

Combined Victorian Society Testimony for December 12, 2023: 1197 Clove Road - John King Vanderbilt House; 588 Broadway; 34 Perry Street; 302 West 13th Street; 854 Fifth Avenue

Approximate time: 10:15; join Zoom by: 9:15

LPC-21-05596 -- 1197 Clove Road - John King Vanderbilt House Individual Landmark, 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 19th and early 20th century heritage. The NY chapter promotes preservation of our historic districts, individual and scenic landmarks, interiors and civic art.

In our view, the main issue here is the appalling condition of the individual landmark. This must be addressed first and foremost in any discussion of the appropriateness of building houses on the landmark site and reducing the designated open space around the individual landmark by more than half. The presentation materials include one small drawing implying restoration of the landmark. But notes like “railing system to be verified” (a “railing system” on a Greek Revival house?), “round wood columns,” and “vinyl cedar shakes” do not inspire confidence in the applicant’s intent. The details of the three proposed new houses are not much more complete.

It is our view that approval and issuance of permits for the new construction must await an ironclad mechanism to ensure the restoration and maintenance of the landmark. This can take the form of requiring the restoration to be completed before issuance of permits for the new buildings, or of an escrow held by a third party with the authority to undertake or complete the restoration if not finished by a date certain.

We also believe that the loss of so much of the landmark site warrants creation of a preservation easement on the designated house and a maintenance fund, which would be held and administered by a third party, such as the Landmarks Conservancy.

We do not think there is much point in addressing the design of the proposed new buildings until assurances for the restoration and future maintenance and protection of the landmark are in place. We recommend, however, that any new buildings be set back on the lots so that their street facades don’t project beyond the facades of the Vanderbilt House.

Postponed

Approximate time: 11:15; join Zoom by: 10:15

LPC-24-01184 - 588 Broadway - SoHo-Cast Iron Historic District, Manhattan

Good morning commissioners, _____ for the Victorian Society New York.

The Victorian Society has found that the proliferation of flagpoles and banners can, in some locations, be overwhelming. They can obscure important historic details, and, if improperly installed, damage original material. However, we sometimes support their installation in specific locations: first, when there's a history of flagpole installations in a particular district. Second, when the installation methods are fully documented, with anchors set into masonry joints to minimize damage to historic material. And third, when proposed flagpoles are reviewed in conjunction with existing flagpoles to insure that they match as closely as possible in terms of height above the sidewalk, length, finish, and installation details.

The applicant has provided historic photographs documenting both historic flagpole installations and Commission-approved installations in the SoHo-Cast Iron Historic District.

However, the installation details on drawing S-003 do not require the installer to place the necessary anchors into the masonry joints to minimize damage to the stone. These should be corrected.

Finally, the applicant has provided photos of an approved flagpole installed at 588 Broadway for another tenant, "The North Face." Unfortunately, there doesn't appear to be any coordination between the existing and proposed flagpoles. The applicant's photomontage on Board S-005 actually shows the pole supporting the new red "Mangia" banner in two different locations, once below the ground floor stringcourse and once above.

Commissioners, 588 is a carefully detailed building. Approved flagpole installations shouldn't be scattered over the façade in a random manner. The drawings should be corrected to show that the location, height, and installation details of these two flagpoles match as closely as possible.

Thank you.

Approved 10-0; applicant promises to match existing flagpole in detail and location.

Approximate time: 11:30; join Zoom by: 10:30

LPC-24-03735 - 34 Perry Street - Greenwich Village Historic District, Manhattan

Good morning commissioners, _____ for the Victorian Society New York.

The Victorian Society supports the proposed alterations to the roof at 34 Perry Street as it appears they will not be visible above the front façade. We also support the construction of an exterior stair from the historic tea porch leading down into the garden, as this type of stair is a common addition to the rear facades of rowhouses.

However, we do not support any of the other proposed changes at the rear façade.

The tea porch at the parlor floor level at 34 Perry is substantially intact, as shown in the photographs. Comparing this one to the others shown in the photos, it's clear that the tea porch at 34 Perry retains not only all its significant features but also a significant amount of historic material. We were especially interested to see that the original masonry piers which support the porch columns remain in place.

Commissioners, tea porches are a significant feature of 19th century rowhouses. They are valuable testimony to the way that affluent families actually lived in these buildings. Unfortunately, too many have been casually destroyed. We urge, in the strongest possible way, that the tea porch at 34 Perry Street be restored, with all sound historic material salvaged and reinstalled.

We also question the proposed enlargement of the small window opening at the third floor, rear façade. The designation report states that the large casement windows on the front façade date to a major renovation in 1924. Such renovations are considered significant alterations which document the evolution of buildings and historic districts. As it appears that the large and small window openings on the third floor, rear, date to that alteration, we recommend that both of these 99-year-old window openings remain intact.

Thank you, commissioners.

Approved 6-4 (Jefferson, Holford-Smith, Goldblum, Chapin dissenting because of tea porch).

Approximate time: 12:00; join Zoom by: 11:00

LPC-24-03020 -- 302 West 13th Street - Greenwich Village Historic District, Manhattan

Good afternoon commissioners, _____ for the Victorian Society New York.

We confess a certain affection for the 1953 alterations. The corrugated metal spandrels and steel hopper windows lend a certain authentic, mid-century grit, reflective of a period in the history of the Village that is quickly being lost and forgotten.

Nonetheless, given the building's current condition, we think a return to an appearance closer to its original design is appropriate. However, some details must be fixed.

First, the dimensional and proportional relationship of the cornice to the brick wall above the third floor is wrong. There's too much brick and too little cornice. The tax photo shows what must be done to correct this.

Second, the first-floor front façade is unresolved. We understand that the building's use as a residence precludes fully transparent storefront windows. But there are various ways to achieve opacity at the lower portion. Traditional storefront windows can be installed with interior shutters, shades, or window film. The option of a high, exterior bulkhead could work, but it would need to be more robustly detailed to be harmonious with the floors above. The completely flat metal panels and lack of stronger vertical and horizontal divisions are the most problematic features of the proposed first floor design.

Approved 10-0, with applicant to work with staff to revise details of the ground floor, including providing more articulation; to fix the details and proportions of the cornice; to shift rooftop addition and provide a sloped front to reduce its visibility; to encourage retention of the ghost sign.

Lunch

Approximate time: 1:45; join Zoom by: 12:45

LPC-24-02994 and LPC-24-02995 -- 854 Fifth Avenue – Upper East Side Historic District, Manhattan

Good afternoon, commissioners, _____ for the Victorian Society New York.

854 Fifth Avenue has had a turbulent recent history, suffering both water and fire damage, and not receiving the care such an important building deserves. We are very pleased to see such an extensive plan to restore and rehabilitate one of the last remaining Gilded Age mansions on Fifth Avenue, especially when spearheaded by a firm that is as exacting as Peter Pennoyer Architects.

We generally support this proposal, but there are two aspects of the plan that we feel need further attention. The first is the new front door design, which is very attractive but appears to be more ornate than the design visible in the 1910 photo, which we presume to be the original door. We would urge the new doorway to be as faithful as possible to the original design given the care being given to the other parts of the restoration.

Additionally, the proposed alterations to the interior facade of the lightwell are too severe, as they involve the loss of historic windows that are not salvaged or repurposed in any way. It does not seem necessary for these windows to be sacrificed in the redesign, and as this project requires a zoning modification, we would urge the commissioners to be more strict than usual in requiring preservation and restoration. We feel the restrictive declaration that goes with the 74-711 zoning should state that the LPC will retain jurisdiction over the formerly exterior courtyard walls that will become interior features.

Thank you.

***C of A Approved 9-1 (Jefferson dissenting).
Modification of Use and Bulk Approved 10-0.***