**VSNY Testimony for April 13, 2021**

***Time: 10:30; join Zoom by: 9:30***

**LPC-21-04770 160 Maujer Street - Williamsburg Houses - Individual Landmark, Brooklyn**

Good morning Commissioners, \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ for the Victorian Society New York. 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 New York is pleased to see a proposal focusing on the landscape of the Williamsburg Houses. Successful “tower-in-the-park” designs put as much design effort into the park as the towers—perhaps more. Yet the landscapes of these projects have often been neglected, in the initial design and then in the lack of maintenance and in expedient alterations that follow. Although we have been unable to determine whether there was a landscape architect associated with the Williamsburg design, its historic form, much of which remains, was crucial to its success. This proposal will benefit not only this important individual landmark, but the hundreds of our fellow New Yorkers who call it home.

We do have some questions and suggestions. The large central spaces on three of the blocks, once open greenswards, have been cluttered with a great deal of stuff, including ball courts, playgrounds, miscellaneous furnishings, and lots of pavement. This proposal does not move towards restoration of the original character of these spaces; in fact, more hardscape is proposed. We would like to see an attempt made to restore the character of these central spaces.

The architectural and landscape features of the entrances to the buildings were carefully designed, apparently variations on a theme. The presentation materials provided are insufficient to fully understand the original designs of the entrance ensembles; we suggest that these be looked at carefully with the goal of fully restoring the landscape component.

The proposed light pole fixtures look fine, provided the height is correct—are they the same human scale as the originals? How does the plan compare with the historic lighting layout? And, can the lighting scheme allow for removal of the awful highway-style bracket lights attached to the buildings?

Finally, we note that the original design had hedge borders to help control use of the lawns. The proposed nearly fenceless design leads us to wonder how the lawns and plantings will be maintained. Is there a workable and funded plan for maintenance? Nothing would be worse than to have the lovely new plantings quickly degraded, and for expedient solutions, that is, fencing, to reappear.

*Note: if the Commission does NOT take an action on 14-16 Fifth Avenue (the previous item), please read the paragraph below. If an action was taken, do NOT read it.*

As an aside, since the Commission hasn’t yet taken an action on the previous public meeting item, 14-16 Fifth Avenue, we note that the designation report for the Williamsburg Houses states that there is nothing—not a brick, not a window, not a surface—anywhere on this complex that is original or even old. It’s all reconstructed, and yet is very much a landmark.

*Approved 11-0, with request to work with staff on central green spaces to unify and calm.*

***Time: 11:45; join Zoom by: 10:45***

**LPC-21-06414 Fort Greene Park - Fort Greene Historic District, Brooklyn**

Despite the modest intervention of McKim, Mead and White, Fort Greene Park remains one of New York’s brilliant landscapes by Olmsted and Vaux. It is the view of the Victorian Society New York that proposals for this as for other Olmsted and Vaux parks, whether designated as scenic landmarks or not, should be guided by the park’s historic plan and character. The addition of new monuments and memorials should be avoided, and we don’t understand why, since the 1976 Spanish Memorial plaque has been conserved and is safely on permanent view in the visitor’s center, a second memorial plaque is warranted, oddly memorializing both the same event and the installation of the first memorial.

Despite that reservation, the proposal is quite modest in scale and effect, erratic boulders are a feature of many of Olmsted’s Romantic-style parks, and the location doesn’t appear to call attention to itself or disrupt the park landscape.

We note that the presentation includes no information on the disposition of the empty base for the original tablet. We strongly urge the Commission not to approve this proposal unless it is accompanied by a definitive plan and schedule for removal of the derelict base of the former monument and restoration of the disturbed pavement.

***Time: 12:15; join Zoom by: 11:15***

**LPC-21-06139 120 Underhill Avenue - Prospect Heights Historic District**

Good \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ Commissioners, \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ for the Victorian Society New York.

The VSNY cannot support this proposal, which will require the destruction of an oriel window which is not only a “special window” as defined by the Rules, but also a window which is a significant unifying feature in this group of 12 rowhouses, 120-142 Underhill Avenue.

The applicant has provided photos of the rear façades of the houses in this row on boards 5, 6 and 7. Because the row is over 200 feet long you can’t see all twelve, but we counted nine which are fully or partially visible. It is a very unified row. On the rear, all but one retain their historic stucco cladding, corbeled cornice and one-over-one double-hung windows with arched brick window heads on each of the top two floors: we could see seven which have their oriel windows on the parlor floor.

The oriel at 120 Underhill retains more of its original features than any of the others. Not only does it have its three stained glass transoms, but it also has its original cornice, and, on the interior, the original wood trim around the double-hung windows and transoms as shown on Board 7, although the interior details are not, of course, regulated.

The applicant has provided photos of two houses in the row, numbers 136 and 138, which do not have oriel windows. We don’t know if these two buildings never had them or if they were replaced before designation in 2009. However, we did a permit search for these two buildings, checking all the permits issued since 2016, and found that neither has received a permit to do window work on the rear façade at the parlor floor, although 138 did get a permit to replace one-over-one double-hung windows at the rear.

Therefore, we request the Commission not to consider the windows at 136 and 138 as a precedent and to deny this proposal to alter the rear façade at 120. This view is endorsed by the [Art Glass Forum | New York](http://artglassforumny.org/)!, an organization founded in 2000 and dedicated to scholarship about glass, including stained-glass windows.

Thank you.