



THE COMMITTEE TO PRESERVE THE UPPER WEST SIDE

**Testimony of LANDMARK WEST!  
Certificate of Appropriateness Committee  
Before the Landmarks Preservation Commission  
Harlem Meer – 110<sup>th</sup> Street and Lenox Avenue, Central Park  
December 10, 2019**

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 an ice-skating rink and swimming pool, known as the Louis D. Lasker Memorial Pool and Rink, designed in 1963 by Fordyce & Hamby Associates and constructed within the northern section of Central Park, an English Romantic style public park designed in 1856 by Olmsted and Vaux. The application is to demolish structures and construct a new building and pool/rink, alter the landscape, and install a pergola and boardwalk.

The LANDMARK WEST! Certificate of Appropriateness Committee would first like to address oversight. Although the Louis D. Lasker Memorial Pool and Rink is within a scenic landmark, this is a multi-story construction replacing a multi-story structure. The Landmarks Preservation Commission (LPC) should, therefore, issue a binding report for this “building” in a scenic landmark project rather than an advisory report, and thereby cede jurisdiction to the Public Design Commission (PDC).

It is clear the existing facility is dysfunctional and cannot meet the needs of its users. The LANDMARK WEST! Certificate of Appropriateness Committee appreciates the architect’s attempts to design a landscape that better resonates with Olmsted and Vaux’s original intentions, though it is difficult for anyone to discern their intentions over 150 years later. While this design attempts to propose an intervention that simultaneously aids the community with a functional recreational center and respectfully pays homage to the historic landscape of Central Park, it is impossible to fully meet both of these goals. However, certain components and design elements could be altered to better achieve this mission.

Concerning the specific components of the proposal, certain portions feel simultaneously of little use to the community and poorly connected to the intentions of Olmsted and Vaux. The pergola and boardwalk are particularly problematic. English Romantic style gardens are intended to prompt interaction with the landscape through a contrived sense of discovery, something the new pool design captures well through its hidden nature. The pergola seems to simply sit atop the landscape, poorly placed and illogically designed. It should be moved and redesigned or simply removed. The boardwalk also defies the intentions of English Romantic gardens. A boardwalk removes a level of interaction with the waterfront, making nature an exhibit rather than an experience. The New York City Parks Department and the Central Park Conservancy have

achieved an expression of this intimacy much more effectively in the past by creating beaches and defined swimming or wading areas.

The design of the community center associated with the pool is generally of high quality. However, the rendered stonework, with its slight and elongated blocks, appears cheap. Larger and more substantial blocks should be used to keep consistency with other architecture in Central Park.

To fully meet the needs of the community, the LANDMARK WEST! Certificate of Appropriateness Committee believes that the pool and ice rink should continue to accommodate two full hockey rinks, a threshold the current facility meets and the new facility will disappointingly fall short of, disenfranchising the community.

The LANDMARK WEST! Certificate of Appropriateness Committee would support the approval of this application with modifications. Significant changes could be made to the designs to better achieve an appropriate solution for the community and the historic landscape of Central Park.