



THE COMMITTEE TO PRESERVE THE UPPER WEST SIDE

**Testimony of Kate Wood, president of LANDMARK WEST!  
Before the Landmarks Preservation Commission  
American Museum of Natural History  
Proposal for Richard Gilder Center for Science, Education and Innovation  
October 11, 2016**

LANDMARK WEST! is a not-for-profit community organization committed to the preservation of the architectural heritage of the Upper West Side.

LANDMARK WEST! wishes to comment on the application to demolish three existing buildings, and construct a five-story (up to 105' tall), 180,000-gross-square-foot addition on the Columbus Avenue side of the NYC Individual Landmark American Museum of Natural History at 79th Street, a site located in the Upper West Side/Central Park West Historic District. This expansion, occupying approximately a quarter-acre of public parkland is for the Richard Gilder Center for Science, Education and Innovation.

On September 28, 2016, LW's Certificate of Appropriateness Committee received a presentation by the American Museum of Natural History of its proposal to enlarge the footprint of the museum into Theodore Roosevelt Park—the first time the institution has proposed to encroach on the public area of the park since the construction of the original Hayden Planetarium in 1934.

Though not technically part of the Individual Landmark Site, Roosevelt Park holds its own as a public asset worthy of preservation:

- It is located within the Upper West Side/Central Park West Historic District, and the 1990 NYC Landmarks Preservation Commission designation report highlights Roosevelt Park as "...one of the few parks allocated by the 1811 Commissioners' Plan."
- As the Upper West Side grew around it into one of the nation's densest neighborhoods, the Park has been treated—by the City and the community—as multi-functional public parkland. The advocacy organization New Yorkers for Parks named it among the best parks under five acres.
- The very presence of a park surrounding the Museum is a significant part of the essential human experience of the Individual Landmark and the Historic District.

For these reasons, any addition converting public parkland into built space controlled by the Museum must only be allowed in keeping with a coherent master plan. Without such a plan, Theodore Roosevelt Park is at risk of being erased altogether.

There are important precedents for Master Plans affecting Landmarks. Another, even more vast institution in a much larger park—the Metropolitan Museum of Art in Central Park—

established a Master Plan in 1971 as a condition to obtain city permission to build the Lehman Pavilion. Moreover, the Landmarks Commission routinely works with applicants to develop Master Plans in order to ensure cohesiveness in large projects that may be carried out over long periods of time, where a piecemeal approach would be detrimental to the Landmark—for example, window replacements and rooftop additions.

The Museum points to its 1874-1877 master plan as a “guide”. However, the fact that this 140-year-old plan is largely not followed is a sign that it is irrelevant to the institution’s vision for growth. No civic institution—especially the steward of a significant Landmark on public parkland—has the unrestricted right to develop its facilities, no matter how noble the purpose. Any plan that does not set such limits is fundamentally inappropriate and should be disapproved.