

**Combined Victorian Society Testimony for July 30, 2024: Central Park - Harlem Meer - Scenic Landmark (LPC-24-11791); 44 Jane Street (LPC-24-08313); 829 Park Avenue (LPC-24-10852); 119 Fifth Avenue (LPC-24-08557); 99 Clinton Street, aka 152-156 Remsen Street (LPC-24-05234); 229 Waverly Avenue (LPC-24-06569)**

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

**LPC-24-11791 -- Central Park - Harlem Meer - Scenic Landmark, Manhattan**

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

There are four very problematic aspects to this proposal. First, the soft surface paths on the south side of the Meer should not be removed. These rustic walks, added in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, were restored in the mid-1990s, and they are a delight. They allow the visitor to have a unique visual and tactile landscape experience typical of the park in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The surface is ADA compliant.

On other paths, cobblestone gutters and swales should not be replaced with raised granite curbs that have a more engineered edge. Cobblestone gutters are a historic park feature. The proposed replacement is a regressive move away from appropriate historic landscape design.

The second problem is the extension of the boardwalk with its steel structure and modernistic railings. Extending this mistake around the rest of the south edge of the Meer would compound the error of its use near Lasker Rink. These proposed walks are typical of a modern nature preserve. In Central Park, however, we are conserving a historic work of art, not a work of nature.

Original park walks were intended to be *invisible*. That's why they had no curbs, handrails, or decorative pavements, and why they are often sunk slightly below grade. When the visitor looks over the landscape, they disappear. This is exactly how the existing paths around the Meer work. The proposed boardwalks will be visible from all over including from above and from across the lake. They might make the shoreline more visible from the boardwalk itself, but they block and interfere with the view from everywhere else. They will be intrusive and spoil the artistic, natural effect of the lake edge.

Third, more creative solutions are needed for providing universal access. The addition of asphalt and railings to already wide and straight walks will degrade the character of the park for everyone.

Fourth is a component of the project not on this hearing. It is a proposed filtration system. This part of the project was reviewed by community boards but has been removed for staff

level approval. We protest this decision. It's a massive project that includes many above-ground, intrusive features and will likely also require extensive, disruptive excavation and construction. Work of this magnitude and consequence deserves review by the public and commissioners.

The Commission has the authority to ask, if not require, the applicant to make changes to the Meer design before it votes on a report. Once LPC votes, the applicant has no incentive to make changes to the design. The result of this process can be seen at the Kinderberg, where important changes the Commission requested were ignored by the Conservancy and the Public Design Commission. A picture of the unfortunate result is in our written testimony, along with other pictures illustrating these comments.

***Approved 6-0.***



The existing south shore soft-surface walkway is nearly hidden by the shore vegetation, allowing the landscape to appear to cascade into the water.



By contrast, even without its metal and mesh railing, the boardwalk interrupts this view, separating the water from the landscape, and introduces a jarring, modern element.



This rendered view of the boardwalk and railing shows that they obscure and thus destroy the original landscape concept of the natural meeting of the shore and the water.



The two-dimensional photo only hints at the extraordinary experience of walking on this soft surface path at the water's edge, an experience unlike any other in the park. The visitor truly experiences *rus-in-urbe*. The removal of these paths would be a tragedy.



These cobblestone swales, installed in the mid-1990's renovation, mimic historic treatments when path edges were necessary. The single courses of raised granite blocks proposed to replace them, used elsewhere in the park, are more akin to modern street curbs. The swales produce a softer, less engineered edge.



**Kinderberg failure:** The Commission asked the Conservancy to pull the ramp away from the historic staircase and to give its walls a rustic face. The Conservancy made no changes. The Public Design Commission approved it. The walls are raw concrete, painted gray. This is why the Commission must request changes to the design *before* voting to issue a report.



Materials and detailing are in complete opposition to the park's aesthetic.



Another view of the Kinderberg ramp, showing its effect on the view to the Dairy from the Kinderberg steps.



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

**LPC-24-08313 -- 44 Jane Street - Greenwich Village Historic District, Manhattan**

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

The Victorian Society is happy to support most of the changes proposed for 44 Jane Street.

At the rear, the demolition of the existing addition will not destroy any significant historic material. Because the proposed rear yard addition maintains the footprint of the existing addition, the work will not diminish the green space at this end of this unusually configured block. We were pleased to see that the windows and lintels at the top floor will be restored to their original shape, although we believe that six-over-six sash would be a better choice than the proposed two-over-two. Finally, we'll note that the proposed rear yard addition has been detailed in a charming manner which recalls the significant early twentieth century alterations seen on Greenwich Village rowhouses.

But we must recommend that the height of the rooftop addition, shown on Board 26 to be 15' – 3" tall, be reduced. As it is, the new construction will be overly visible from the corner of 8<sup>th</sup> Avenue and 12<sup>th</sup> Street, as shown on Board 38. The applicants have compared their addition to the neighboring one at 46 Jane Street, but the one at 44 Jane will be 2' – 4" taller than the one at 46, as shown on Board 27. Aligning the two will significantly reduce this visibility.

Thank you, commissioners.

***Approved 6-0, with condition that height of rooftop addition is reduced and dormer entrance made smaller, and reduce or relocate HVAC units.***

***Approximate time: 11:30; join Zoom by: 10:30***

**LPC-24-10852 -- 829 Park Avenue – Upper East Side Historic District, Manhattan**

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

The Victorian Society questions whether these changes proposed for a low granite areaway wall and metal fencing are the most appropriate way to treat hundred-plus-year-old historic elements.

We think that the existing simple, stepped fence is a better solution than varying the fence height, which changes its proportions at each step. The more ornate fences on the presentation boards are actually seen on primary façade areaways, whereas the 929 Park areaway is along the north side elevation. We believe the decorative features proposed for the new fence are taken from non-historic ironwork on the building.

The project would also introduce an extra line of non-historic coping material to the granite curb wall. This added coping piece appears to be related to the proposed new fence; this would create an extra horizontal joint, which diminishes the effect of the monolithic granite base. This thin layer of granite pierced by fenceposts is not likely to be durable. And adding new material on top of the existing old granite with its weathered edges is likely to be visually unsuccessful.

A site visit shows the existing fence to be in good condition. We ask the commissioners to consider whether scraping and painting it is a better solution than replacement of this historic fence.

Thank you, commissioners.

***Approved 6-1 (Ginsberg); width of fence posts to be reduced.***

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

**LPC-24-08557 -- 119 Fifth Avenue - Ladies' Mile Historic District, Manhattan**

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

We're not sure what the issues are based on this presentation. There is longstanding historic precedent for placement of partitions behind storefront windows and blocking views to the inside of the store. In fact, for some types of stores, like department stores, there is never visibility into the store, and vitrines are almost universal. Appropriateness is determined by what's within these vitrines. Signs directly on the glass need to be minimal, and any sign needs to be restricted in size. The signs proposed here are too big.

LED panels are especially problematic. They're unlike any historic sign, and their brightness, motion, and graphics can easily overwhelm the storefront, building, and street. More insidiously, they're a poor substitute for creative and artistic window displays that depend on style rather than bright lights and quick motions to catch the eye.

***Approved 7-0, with requirement to increase views into store.***

*Lunch*

***Approximate time: 1:45; join Zoom by: 12:45***

**LPC-24-05234 -- 99 Clinton Street, aka 152-156 Remsen Street - Brooklyn Heights Historic District, Brooklyn**

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

The Victorian Society is happy to support this proposal to install skylights on the west-facing roof of the former Spencer Memorial Presbyterian Church. We encourage such unobtrusive solutions in support of new uses for former religious properties.

The applicant's decision to align the new skylights with the historic window openings on the west wall directly below will maintain the rhythm of this façade. We appreciate seeing the sections through the proposed Velux skylights on Board LPC-11 which document their minimal and unobtrusive projection above the roof. We also commend the applicant for providing clear documentation of both the existing skylights at this former church, and at other churches and institutional buildings in Brooklyn Heights.

However, we couldn't find any actual note on the elevation drawing, LPC-07, stating "New skylights to align with the center lines of windows below." This should be added to the final documents as reviewed by staff.

Finally, these drawings show additional skylights to be added to the east and south-facing roofs. As these are essentially invisible from any public way and will not require removal of significant historic material, we are not commenting on them.

***Approved 7-0.***

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

**LPC-24-06569 -- 229 Waverly Avenue - Clinton Hill Historic District, Brooklyn**

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

The Victorian Society supports the applicant's proposal to construct a new building, designed to resemble historic carriage houses, at 229 Waverly Avenue. We believe that the building's overall massing, the symmetrical street façade, the proposed combination of limestone, brick, gray synthetic slate, and copper flashing on the main façade, and the dark finish on the windows and doors, are all in keeping with the district. The building will complement the historic carriage houses on Waverly without drawing undue attention from them. We'll also note that, where the side and back facades of the building can be seen through gaps in the street wall, it will be minimally obtrusive.

However, we question the use of single-light windows on the visible north façade and recommend the use of one-over-one sash.

Finally, we must note a problem we've mentioned before: that the use of CAD renderings can make it difficult to get a sense of the true color scheme and textures of a building. In this case, the front façade's brick, as shown on Board 2, looks a medium brown/ gray, with iron spots. The rendering on Board 10 makes it look to be a strong red, no spots. The photo of the sample on 32 shows a long "Roman style" medium red brick, no iron spots. This is a case where an actual brick sample would add a lot of information. We request that, in the future, actual material samples are required and photographed for incorporation in the presentation.

***Approved 6-0, with flue configuration to be altered to minimize visibility, and details of rear parapet and selection of façade brick to be reviewed with staff.***