

Combined Victorian Society Testimony for June 18, 2024: 253 West 125th Street - Apollo Theater (LPC-24-10008); 116 Pierrepont Street (LPC-24-07987); 134 Gates Avenue (LPC-24-08512); 69 Greene Avenue (LPC-24-09101); 177 Water Street (LPC-24-08276); 512 Broadway (LPC-24-06584); 550 Broadway (LPC-24-04376); 415-417 West 22nd Street (LPC-24-05576)

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

LPC-24-10008 -- 253 West 125th Street - Apollo Theater - Individual and Interior Landmark, Manhattan

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 and scenic landmarks, interiors and civic art.

It appears to us that few if any historic features and finishes remain in the lobby. The changes proposed will restore some missing features, such as the pilasters, wall paneling, and coved ceilings. This is appropriate as far as it goes. We wish it went further.

There are three major changes proposed to the lobby that should be revised. The large opening proposed into the adjacent, non-designated space will significantly and inappropriately affect and dilute the room's historic form and integrity. Installation of piers dividing this opening into sections would mitigate the change and would help maintain the historic rhythm of wall divisions formed by the recreated pilasters.

The abstract terrazzo floor pattern doesn't relate to the architecture of the lobby and seems to fight against it. It has no discernable historic significance or relevance to the theater. It should be revised to support the proposed and historic designs of the lobby and theater.

The large, LED ring lights proposed for the ceiling have become a cliché. Surely something more fitting can be found for this historic space.

Now to the exterior Apollo sign lighting. First, there must be no confusion. There is no such thing as "LED neon." There is LED lighting and there is neon lighting. They *are* different and they *look* different. Nothing matches the glow of neon. Neon is a historic but still available technology. Neon is historic to this location and is especially important historically to theaters and their marquees. The making of neon signs requires craftsmanship. The Commission should care about and encourage the retention of historic technologies and

traditional craftsmanship and use of historic materials. It would be a tragedy to destroy the essence of these historic signs by converting them to plastic LED strip lights.

No action. Restudy lobby, speaking more directly to history of the building, especially floor and ceiling; consider proportions and fabric of acoustic panels in auditorium. Consensus to allow replacement of neon signs with LEDs.

Approximate time: 11:45; join Zoom by: 10:45

LPC-24-07987 -- 116 Pierrepont Street - Brooklyn Heights Historic District, Brooklyn

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

The Victorian Society does not support the proposed rooftop additions at 116 Pierrepont Street. This building's location, perpendicular to Monroe Place, allows its front façade to be fully visible from several hundred feet away. The photomontages the applicant has provided show that the proposed HVAC units and skylights will not only be visible on this gabled roof in conjunction with the primary façade, but that these additions will also stand out against the sky. They do not, in any way, meet the standard for "minimally visible." These additions will diminish this building, this block, and the Brooklyn Heights Historic District. We urge the Commission to deny this application.

Approved 8-0, with requirement that HVAC units be less visible, located to rear yard if allowed by zoning.

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

LPC-24-08512 -- 134 Gates Avenue - Clinton Hill Historic District, Brooklyn

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

Once again we're compelled to note that the presentation materials are so unclear we can't understand the scope of the project, what work is in violation, and what work is to be corrected. The agenda description says "application is to legalize the replacement windows and painting the façade." But there are drawings of proposed replacement wood windows that appear to be appropriate and eligible for a staff permit. Are there other windows in violation that are not proposed for replacement? Which ones? We can't tell.

It's also obvious that the house was painted at the time of designation. What about the existing paint scheme is in violation? What were the pre-existing and historic colors? On what basis is appropriateness to be determined?

We see pictures of historic brick molding under aluminum panning, but no notes about what's to become of it.

Some of these questions may be answered at the hearing, but too late for us to prepare meaningful testimony. We are perplexed and saddened that such inadequate presentations are being calendared for public hearings.

Approved 8-0 (work includes replacement of all windows with 1/1 wood except 2 parlor floor front French doors (paint to be addressed at staff level, with consideration of matching the color of the adjacent twin building).

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

LPC-24-09101 -- 69 Greene Avenue - Fort Greene Historic District, Brooklyn

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

The property at 69 Greene Avenue has had an unusual history, but after considering this, and the histories of the adjacent sites at 67 and 71 Greene Avenue, the Victorian Society finds we can support this project. The history of the site is important to understanding the current design and our recommendation, but it's long and requires some effort to understand. We include a full account of this history in our written testimony.

Briefly, in 2015 and 16 the LPC approved demolition of the historic but deteriorated building at no. 69, salvage of historic material, and reconstruction of the building using that material. The material, however, was not salvaged, and in 2020 the Commission approved the design for a new building closely replicating the design of the demolished historic house. The current application is an update of that design.

Noting that all historic elements from 69 Greene Avenue were lost; that the design of this proposal is essentially identical to the design approved but even more closely replicates the lost building; that the new building will not detract from the adjacent houses in the row; and that constructing this building will help stabilize its neighbors by enclosing their exposed demising walls, the Victorian Society recommends approval.

Thank you, commissioners.

Approved 7-0.

lunch

The following history of the site and LPC actions is provided with our written testimony.

The applicants have provided a tax photo, #1 on Board L-02, which shows that in the 1940s the three houses at nos. 67, 69, and 71 were a matching row. Unfortunately, by the time of designation, 71 Greene Avenue had been demolished. The Designation Report states a parking lot was on the site. When photo #2 was taken in 2011, no. 67 had also been demolished: this left no. 69 as a free-standing building.

In 2009 a Certificate of Appropriateness was issued for the construction of a new rowhouse at 67 Greene Avenue. It was similar to the original house on the site, but not a replica.

Unfortunately, by the time 67 was constructed, 69 Greene Avenue had deteriorated. To address this deterioration, the Commission issued Status Update Letter 17-2326 (LPC 17-0815) on June 2, 2015 approving a proposal to reconstruct the front, rear, and lot line facades using salvaged materials, construct a rooftop addition, and excavate at the rear yard; and to address the current disrepair at the building.

However, the deterioration progressed to the point where full demolition of no. 69 was required. Certificate of No Effect 18-5707 (LPC 18-5246) was issued on May 10, 2016, approving the deconstruction of the building, with decorative elements to be salvaged for reinstallation or replication.

Historic materials were not salvaged. Subsequently, Notice of Violation 19-0183 was issued for the "failure to retain architectural elements as per Certificate of No Effect 18-5707 (LPC 18-5256) issued May 10, 2016, and per the public hearing on June 2, 2015." Certificate of Appropriateness 19-41402 was issued on March 6, 2020, for the construction of a new rowhouse at 69 Greene as presented by Eric Safyan/Architect P.C at the Public Meeting on June 2, 2015. This permit expired on June 2, 2021.

Finally, Certificate of Appropriateness 18-0914 was issued on January 8, 2016, for the construction of a new rowhouse at 71 Greene Avenue on the site of the parking lot. It has been built and is shown in photographs on Boards L-02 and L-04.

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

LPC-24-08276 -- 177 Water Street - DUMBO Historic District, Brooklyn

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

This historic district is characterized by views of rear and side facades. This phenomenon is caused by greatly varied scales and heights of buildings, the presence of the off-grid Manhattan Bridge, and, occasionally, left-over unbuilt bits of land like this one. The impact of the view afforded by the small gap here should not be minimized. It frames nearly the entire rear façade of 77 Water Street. It reveals a classic early commercial building with all its details, including the remarkable survival of all its round-headed iron shutters.

It would be inappropriate to remove the entire top floor of this intact façade and relocate the shutters to places where they would be unseen and/or unprotected. The extended parapet is too tall and awkward in its proportions. The new setback façade would be visible and is inappropriate in design and materials to the building.

A solution that might be appropriate would be to retain the top floor façade as a masonry screen wall, complete with its window openings and shutters. This would have the added advantage of screening the new façade from view.

Another, less satisfactory, option is to move the shutters to the front façade. The front windows seem to be the same size as those in the back and they retain their iron receiving hinges. Even then, the extended parapet and new façade at the rear require extensive redesign for them to be architecturally appropriate.

Approved 6-1 (Jefferson) with modifications to proportions and height of parapet, possibly installing a railing instead of a portion of the masonry; ensure reuse of existing brick.

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

LPC-24-06584 -- 512 Broadway - SoHo-Cast Iron Historic District, Manhattan

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

The Victorian Society opposes legalization of the installation of signage at 512 Broadway for several reasons.

First, the total amount of signage is excessive. We counted seven signs for the tenant “Cotton On,” including two translucent signs 9’ – 10” tall and 6’ – 6” wide, (which would almost cover the Hearing Room table if laid together,) two on the skirts of the awnings, one illuminated sign at the metal clad sign-band, one bracket sign, and one banner sign. This is beyond excessive: the total number of signs here must be reduced.

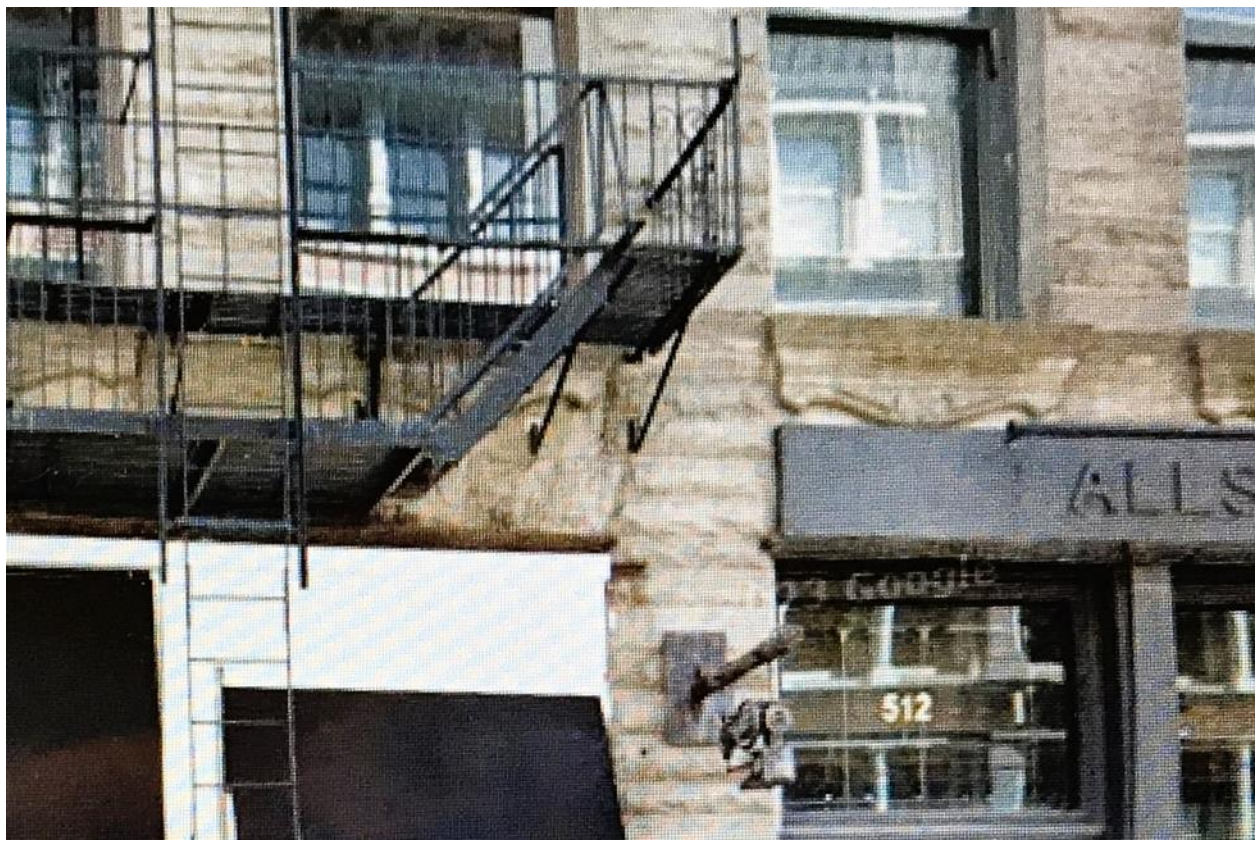
But we also oppose this legalization because the work is concealing historic masonry visible at the time of designation. There are two storefronts at 512-514 Broadway. At the northern storefront occupied by Express Edit you can still see a wide band of rusticated masonry between the storefront and the bottom of the elaborate window-sills at the second floor. At 512 that wide band of rusticated masonry is now concealed by the sign-band. A blow up of the designation photo clearly shows that band of historic rusticated masonry visible between the top of the storefront at 512 and the bottom of the elaborate stone sills at the 2nd floor. This band matches the rusticated stone still visible above the storefront at 514. This sign-band, and the illuminated sign it supports, must be removed. The historic masonry should then be restored.

We have attached the cited photographs to our testimony.

Thank you, Commissioners.

(see photos on next page)

No action.



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

LPC-24-04376 -- 550 Broadway - SoHo-Cast Iron Historic District, Manhattan

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

The effects of this violation are less egregious than those we saw in the previous application. There are still problems with the installation and it's still a violation that needs to be addressed seriously.

We were not surprised to find that Timberland's corporate owner has an entire division dedicated to Ethics and Compliance. One of the five principles of its Code of Conduct is "***WE WILL FOLLOW THE LAW EVERYWHERE WE DO BUSINESS.***" We found no exceptions relating to landmarks laws. We also cannot imagine that, 50 years after the SoHo Cast-Iron Historic District was designated, there is a single storefront contractor, sign rigger, architect, or expeditor in the city that isn't aware of the requirements for filing Landmarks applications in this neighborhood.

The size of the Timberland sign is reasonable for this storefront, but it was mounted on what appears to be an original cast-iron feature and covers a decorative rosette and paneling. If the applicant had worked with the Commission, a better solution could have been found that would have maintained the appearance of this historic feature and ensured its physical integrity.

We recommend that rather than approving the sign as is, the Commission work with the applicant to find a better solution.

Approved 7-0 with modifications. Halo-lit letters to be relocated away from the cast-iron spandrel and cast iron repaired.

Approximate time: 3:00; join Zoom by: 2:00

LPC-24-05576 -- 415-417 West 22nd Street - Chelsea Historic District Extension, Manhattan

Good afternoon, Commissioners, _____ for the Victorian Society New York

The Victorian Society strongly opposes this proposal for several reasons.

We believe that the removal of most of the demising walls which have supported these two buildings for nearly 170 years will endanger both them and their immediate neighbors. We've heard reassurances at public hearings that DOB monitors this sort of construction, but as we've seen, not always successfully. We believe that allowing applicants to go forward with projects which eviscerate historic buildings is stepping away from the Commission's mandate to "preserve." There will be nothing left of these buildings but the front facades.

The Commission has required that floors and party walls be retained for a certain depth back from the façade. These should be minimum requirements here, at both the front and rear of these houses.

We find that the proposed rooftop addition will be too visible from multiple locations, especially the corner of 9th Avenue and 23rd Street but also from 22nd and 9th. This visibility is exacerbated by the decision to extend the sweeping staircase which rises the full height of the building to the upper roof. This building has ample outdoor space in the rear yard and on various terraces. There are also two ladders providing access to this upper roof as shown on Board 20.

But the new design for the rear façades of these two buildings may be the most disturbing part of the proposal. The applicants blow through every guideline the Commission has for rear yard alterations. There will be no evidence documenting the location of the original demising wall, no historic masonry, and no original window openings at all. Everything on these two facades is to be destroyed, with a token gesture, the four new window openings on the conjoined top floor, to be built in the locations of the original window openings. It's a very small bone tossed to the gods of preservation.

We're told that these two buildings, which are to be combined into a single family house, contained 18 apartments. We all know that use and occupancy are not within the Commission's purview. And yet, elected officials are preventing designations from moving forward because of claims that historic districts limit housing construction. At the same time, preservation is blamed for making neighborhoods so popular that the wealthy are moving in, combining units, and displacing residents. Much of this criticism is exaggerated

if not downright incorrect. But as preservationists, we cannot escape the discussion. As citizens and representatives of the city we—including the Commission—must seek ways to address these concerns.

Thank you, commissioners.

No action. Redesign for more retention of historic party wall and historic rear façade; design of rear addition should speak more to context; rooftop addition should be lowered.