

**Combined Victorian Society Testimony for June 4: 2024: 276 West 11th Street (LPC-24-04987); 346 Broadway (aka 108 Leonard Street, 50 Lafayette Street) - Former New York Life Insurance Company Building (LPC-24-09650); Governors Island - Building 140 (LPC-24-07729); 109 West Broadway (LPC-24-09233); 44 West 8th Street (LPC-24-09252)**

**Public Meeting Item No. 1**

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

***Note: Do not read this testimony; submitted as written testimony only***

The applicant has changed the proposal so that the facade retains a bit more of the existing design. The effect, however, has been to make a stylistic mashup. The basic problem is that the proposal does not respect the 1924 design. The façade as it stands today is stylistically coherent and is a good example of an intact, 100-year-old alteration, exactly the kind of alteration that good preservation practice tells us should be respected and retained. The proposed design would still remove two of the most important features of the façade, the elegant basement entrance and the copper dormer and studio window.

At the hearing, there was a point of view expressed that because the house is being reconverted to single family use, it's reasonable to recreate the stoop. The assumption was made that removal of stoops and creation of ground-floor entrances were associated with conversion of single family houses to multi-family. This assumption is incorrect. Many such ground-floor entrances were created when old rowhouses were renovated for single-family use. In fact, the first example of such a renovation, by Frederick Sterner in 1908, was for single-family use. The reconversion of this house to single-family use is not a justification for recreating the stoop.

*Following is our testimony on the original proposal:*

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 20<sup>th</sup> 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.

***June 25, 2024: Approved 8-0 as modified. Front dormer and studio window to be rebuilt mostly to match, new cast stone keystones to match existing, simplified fence in early 20th c design, paired front doors typical of period. Applicant to work with staff on front door proportions.***

**Approximate time: 10:15; join Zoom by: 9:30**

**LPC-24-09233 -- 109 West Broadway - Tribeca South Historic District, Manhattan**

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

The Victorian Society could support the creation of a Master Plan for signage at this building which conformed to the style of the historic wall signs traditionally found in industrial areas. As noted in section 2-13 of the Rules, historic wall signs typically had borders and were primarily text. The Rules state that illustrations were common, but the many historic photos the applicants have provided show that the illustrations were essentially drawings. They did not mimic photographs. This is the type of signage we could support on this primary façade.

What the Victorian Society does not support is a proposal for a signage Master Plan that would allow photo-realistic signs, the specialty of this applicant, New Tradition, on the west façade of this building.

We believe that the location for the proposed photo-realistic signs, on a primary façade, is especially problematic. Wall signs in commercial and industrial neighborhoods were typically seen on secondary facades. The applicant has provided photographs of four of their installations, and three of them are, in fact, on secondary facades. The fourth photograph shows some of their signs in Times Square, but we don't believe that signs in Times Square should be used as a model for signs in historic districts.

Finally, we aren't persuaded that the fact that New Tradition uses an historic method to create these signs, hand painting, mitigates the effect that their photo-realistic style will have on this building and this district. Few people will see the painters on their scaffolding, but thousands will go by every week, seeing completed signs which have no stylistic connections to this building.

We ask that this proposal be modified to eliminate the use of photo-realistic signs. The Commission's statement in response to previous testimony that it's "too difficult" to regulate the graphic style of wall signs strikes us as disparaging the skills of the talented preservationists on the Commission's staff. We are confident they could devise a means of differentiating among graphic styles. But if that is not to happen, then we oppose this application. Thank you, commissioners.

***No action; some support if signs don't "overwhelm." Think about size, relationship to architectural features, maybe the style of the paint.***

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

**LPC-24-07729 -- Governors Island - Building 140 – Governors Island Historic District, Manhattan**

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

The Victorian Society supports most of the changes proposed in Requests 1 through 5 at Building 140 on Governors Island. However, because the presentation does not include any detail drawings, we urge the Commission to require more information on the installation of the proposed ADA lift, request 3, where it's set against the historic masonry. We also urge modifications to the window infill at the basement, Request 5. Recessing the new infill an inch or two behind the historic masonry will leave evidence of the evolution of this façade and should not impact function.

We'll note that the use of aluminum clad wood to replace non-historic windows and doors for this project seems appropriate in such an exposed location; that the proposed signage is modestly scaled for a building of this size; that the design of the signage, and the installation of the ductwork at the roof, both seem in keeping with the utilitarian nature of the structure; and that the work will only require removing or concealing a minimal amount of historic masonry.

Concerning the prominent louver proposed for the large, arched window at the west façade, we find this troubling aesthetically, but we note that the window being replaced is not historic and the work is reversible. Setting the louver back further behind the framing and giving the louver a darker finish may help maintain the integrity of this large, arched opening.

Thank you, commissioners.

***Approved 8-0, with modifications to minimize impact of shade structures; to paint the large, arched louver in a darker color; to make rooftop ductwork smaller and/or to relocate it to minimize its impact.***

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

**LPC-24-09650 -- 346 Broadway (aka 108 Leonard Street, 50 Lafayette Street) - Former New York Life Insurance Company Building - 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 19th and early 20th century heritage. The NY chapter promotes preservation of our historic districts, individual and scenic landmarks, interiors and civic art.

We have two points to make about this application. First, many members of the public who are experienced preservationists reviewed the presentation. No one has been able to figure out what work is proposed for legalization. We expect this will be explained during the hearing, but that doesn't give the public any means of reviewing it and preparing testimony. We ask that the hearing remain open, the applicant be directed to revise the presentation to adequately explain the proposal, and that the public be given the opportunity to testify on it at a future hearing.

Second, slide two of the presentation has a "Diagram of designated interiors" and creates two categories of significance—primary and secondary. We point out that no such distinction is made in the designation report. We also point out that the Landmarks Law provides for making no such distinction in the designation of interior landmarks. We request that the Commission require the applicant to revise this drawing so that the permanent record of the project accurately reflects the interior designation. This attempt by the applicant to create alternative facts should not be allowed to stand.

***No action; explore lighting of elevator grilles, possible modifications to the design, possible time limited approval (hearing not closed).***

*lunch*

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

**LPC-24-09252 -- 44 West 8th Street - Greenwich Village Historic District, Manhattan**

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

We are pleased to offer our support to the inventive apartment building proposed for 44 West 8th Street. The four-light windows with use of alternating decorative brickwork not only inform a modern sensibility to a historically influenced design, but also present a very clever interpretation of and nod to the buildings that once stood at that address. The ground floor entrances and storefronts are pleasantly proportioned and create a distinct base that's in harmony with the upper floors. This building fits well into the existing architecture of the street and offers a subtle connection to the plot's history while accommodating the needs of a more modern purpose. Well done!

***Approved 8-0; consider raising ground floor height slightly.***