

**Combined Victorian Society Testimony for February 13, 2024: 96 Macon Street (LPC-23-05203); 315 Greenwich Street (LPC-24-01920); 57-59 Christopher Street (LPC-24-04610); 101-111 West 10th Street (LPC-23-11959); 924 Broadway (LPC-24-05350); 218 West 57th Street - Society House of the American Society of Civil Engineers Individual Landmark (LPC-24-06030); 420 Amsterdam Avenue (LPC-24-03142); Riverside Park - Dinosaur Playground (LPC-24-05534)**

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

**LPC-23-05203 -- 96 Macon Street - Bedford Historic District, 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 19th and early 20th century heritage. The NY chapter promotes preservation of our historic districts, individual and scenic landmarks, interiors and civic art.

The Victorian Society is pleased to support this proposal. Ideally, the missing half of this twin house would be rebuilt instead. But short of that, the proposed design is a good fit for the street in scale, proportion, and details. The proposed façade makes good use of traditional Italianate features as commonly adapted to the earliest rowhouses in this district. It's also harmonious with the later Renaissance Revival style flats building to its east.

We suggest that ironwork at the first-floor windows might be called for. We also recommend that the areaway fence incorporate some heftier turned features such as gateposts and end posts. And finally, it appears that there are to be a raised planter and trash containers built into the areaway. These are barely shown and should be more carefully delineated so that their appropriateness can be determined.

***Approved 10-0, continue to study with staff proportions and details of openings at ground floor.***

***Approximate time: 12:15; join Zoom by: 11:15***

**LPC-24-01920 -- 315 Greenwich Street - Tribeca West Historic District, Manhattan**

Good afternoon commissioners, \_\_\_\_\_ for the Victorian Society New York.

This proposal has two parts which require two different responses.

We urge denial of the proposal to remove the fire-baskets. Iron fire escapes and balconies are an historic feature seen on the façades of many 19<sup>th</sup> century buildings. They document not only the frequent use of iron on 19<sup>th</sup> century buildings, but also the city's response to the Triangle Shirtwaist Company fire when countless building owners were required to add them to existing structures. The design of the baskets at 315, with iron slat floors and diagonal crossbars facing the street, is also typical: nearly identical ones can be seen on the neighboring buildings at 317-19 and 321 Greenwich, helping to unify this streetscape. These must not be removed.

We urge approval, with modifications, of the new ground floor window opening facing Reade Street. The removal of the existing painted masonry on this secondary façade won't destroy any significant protected material, and there are historic window openings on the upper floors. However, we feel that replicating the design of the historic display windows, cornice, and cast-iron column covers would be a mistake. The Greenwich Street façade is a fully developed primary façade. The mid-nineteenth century widening of Reade Street resulted in only a single bay fronting this street. This is reflected in the historic single bay return of the Greenwich Street storefront.

Beyond that single bay, this side of the building angles back and becomes a lot line wall. Extending the storefront with its cornice past the angle onto the lot line wall confuses this historic pattern. We suggest leaving the existing storefront intact and providing a much-simplified window typical of an undeveloped, lot-line wall.

Thank you, commissioners.

***Approved in part 10-0: fire balconies to be retained; new storefront opening to be separated from existing with brick masonry surround, no cast iron.***

*Lunch*

***Approximate time: 1:30; join Zoom by: 12:30***

**LPC-24-04610 -- 57-59 Christopher Street - Greenwich Village Historic District, Manhattan**

Good afternoon commissioners, \_\_\_\_\_ for the Victorian Society New York.

The proposed rooftop additions appear to be fairly modest and well set back. Though visible because of the siting of the building, the resulting visibility appears to be within acceptable limits.

However, we found that the boards showing mockups of visibility are extremely confusing, especially regarding the railings. Site view studies no. 1 and 6, on boards 19 and 24, appear to show in yellow highly visible railings. Yet this railing doesn't appear on the plan or section views of the building. The visibility needs to be clarified, and if the railings are as visible as some of these mockup boards indicate, it needs to be reduced.

We also could find no information in the presentation to document the advertised reconstruction of the rear facades. They appear to be in good condition, based on the pictures provided.

***Approved 9-0, but work with staff to reduce visibility of railings and to lighten color of the rooftop bulkheads.***

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

**LPC-23-11959 - 101-111 West 10th Street, aka 445-451 Sixth Avenue - Greenwich Village Historic District, Manhattan**

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

The often “bare bones” Greenwich Village Designation Report waxes poetic about this intersection. It describes the streetscape containing both this row of houses and their neighbor, the Jefferson Market Courthouse Library:

“Here is a case where contrast lends unusual drama, for the best of the picturesque is pitted against the simplest of our good vernacular architecture. The result is spectacular, as the very simplicity of the low buildings sets off the ornate elaboration of the higher structures to best advantage.”

The phrase which we found most important here, when considering this proposal, is the description “the simplest of our good vernacular architecture.”

We find that the proposal as presented is not in keeping with the essential simplicity of these buildings or the documentary evidence we have for their historic appearance. There is virtually no historic material at the storefront level to go by, and the existing master plan, though well-intentioned, has resulted in a forced blandness.

What stands out to us in the documented visual history of these buildings is the unity formed by strong and continuous horizontal bands: the main cornice, the two rows of windows, the storefront cornice, and the more or less regular storefront bulkheads. We think the new master plan should call for a continuous storefront cornice with details closely based on those in the historic photos, and for painted wood storefronts with bulkheads of a common height. These features will provide a strong yet simple architectural structure. Within this structure, variety should be allowed—in fact, encouraged—in color, types of signs, and storefront details.

Finally, we note that light fixtures at the residential entrances will be required once the existing cornices with their built-in fluorescent lights are replaced. Proposed fixtures should be indicated on the drawings for review and approval.

***Approved 9-0, with modifications: storefront cornices to extend full length of buildings, with cornices ending at each building and stepping up or down slightly as required.***

***Approximate time: 2:30; join Zoom by: 1:30***

**LPC-24-05350 -- 924 Broadway - Ladies' Mile Historic District, Manhattan**

Good afternoon commissioners, \_\_\_\_\_ for the Victorian Society New York.

The phrase, "First, do no harm," is commonly attributed to the Hippocratic Oath. The Victorian Society sincerely wishes it could be drafted into the Rules of the Landmarks Preservation Commission. We also wish that all building owners were required to take that oath before starting renovations.

924 Broadway is not one of the buildings which inspired the designation of the Ladies Mile Historic District. However, the regular window pattern in place on the upper floors since at least the 1930's, visible in the tax photos on LPC-2, gave it unity: it looked like a façade which was designed with some thought. The 2009 window permit, written by a staff member who's now on the Board of the VSNY, maintained that regularity and the unity it provided.

The windows, as installed, throw out that regularity. The unity of the building has been lost. What was once a simple background building now has the jarring appearance of a collection of parts quickly thrown together. We strongly urge the Commission to deny this proposal, and to require the applicant to install replacement windows which conform to the 2009 permit.

***Postponed to a future hearing This testimony read into the record.***

***Approximate time: 2:45; join Zoom by: 1:45***

**LPC-24-06030 -- 218 West 57th Street - Society House of the American Society of Civil Engineers Individual Landmark**

Good afternoon commissioners, \_\_\_\_\_ for the Victorian Society New York.

The best we can say for this proposal is that it isn't destructive to any of the significant, historic features of this individual landmark. The raising of the elevator bulkhead will be very visible, but the existing context renders this a relatively unimportant change.

We wish that a more restorative approach were being taken with the ground floor of the front façade. The oversized former Lee's sign should come down. The proposed ornamental cladding helps but doesn't solve the real problem. The sign is too big and ill-proportioned.

Applying solid sign boxes to the openwork grid at the side entrances—or in place of the grid, it isn't clear which-- is also a bad idea. This grid appears to be recalling the condition during the Schrafft's occupancy ca. 1930. It should remain open with another type of sign devised that better fits the architecture. Repeating the mistake of the Lee's Art sign, slapped on top of architectural features, is not the right approach.

***Approved 9-0, but work with staff to refine details of the signs and window displays.***

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

**LPC-24-03142 – 420 Amsterdam Avenue - Upper West Side/Central Park West Historic District, Manhattan**

Good afternoon commissioners, \_\_\_\_\_ for the Victorian Society New York.

This application seeks to legalize the replacement (without a permit) of a metal fence along the side of a circa 1891 corner building. Part of the character of rowhouse blocks on the Upper West Side is the visual richness that historic decorative railings offer to pedestrians.

The essential criterion for reviewing illegal work is whether it would have been found appropriate in the first instance. We do not believe the Commission would have found appropriate the complete removal of an elaborate, historic cast- and wrought-iron fence for the purpose of installing trash containers. The remedy, therefore, must be replication of the original ironwork.

There are examples of extant articulated railings with 1890s motifs in the surrounding blocks, which the applicant could use as a model for a replacement railing system. Some of these appear to be exact duplicates of the removed fence.

Thank you, commissioners.

***Postponed until a future hearing.***

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

**LPC-24-05534 Riverside Park - Dinosaur Playground - Scenic Landmark, Manhattan**

Good afternoon commissioners, \_\_\_\_\_ for the Victorian Society New York.

In scenic landmarks, historic landscape designs should not be altered for the convenience of contemporary maintenance operations. Instead, maintenance techniques should accommodate themselves to the historic park design.

The proposed 10-foot-wide asphalt strip would interrupt and cover an area of pastoral planted landscape. It is not appropriate, based on any aesthetic or historic criteria. And it will exacerbate the very problem of flooding that this project is meant to solve. However, some good might come of it. This new pavement could also serve to provide an ADA-compliant path to the playground. Then, the pair of historic step ramps just to the north at the park entry could be restored. This would return them to their original design and also eliminate the awkward, angled switchback ramp that had been proposed for ADA access. Restoring instead of eliminating the historic step ramps, coupled with the new path to provide ADA access, would provide both access and restoration and would bring the project into the realm of appropriateness.

***Approved 9-0.***