

**Testimony of LANDMARK WEST!  
Certificate of Appropriateness Committee  
Before the Landmarks Preservation Commission  
Central Park Police Precinct  
Tuesday, January 24, 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 enclose the central courtyard of the stable, shed and reservoir keeper's cottage in Central Park. This complex was designed by Jacob Wrey Mould and Calvert Vaux, constructed in 1871 and is one of the few examples of Victorian polychromy in New York City. As we all know, Central Park was designed to be the heart and lungs of New York. Olmsted and Vaux's plan has stood the test of time and functions as a natural retreat for the city. Changes to such an important place and such an important complex within that place, must be closely scrutinized by this commission.

Neither the proposed restoration nor the proposed glass addition to the stable complex meet threshold criteria for appropriateness. We urge the City to abandon this disastrous plan, which will not restore the stable, but irreparably alter it. First, we question whether the glass canopy is essential to reusing the building or is rather an unnecessary and inappropriate design statement. Keep in mind that a glass enclosure presents a host of problems. In the rendering before you it appears somewhat transparent and ethereal, but we all know that the only place glass enclosed spaces ever appear transparent and ethereal is in the artist's presentation rendering. In real life, they tend to be as intrusive as structures built of any other material, whether from reflections, dirt and poor upkeep. By its own admission, the police department is prepared to invest very little in maintenance. Now visualize this space encumbered with computers, trash cans, bulletin boards and notices scotch-taped to walls. The lobby will be a highly-visible cluttered mess.

Further, the joint where the canopy meets the roof and dormer windows appears as a thin line in the rendering. In reality, this will require a distracting amount of flashing, a high maintenance proposition. The police department freely admits they have an inadequate maintenance budget, so imagine what the glass canopy will look like in five, ten, twenty years after minimal maintenance. (For a clue, see the leaking, streaking atrium at Columbia Presbyterian hospital.) On that note, how will the old materials handle the thermal stresses where they are partially covered by an effective greenhouse? Does this proposal represent acceptable stewardship of a 130-year-old building? We think not.

### Visibility from the Park

In addition to its effect on the building, we are also concerned about how the canopy will alter the visual impact of the structure from other sections of the park, including the Great Lawn and the Reservoir. The original designers tucked the complex into the bank of the old reservoir so as to fade into the landscape. The bald metal canopy peeking above the stable's roofline will draw attention to the stable as well as the transverse road, where invisibility is so crucial to the Olmsted and Vaux's original design of the park. Just as rooftop additions should not be visible from the street, a courtyard addition should not be visible from outside.

### Restoration of the Stable Complex

It concerns us that perceived security needs seem to be driving this design. The proposal to replace the multi-light windows, installed in the 1930s, with single-pane bulletproof glass in metal casing, will disastrously alter the complex's character. Why cannot this be done with more appropriate materials? Again, we were informed that the police department selected this model because of their inadequate budget for maintenance. One proposal we wish the police to consider, if they do absolutely need to use bullet-proof glazing in this quiet precinct, is to place the 11/16" glass on the inside of the window, while accommodating a wood frame with divided lights on the outside of the structure. We are also informed that riot lights will be installed to flood the exterior of the complex with light. This, too, is inappropriate.

### Conclusion

While ideally we support a police presence in Central Park, we also strongly believe that this historic complex should not be sacrificed for that purpose. The building is primarily used as an office building since Central Park is a low-crime precinct. We request the police department to review all functions in the space, including the private gym, and to relocate any distinct units that can be on their own to make the program fit the existing space. This building can be reconfigured to accommodate the primary needs of the precinct. Relocating the entrance and desk sergeant's office in the keeper's cottage at the northwest corner is one suitable option.

The bottom line is unless the police department can prove it will be a good steward of this important structure, through more appropriate materials and sensitive redesign to reduce visual impact, we recommend that it explore other options: either in the form of relocating outside of the park or designing a new, visually non-obtrusive building, perhaps adjacent to the historic stable complex on the transverse road or even a subterranean location, to accommodate its needs.

The stable complex could be sensitively restored for other uses: including a stable to replace Clairmont Stables on West 89<sup>th</sup> Street, which is on the verge of closing, or some other public use including a restaurant, that takes advantage of its easily accessible location.

Finally, we wish to point out you that the traffic light on the transverse road and the stable complex is a designated landmark and should be incorporated into any redesign of automobile circulation at that location.