

Combined Victorian Society Testimony for January 9, 2024: Central Park W. 85th Street Playground (LPC-24-04565); 675 Hudson Street (LPC-24-04256); 4 Grove Street (LPC-23-12139); 92 Horatio Street (LPC-23-09458); 608 Fifth Avenue - Goelet Building (LPC-24-04737); 17 Fillmore Place (LPC-24-03097); 313 Jefferson Avenue (LPC-24-04315)

Approximate time: 10:30; join Zoom by: 9:30

LPC-24-04565 -- Central Park - West 85th Street Playground - Scenic Landmark, Manhattan

_____ for the Victorian Society New York.

This proposal is unlike the last playground the Commission reviewed, in Riverside Park, which was a significant part of a major and now historic enlargement and redesign of that park. The perimeter playgrounds in Central Park are nothing of the kind. Rather, they were piecemeal incursions with no design distinction of their own. We concur with the proposed approach of modifying the perimeter and lowering the fence to reduce the playground's intrusiveness.

However, there are aspects of the proposal that are extremely problematic and inappropriate. First, the new, fenced picnic area will be as intrusive as the playground itself. It would replace a lovely, perimeter, pastoral lawn with large trees. The overall increase in the play and picnic areas combined is inappropriate. Picnic tables could be placed within the modified, but not expanded, boundaries of this playground, perhaps scattering them amongst the different play features.

Second, paving the grass triangle near the playground entrance will result in an oversized area of asphalt. The grass should either remain, or the paved intersection should be much reduced in size, making it typical of historic path intersections.

Finally, and most importantly, are the two duplicate ADA-compliant paths, which introduce highly inappropriate physical features to the park. Compliant access is important. It's a complex and difficult task to provide it on a site that was purposely designed as a foil to rectilinear and level city streets. But we also know that ADA law does *not* require the destruction of character-defining features of historic sites. And the circulation systems in Central Park are nothing if not character-defining. This extends not just to the circulation *plan* but to the physical *design* of the paths, which were intended to recede and disappear into the landscape. That is why originally, they almost never included retaining walls, raised curbs, railings, or patterned pavements. The Conservancy's use of unit pavers at the landings, raised curb edges, and often double layers of railings and fences exacerbate the effects of these installations.

These ADA-compliant paths are being installed wherever capital projects are being implemented, without an overall plan for the park. It's certain that over time these installations will severely alter the park's character; they are already doing so. The Commission should insist

that a park-wide strategy and plan be developed that will minimize these impacts and look at alternative means of providing access.

And for this project, certainly only one of the two routes is needed. They both lead to the same playground entrance and enter the park at nearly the same place on Central Park West. The existing accessible path to the Toll Playground, or the 85th Street Drive entrance that's now closed to vehicles, is the most logical route, adding but a few feet to the path of travel but significantly reducing the amount of fencing, railings, curbs, distinctive pavements, and other intrusive features.



The landscape that would be fenced and turned into a picnic area.

Approved 10-0, with the recommendation that a single fence type be used for the playground and picnic area.

Approximate time: 11:00; join Zoom by: 10:00

LPC-24-04256 -- 675 Hudson Street - Gansevoort Market Historic District, Manhattan

Good morning commissioners, _____ for the Victorian Society New York. The multi-faceted proposal for this very prominent building has some appropriate and some inappropriate elements. Restoration of the cornice is of course appropriate. The proposed painted signs, both the sign bands between floors and the plaque signs at the ground floor, have historic precedent on this building and on 19th century commercial buildings throughout the city. Unlike many more modern sign types, we believe this type of painted sign, limited to lettering and a narrow color palette, will contribute to, and advance the appreciation of, the historic character of the district.

Some of us feel that in exchange for all this additional signage, the applicant should remove the non-historic and distracting rooftop billboard.

The work proposed for the ground floor is much more problematic. This early commercial building is characterized by wide brick piers taking the upper floors down to the sidewalk. The show windows that fill the spaces between are large enough to perform their intended function. The proposed intervention includes far too extensive a loss of historic brick masonry and widening of show windows, completely changing the character of the building's base. We also object to the painting of the remaining brick piers; they should remain unpainted and match the brick above.

Finally, the enlarged penthouse will be too visible and prominent. We urge exploration of different configurations and types of elevators to reduce the height and bulk of this addition.

Laid over.

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

LPC-23-12139 -- 4 Grove Street, Greenwich Village Historic District, Manhattan

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

While we generally do not take issue with the exterior alterations to 4 Grove Street, we would like clarification on a few points. Firstly, we noticed that the proposed new facade does not include shutters, which are present in the HABS survey. We would urge the commissioners to require the maintenance and restoration of the shutters on the street-facing facade, and while slightly less crucial, we would also be happy to see shutters reinstated on the rear facade as per the HABS drawing.

Additionally, while we are happy to see the restoration of the original pitch of the roof, we noticed that the proposed new front-facing dormers seem to be pushed slightly forward. The historic position and profile of the dormers should be maintained. We do not believe standing seam metal siding is historically appropriate for the dormer sides. The cladding should be wood clapboards, or a substitute material that matches clapboards in appearance, dimensions, and details.

Finally, while we understand this review pertains to the exterior of the building, and the interiors are not protected, we must express that we are very sad to see such a substantial redesign of the interior that appears to sacrifice multiple original mantles and Federal-era woodwork, and to alter the floorplan. This house has remained relatively intact over the past 200 years, and while we understand that renovations are needed to accommodate modern ways of life, we hope that materials will be reused elsewhere in the house if they must be de-installed from their original locations.

Thank you.

Approved 10-0, with dormer cladding to be wood or wood substitute; owners "encouraged" to maintain shutters on front façade.

Approximate time 12:30; join Zoom by: 11:30

LPC-23-09458 -- 92 Horatio Street, Greenwich Village Historic District, Manhattan

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

The Victorian Society supports removal of the modern materials which now clad the ground floor of this corner building, including the cementitious stucco, doors, door surrounds and light fixtures, and the applicant's efforts to create new facades which have a better relationship to the historic upper floors. However, we feel that the details and materials proposed do not go far enough in this effort.

Starting at the ground, we'll note that the original low stone curb or water table has survived previous alterations. This is visible in the historic tax photo, on the left of board 11, and in the modern photos on the same board. This disappears in the new proposal. We recommend retaining this stone curb. If it is severely damaged, we recommend recreating it in stone, matching the original dimensions. The applicants are proposing a taller stucco clad bulkhead, but this is neither historically accurate nor a durable choice set next to the sidewalk.

We appreciate the applicant's efforts to add details to the stucco cladding at the ground floor, but the details selected appear to have no relationship to the original door and window surrounds visible in the historic photos, and they're applied in ways atypical of historic ornament in general. There seems to be no precedent for the proposed mix of textured and smooth cementitious brownstone. This area needs to be restudied.

There is an historic flat brownstone string course visible in the historic photo on the right side of Board 10. The applicant is proposing a new banded string course in this location. We recommend copying the historic flat string course.

The historic door surround at the entrance to the upper floors can be partially seen in the photo on Board 11. It appears to have details which are similar to the remaining window surrounds on the upper floors. The existing door opening appears wider than the original, but we believe that a more historically correct surround could be developed which would help unify the façade.

Finally, the doors and light fixture at the main entrance are too modern. The large, flat mahogany panel where the transom should be is awkward. Wood and glass doors, based on historic examples, and a black finished carriage lamp style fixture would be more appropriate.

Thank you.

Approved 10-0, with modifications to be reviewed with staff: placement, height, articulation of cornice band; color and design of doors (secondary and main); location and presence of different stucco textures.

Approximate time: 2:00; join Zoom by: 1:00

LPC-24-04737 -- 608 Fifth Avenue - Goelet Building - Individual Landmark – Manhattan – January 9, 2024

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

The Victorian Society supports most of the changes which the applicant is proposing for the lower two floors of the Goelet building. However, we must question the decision to re clad the existing window and door frames, noted on drawing 18 to remain on the storefront elevations, with new black-finished powder coated aluminum break metal.

Commissioners, break metal has a long history of oil-canning, flexing and warping, The illustration the applicant has provided on drawing 13 appears to display these exact characteristics, the very ones which make it an inappropriate choice of material for use at an Individual Landmark. Break metal should be eliminated from this proposal, and storefront material should be specified that's in keeping with the dignity of the Goelet Building and its location on one of the most famous retail avenues in the world.

Finally, we realize that the Commission does not regulate the design of banners. However, we know the wonderful Fifth Avenue flag paintings of Childe Hassam, and we mourn the applicant's decision to substitute for American flags propriety banners for Aritzia, a self-described "lifestyle apparel" store, in a proposal which is already lavishly supplied with signage. It's a sad commentary. Thank you, commissioners.



Childe Hassam: Rainy Day, Fifth Avenue, 1916, oil on canvas, Princeton University

Approved 9-0, with less signage, especially at the 2nd floor wall sign; letters not to be pin-mounted; also noting that proposal is to paint existing storefront and window framing, not apply break metal.

Approximate time: 3:45; join Zoom by: 2:45

LPC-24-03097 -- 17 Fillmore Place, Fillmore Place Historic District, Brooklyn

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

This proposal has nothing in its favor. The addition would rise to the full height of the historic building, preserving none of the original envelope and materials at the rear façade. The proposed rear façade design doesn't acknowledge that it's within an historic district--in fact a tiny historic district and the only one in all of Williamsburg.

The modernistic, faceted design proposed may be compatible with much of the new construction in the surrounding neighborhood, but it clashes with historic designs and materials on nearby buildings within the district. The applicant should study the designation report and return with a proposal that recognizes and reflects the architectural character and historic significance of the district and this building.

Approved 8-0 except for top floor extension, historic masonry openings at top floor to be retained.

Approximate time: 4:15; join Zoom by: 3:15

LPC-24-04315 -- 313 Jefferson Avenue, Bedford Historic District, Brooklyn

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

The Victorian Society would not normally support the demolition of the entire rear façade of a 19th century building. We make a rare exception for this proposal for work at 313 Jefferson Avenue because the applicant has provided photographs which clearly document the building's extremely deteriorated condition, evidence of what must have been years of neglect.

We also appreciate that the applicant has stated on drawing LPC-4 that the new façade will be constructed in the same location as the existing façade, and that the new window pattern will match the historic window pattern on the upper 2 stories.

However, we strongly recommend three additional steps to restore the original unity of the rear facades of this row of 19th century houses. First, we continue to question the installation of large window openings which span the width of buildings of this age. We recommend that the ground floor be provided with individual full-length windows, separated by masonry piers, which align with the window openings on the upper floors.

Second, the façade should be of brick, with cast lintels and sills, to match the existing, original condition.

And third, we recommend the use of one-over-one double-hung windows for the openings on the top two floors.

Thank you, commissioners.

Approved 7-0, with modifications: rear wall to be brick with cast-stone lintels and sills and efforts made to reduce visibility of the rooftop addition.