district as it is not retractable and its sides are not open. We recommend that the commission deny approval. The windows, also installed illegally, do not appear to be inappropriate.



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**Testimony of LANDMARK WEST!
Certificate of Appropriateness Committee
Before the Landmarks Preservation Commission
146 West 80th Street
February 6, 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 install ironwork at the areaway and stoop on this Renaissance Revival-style rowhouse designed by Gilbert A. Schellenger and built in 1890.

The Committee objects to this application for a stoop gate based on two principles. First, according to the tax photo, there is no historical precedent for a stoop gate at this location. Second, particularly as they proliferate, stoop gates undermine the sense of community in the neighborhood that historic districts are intended to engender.

This block is a good example of the domino effect that stoop gates create. Currently, two neighboring brownstones have stoop gates. If the commission approves this application, trends in the neighborhood indicate other property owners on the block will feel the need to install similarly unfriendly gates as well.

In conclusion, we echo the statement made by a commission director when asked about stoop gates at a recent community meeting: the commission encourages property owners to explore other less obtrusive forms of security.