**LPC Public Hearing Testimony, December 8, 2020**

**10:45 am**

**LPC-20-05535 39 Chauncey Street - Stuyvesant Heights Historic District, Brooklyn**

**Status Update: Approved 2-9-21, with direction to work with staff on differentiating buildings through brick type and color and mortar color, 10-0**

Founded in New York City in 1966, the Victorian Society in America is dedicated to fostering the appreciation and preservation of our nineteenth and early 20th century heritage. The NY chapter promotes preservation of our historic districts, individual landmarks, interiors and civic art.

The Victorian Society enthusiastically supports the construction of new row houses on vacant lots in historic districts characterized by this building type. In this presentation the applicant shows a variety of exquisite row houses that characterize this district, any one of which could serve as a model for new construction. It is a puzzle, therefore, that the applicant has chosen to model his development on a forlorn 2nd Empire house missing its cornices, with the missing cornices being a major feature of the new design.

The elements of the design--the mansards, multiple sizes and types of windows, and asymmetrical masonry dormer-like extrusions at the 3rd floor--seem to be borrowed from a variety of times and places and do not coalesce into a coherent whole. Other problems are the bulkhead, which should be a different material from the roof and should reflect the individual houses, and what appear to be trash receptacle containers lining the sidewalk. While we applaud the effort to minimize trash receptacles and vermin, this is the urban equivalent of being greeted by a row of projecting garages fronting a suburban street. Other solutions include dedicating parking spaces to covered trash storage.

Along with the privilege of building in a historic district comes the responsibility of designing exemplary buildings that have their own stylistic integrity *and a harmonious relationship* with their historic neighbors. This does not mean a “conversation” where the languages are so different they are unintelligible to each other. While we applaud the concept of building row houses here and find the proposed scale appropriate, we believe this proposal is beyond being amenable to tweaking, and we recommend it be denied and a fresh start made.

**11:45 am LPC-19-37213 519 2nd Street - Park Slope Historic District Brooklyn**

The Victorian Society New York notes that this row of houses is characterized by stoops alternating in brownstone and limestone, but that there are elements of consistency that should be maintained. First, each house incorporates a threshold or step extending across the yard entrance and connecting the stoop and areaway walls in the same material. Second, a projecting bluestone basement windowsill continues as a bluestone sill course on either side of the window. We recommend that a brownstone threshold separate the sidewalk from the areaway paving at the stoop wall to maintain this continuity of materials—the existing step can perhaps be repurposed--and that the projecting bluestone sill course also remain and be restored, with a different, appropriate masonry material below the sill course down to grade. We have no objection to the other proposed changes, which are similar to existing minor alterations to the row’s stoops and areaways that don’t appear to significantly detract from the row.

We also suggest the applicant consider the potential problem with draining the entire areaway to the basement door, and this will include water draining from the stoop surface as well.

**12:00 PM**

**LPC-20-07926 500 25th Street - Green-Wood Cemetery, Fort Hamilton Parkway Entrance and Chapel - Individual Landmark, Brooklyn**

The Victorian Society New York supports the location and graceful form of the proposed ramp, finding it will have a relatively minor effect on the appearance and integrity of this extraordinary structure. However, the proposed destruction of the mosaic tile porch floor, in remarkably fine condition, is another matter. We have learned very late that the existing floor is not original, but is a reproduction that may have been produced by a successor firm to the original maker. So we nonetheless suggest two possibilities for consideration that would allow for retention of the existing floor. They include constructing an open structure on top of it, possibly with a glazed floor. That structure could be pulled away from the perimeter of the porch, thus retaining the exposure of the column bases. A second possibility is a more substantial, solid, raised base, with the reproduction tiles on top as proposed, but with the existing tile floor protected and the new platform not affixed to it. In the future, if this accessible entrance is no longer needed, the existing tiles would be intact and could be revealed.

We also suggest the designer look at lowering the height of the new cast brownstone ramp wall by one course so that the wall’s coping meets the bottom of the porch column base. There might be a tradeoff to consider, in that this change might increase unwanted visibility of the concrete ramp surface. Finally, the pair of ramp railings may not require vertical pickets, and omitting those verticals would allow the adjacent historic fence to read more clearly. These railings should be checked to ensure they meet ADA standards for required height and end extensions.

Concerning the yard fence at the residence, we think a design that incorporates somewhat more period detail—though definitely not replicating the historic fence—would be less conspicuous because of a better fit with the Victorian elements of its setting

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**12:45 PM**

**LPC-21-02452 75 Broadway - Trinity Church and Graveyard Individual Landmark, Manhattan**

Founded in New York City in 1966, the Victorian Society in America is dedicated to fostering the appreciation and preservation of our nineteenth and early 20th century heritage. The NY chapter promotes preservation of our historic districts, individual landmarks, interiors and civic art.

The Bard Act of 1956, the state enabling legislation for the NYC Landmarks Law under whose aegis the Commission is operating today, was first proposed by Albert Bard in 1913. The law’s origin had much to do with the desire to control rampant signs and advertising billboards in the city. One hundred and seven years later, signs and advertising are still running rampant. We ask, “How many signs are too many for the site of one of the most iconic and recognizable buildings in the city?” The answer is clearly provided in the presentation. There are too many. As signs, they are designed to distract, and as a result they detract from this landmark.

But we reserve our strongest objection to the proposed digital signs. These overly bright and animated signs, housed in bulky boxes, have become inescapable in the city. They have even invaded our subway station interior landmarks, obscuring and detracting from the ornate station walls. Another place they do not belong is on the elaborate, historic fence surrounding the 1846 Gothic Revival Trinity Church, one of the city’s most important landmarks. There are signs that are necessary and appropriate in materials, scale, and design for individual landmarks and this landmark; these are neither and should be rejected.

**1:15 PM**

**LPC-20-09067 328 West 108th Street - Riverside - West End Historic District Extension II, Manhattan**

The Victorian Society New York suggests that a decision about how to proceed should be based on conservation science. That is, an independent, professional investigation should be made. This should include analysis of the material applied and whether it may itself cause harm to the building over time, whether and how it can be safely removed , and what the condition of the underlying masonry is and what might be required to protect it once the coatings are removed.

**2:45 PM**

**LPC-21-00271 18 West 75th Street - Upper West Side/Central Park West Historic District, Manhattan**

The Victorian Society New York supports this proposal to recreate a missing stoop. It is a gift to the block, the historic district, and the city, and should be so acknowledged. As the proposed new stoop is based closely on the original at this building in its materials, form, proportions, and details, it is appropriate. Accommodating the change in first floor height creates only a subtle change in proportions, which does not detract from the overall composition, and commemorates historic changes to the building.

We note that this style and specifically this row of houses is characterized by effusive carved foliate ornament. We are unsure whether the applicant intends to recreate this ornament. There are craftsmen who can recreate it in carved and molded stucco, and we hope the applicant will consider reproducing some of the ornament in key locations on the new stoop and entrance.

**3:15 PM**

**LPC-21-01073 2211 Broadway - The Apthorp Apartments - Individual Landmark - West End - Collegiate Historic District Extension, Manhattan**

**Status Update: 2-9-21 Approved removal of vault lights, 9-2.**

The Victorian Society New York notes that there are some extenuating circumstances in this proposal to remove an extensive amount of cast-iron and glass vault lights. They are presently covered with concrete, are normally not as visible as the typical sidewalk-level installation--though they *are* visible over the areaway wall and from the entrance stair--and they are perhaps not as characteristic of residential buildings as they are of the older commercial districts where they are usually found. However, we oppose this proposal because of the terrible precedent it would create. The vault lights are important and scarce historic material that, if exposed, would add to the texture and interest of the landmark, and their removal would violate historic preservation standards and therefore be inappropriate. The applicant might consider the technical feasibility of placing the covers on top of a new structural and waterproofing system, thus eliminating the need for them to perform these functions.