

Combined Victorian Society Testimony for April 9, 2024: 214, 216, 218, 222, 228, and 230 Court Street (LPC-24-00926, 24-04539, 24-04537, 24-04553, 24-00269, 24-07619); 276 West 11th Street (LPC-24-04987); 19 Circle Road (LPC-24-05494)

Approximate time: 10:45; join Zoom by: 9:45

LPC-24-00926, 24-04539, 24-04537, 24-04553, 24-00269, 24-07619 -- 214, 216, 218, 222, 228, and 230 Court Street - Cobble Hill Historic District, Brooklyn

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

There are a lot of pictures of probes in this presentation, but we find no information that would tell us why the radical interventions proposed are necessary. One of the pictures notes in its caption that the outer wythe of brick is connected to the backup only by a series of header bricks. That was a standard way to construct masonry buildings in the 19th and into the 20th century. What if anything is different about these buildings? Problems should be clearly explained and documented before a decision is made on such a major intervention.

Should a decision be made to reconstruct the facades, the next problem is that the details for the reconstruction are woefully inadequate. Sample replacement bricks, mortar, and jointing must be provided. Some of the cornices to be removed and replaced are missing sections of wood paneling. Are these missing features to be replaced? The proposed window and storefront drawings are rudimentary. Where are the details for all these features?

It isn't clear whether the reconstruction is supposed to include the ground floors and storefronts. The ground floors vary from building to building, but only one type is drawn, as both an existing and proposed condition. Is this intended to be a template for all of them? Materials, dimensions, and details need to be shown. It seems impossible to tell from this presentation what's being approved.

When such significant interventions and loss of historic material are proposed, we expect that the reconstructed facades will be high quality restorations of historic conditions. We also expect that this work will be properly documented for the Commission. These details should not be left to the staff in this case. This is not because the staff aren't capable, but because the rules require staff to approve approximations of generic historic designs rather than high-quality, accurate reproductions. This proposal, as it stands, gives us no confidence that high quality work is being proposed.

Approved 8-0.

Approximate time: 1:00; join Zoom by: 12:00

LPC-24-04987 -- 276 West 11th Street, Greenwich Village Historic District, Manhattan

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

For the last century, 276 West 11th street has retained its landmarked neo-Federal appearance. While it was not originally designed with this facade, its current appearance—complete with artist studio skylight—is vital to the history of not only the building but also the street.

Personal preference of the applicant aside, the neo-Federal appearance of this 5-unit townhouse can be maintained while converting it into a single-family home. Additionally, the proposed new facade is not based on any evidence of the townhouse’s original appearance. What is being proposed is nothing short of a speculative fabrication masquerading as historic restoration. The house next door, serving as a model for this one, was also a speculative reconstruction.

Removal of the front-facing and visible artist studio window and charmingly picturesque copper dormer would eliminate features associated with the early 20th century legacy of the neighborhood as a haven for creative persons and artists. The removal of the rear-facing studio window and little top-floor balcony is equally inappropriate. The replacement-- a clunky and all-too-visible rooftop addition—is not an appropriate substitute.

This proposal violates two of the foundational tenets of historic preservation. One, that significant historic alterations should be preserved, and two, that restoration should be faithfully executed based on documentation. It would be a betrayal to the history of this house and to the neighborhood if the plans for this proposal were approved, and we do not support it.

No action; consider a redesigned stoop with remainder of the façade left including the studio window and dormer; rear changes ok but consider retaining the rear “tower.”

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

LPC-24-05494 -- 19 Circle Road - Douglaston Historic District, Queens

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

The Victorian Society appreciates that the application description now includes all the work undertaken in violation. It should be noted in addition that the work is in non-compliance with the Douglas Manor Deed Restrictions, in place since 1906, and LPC's Douglaston Master Plan, in place since 1997.

The Victorian Society recommends denial of all aspects of this proposal.

The Master Plan for this garden suburb regulates "mature" trees, defined as any tree "with a trunk diameter of 12" or greater." It then states that "A mature tree may be removed because such tree is dead or seriously diseased, or where such tree is causing, or threatening to cause, significant damage to a building" but "In such a case, the application shall include a report from a certified arborist regarding the health of the tree."

The designation report notes that 19 Circle Road has "mature trees." The tree in question is visible on the left of the driveway in the 1997 designation photo we've attached. It appeared to have several trunks rising from a single base that was at least close to 12 inches 25 years ago. By 2023 it must have grown larger. Legalization of this removal must be denied: a new tree, as large as possible, should be replanted in the original location.

The work done without permits also destroyed what was a historic, charming, and picturesque treatment of the garage entrance. Before the new tree can be planted, the retaining wall must be rebuilt as it was at designation, returning the driveway that serves the existing two-car garage to its original width.

The new wood fence should be moved back to a less visible position, to restore the prominence of the porch and entrance terraces.

The proposal also calls for adding gutters and leaders which would cut across the striking brick terrace retaining wall, significantly altering the appearance of the house as seen from the street. If terrace drainage is required, we urge that a scupper be opened on the side of the terrace, adjacent to the existing downspout shown on Boards 12 and 16, with a connection to that downspout.

Finally, we note that the 2022 Realtor.com and Zillow ads for this house both stated that it was in the Douglas Manor Historic District. And right outside this house, just a few feet from where the illegal work is occurring, is a terra-cotta street name sign indicating the

(continued below)

property is within the Douglaston Historic District.

Thank you, commissioners.

No action; revise retaining wall, reduce driveway width, move fence back, etc.

