

**Testimony of LANDMARK WEST!  
Certificate of Appropriateness Committee  
Before the Art Commission  
Regarding the Restoration of the  
Bethesda Terrace Arcade Ceiling, Central Park  
April 11, 2005**

LANDMARK WEST! is a non-profit community organization committed to the preservation of the architectural heritage of the Upper West Side.

LANDMARK WEST! is very pleased to comment on the proposed restoration of the Minton Tile ceiling at Bethesda Terrace, an architecturally important and much-beloved element of historic Central Park. We are thrilled that this long-overdue project, which clearly aims to meet the highest preservation standards, is moving forward at last.

We thank the Central Park Conservancy for coming to present their carefully considered proposal to our committee. We would like to wholeheartedly support this proposal; however, we have several critical reservations that we urge the Commission and applicant to address prior to approval.

Proposed Ceiling Tiles

First, our committee members observed a potentially serious flaw in the sample tiles shown by the Conservancy. Viewed in profile, the glazed surface appeared to have separated from the clay bodies of some of the tiles, indicating differing shrinkage rates. Whether this was caused by an inherent defect in the production of the tiles or by subsequent environmental exposure, the Commission and Conservancy must ensure that the tiles are up to par before they are approved as part of this important project.

Ceiling Structure

Our committee questions whether it is necessary to demolish and replace the historic vaulted infrastructure of the terrace. Although it is not visible underneath the ceiling tiles, it is always regrettable to destroy original works of structural engineering. If it is at all possible to save this structure without exposing the restored tile ceiling to potential damage, then we urge that it be preserved.

Roadway Repaving

The proposal to repave the roadway on top of the terrace with asphalt blocks raises questions about safety to cyclists, rollerbladers and pedestrians since surface irregularities can pose hazards.

Lighting

The lack of a lighting plan for the space beneath the terrace is an important and unfortunate omission. The existing hanging globes are clearly inappropriate, yet the Conservancy does not have a plan for replacing them. Once the ceiling is restored, the public will certainly want to be able to see it. From a purely practical standpoint, it is

hard to imagine how lighting could be installed after the fact without unnecessarily exposing the restored tile ceiling to potential damage or requiring alterations to the new metal frameworks. We urge the Commission and the Conservancy to consider these issues before moving forward.

#### Interior Walls Below the Terrace

Finally, we hope that the Conservancy will soon address the treatment of the interior walls below the terrace, which are now covered with inappropriate decorative murals installed in the 1980s. These walls should be restored to their historic appearance. Indeed, it would be preferable if this work took place as part of the larger restoration project.

After so many years, it is time to bring this space back to its full glory with a complete restoration of which we can all be proud.