**Combined VSNY Testimony for March 9, 2021**

***Time: 10:00; Join Zoom by: 9:30***

**LPC 21-05680 - Building B, Sailors’ Snug Harbor, Staten Island**

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 VSNY thanks the Commission for this opportunity to comment upon and support the proposed changes to this extremely important Individual Landmark.

The VSNY finds that cladding the modestly scaled roof bulkhead in galvanized sheet metal, matching the sheet metal used on the roof of this building and others within this group, will help minimize the obtrusiveness and visibility of the new bulkhead.

That installing louvers resembling shutters in the third floor window openings, added to the building early in the 20th century, will not require the removal of any historic material and that, because shutters were historically used to seal unneeded windows, will not present an ahistorical appearance.

That creating a new door opening on the rear façade by removing one window, the sill and the masonry panel below the sill, will not require the removal of a significant amount of historic material; that the exit door will resemble others in place at this building in terms of size, proportions, materials, details and finish; and further, that the black-painted exit stairs and railings, also resembling others in this complex, have been designed in a simple straight-forward manner which will not draw undue attention to themselves.

And that the insulated panels the applicant is proposing to install behind the basement window sash will be virtually invisible.

Finally, the VSNY thanks the applicant for the decision to restore and reinstall the historic roof vent.

*Approved 3/9/21; 10-0*

***Time: 11:15; Join Zoom by: 10:15***

**LPC-21-02432 - 176 Washington Park, Brooklyn**

Good afternoon Commissioners, ---------- for the VSNY.

Regarding the existing building, VSNY supports restorative work including cementitious brownstone restoration, new wood windows, new and salvaged hexagonal roofing slates, new painted metal cornice set below the Mansard, and restoration of the historic wood cornice at the top edge of the Mansard.

Further, the proposed rooftop bulkhead, HVAC equipment, and railing, while visible from Fort Greene Park, have been detailed in a simple unobtrusive manner which will not draw undue attention to them.

But regarding the new main cornice, we suggest the design be based on the cornice at 174 Washington Park, another house in this row, noting that the designation report states that of the four houses in the row, 174 is the most intact. The pictures show that Nos. 174, 75, and 76 originally had matching cornices. The subsequent re-creation of the cornice at No. 175 was not an accurate reproduction and shouldn’t be used as the model for No. 176.

And although we understand there is no requirement to recreate features missing at designation, we note that this may be the only chance we’ll get for 50 years to have the quoins, projecting window lintels, and doorway pediment restored. We urge the applicant to consider recreating them. We also note that as the applicant is proposing to alter the Mansard-level window openings in order to install the cornice, the awkward size and tripartite configuration of the large dormer should be reconsidered to restore a better sense of the historic openings at that level.

Regarding the proposed new building, the VSNY supports the demolition of this minimally detailed mid-20th century garage and the restoration of the historic fence, gate, and posts, important as an apparent remnant of an early carriage drive.

Regarding the design of what the applicant calls a carriage house, the VSNY sees as appropriate the deference in height to the height of 176, the retention of the historic courtyard garden, and the color palette of the proposed materials. However, the Cor-ten proposed for the large garage door is an industrial material that seems out of keeping with the character of this 19th century residential district, and it invariably stains adjacent materials.

But our major concern is with the alignment of the free-standing pierced masonry wall with the front façade of the adjacent row of buildings at 11 through 19 Willoughby. Commissioners, as a rear yard carriage house, this building should be set back from the façades of its Willoughby Street neighbors to retain its subordinate place in the hierarchy. We also think the design would benefit from an overall simplification of the form of its many components, planes, and angles, which, along with its sharp contrast in style, serve to call attention to a structure that should be deferential to the main house.

Finally, Commissioners, the applicant has provided photographs of several modern style buildings built with Commission approval in various historic districts. The VSNY would like to note that these are by no means all successful accretions that have stood the test of time.

*N****OTE: Whoever reads this testimony should know the rowhouses at 11 through 19 Willoughby are not designated!***

*No action; consider refinements mostly regarding screen wall at front of new building, other elements of configuration and materials (Cor-ten); restoration should be accurate, especially brownstone and dormer window in order to provide an appropriate contrast with new building, the general conceptual approach to which seems acceptable.*

*lunch*

***Time: 2:00: Join Zoom by: 1:00.***

**LPC-21-05867 14-16 Fifth Avenue - Greenwich Village Historic District, Manhattan**

The book *Bricks and Brownstone* calls nos. 10-16 Fifth Avenue “among the city’s finest row houses” in the rare Gothic Revival style. The long reign of the New York brownstone-fronted house had its beginning with this style. We oppose this proposal to demolish two of the three remaining houses in this row despite their altered appearance.

This proposal raises a fundamental question for historic preservation, and that is whether a historic building that has been stripped of ornament and altered on the interior is still significant and worthy of protection. We argue that it is. Historic preservation is not only about preserving historic fabric. In fact, the Landmarks Law makes no mention of historic fabric in enumerating the criteria for designation. Historic preservation practice dictates that historic fabric should be protected where it exists, but it is neither necessary nor sufficient for significance.

Our historic districts are filled with buildings that have been stripped of ornament and original windows, resurfaced with modern materials like stucco, and altered and combined on the interior. The Commission itself regularly approves such changes. If the Commission were to approve demolition of these two houses because of a lack of historic material or detail, or because they are no longer individual houses, consistency would require approval, by the same logic, of requests to demolish countless designated buildings that are in the same condition.

To the suggestion that this part of Fifth Avenue has a different character—one of taller apartment buildings and not row houses, we say that this is all the more reason that these remnants from an earlier era are important to retain, as they illustrate the development of Fifth Avenue over time. Consistency of scale, period, and building type is actually *not* one of the defining characteristics of the Greenwich Village Historic District. The scarcity of Gothic Revival row houses in the city makes these buildings even more important, as do the many individuals significant to the arts and other fields who have lived here. Even in their current state, these houses contribute to the history, character, scale, and sense of place of the Greenwich Village Historic District. If the houses were gone, a case could be made for a taller building, but not, as the applicant proposes, one far taller than its neighbors.

Most importantly, demolition would remove forever the opportunity for restoration. Preservation is a long game. We have no doubt that someday an owner will propose the restoration of these houses. The missing brownstone ornament is easy to replace; this kind of work is commonly done. In fact, No. 10 Fifth Avenue had been stripped of its projecting window hood moldings at the time of designation. Time and a sympathetic owner took care of that; they have been restored. Replacement of cornices and stoops, while less common, is regularly undertaken. We look forward to the future, award-winning restoration of these houses.

*No action; split on demolition; applicants to come back with more information for those on the “fence”; consider changes to proposed design of new building.*