



THE COMMITTEE TO PRESERVE THE UPPER WEST SIDE

**Testimony of LANDMARK WEST!
Certificate of Appropriateness Committee
Before the Landmarks Preservation Commission
Restoration of the Belvedere – ADA Accessibility
May 2, 2017**

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 pathway and walls for barrier-free access leading from the East Drive to the Belvedere within the Central Park Scenic Landmark. Jacob Wrey Mould and Julian Munchkwitz designed the Belvedere, and the landscape is by Frederick Law Olmsted and Calvert Vaux.

The LANDMARK WEST! Certificate of Appropriateness Committee reviewed the accessibility portions of this proposal independent of the door and window scope, which in itself, our Committee readily supports.

As a goal, accessibility, although not required for scenic landscapes, is a desired feature. The means to this end is where our Committee has concerns. The Belvedere was intended as an architectural folly—built as a physical destination as much as a mental one, and also for whimsy and delight. In that respect, the architects designed it intentionally out of standard human scale in order to exaggerate its site and appear more distant than it truly is.

True to its name, the site boasts stellar views, and it should be a goal to allow all visitors access to this vista. Our Committee has concerns with the route. While Central Park is ideal for meandering strolls, this proposal seeks to pull those paths taut into a rigid 12-foot wide roadway—actually, over 14 feet wide with armament walls. The precedents for the design are an arranged marriage of a lost reservoir retaining wall and a lost planted walkway affectionately remembered as Lover's Lane. The functional result is not planted like its precedent, but rather removes plantings and impedes roots. Nor does it serve an essential civic necessity like the reservoir did for New Yorkers' drinking water.

We believe less invasive solutions, which are more in keeping with the aesthetics and Olmstedian/Vauxian intent of Central Park can be implemented with vernacular pipe rails seen elsewhere in the park and on undulating paths. These solutions would be lighter on the landscape, less invasive, less costly and most importantly, allow the Belvedere to remain an object of discovery, not the punctuation of a route that frankly looks like a "freeway". Further, solutions working more closely with the topography will save the

need to “bury” approximately five feet of the base of the castle, a reality that would only serve to diminish the height of the folly.

Distorting an under-scaled building with an over-scaled access ramp would be a folly in itself.

We hope the Commission and the Conservancy can consider more appropriate solutions for accessibility in order to highlight this historic resource rather than undermine it.

Thank you for your time.