

**Victorian Society Testimony for September 17, 2024: 51 Barrow Street (LPC-24-09981);  
900 Broadway (LPC-25-00284); 8 West 86th Street (LPC-24-09829)**

***Approximate time: 10:00; join Zoom by: 9:30***

**LPC-24-09981 — 51 Barrow Street - Greenwich Village Historic District, Manhattan**

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

The Victorian Society supports most of the changes the applicant is proposing for this very early, very small rowhouse. Because the building is set between two taller structures it seems that the proposed rooftop addition, essentially a stair bulkhead and mechanical equipment, will not be seen from any public way. The rear cornice on the wood-clad rear façade appears to have been boxed out in a previous alteration, so raising the rear façade will not destroy any significant architectural features. Given the amount of deterioration visible in the photographs the applicant has provided, the reconstruction of the previously altered rear façade seems appropriate.

However, we do not support the formal symmetrical design of the rear façade.

Commissioners, the Greenwich Village Designation Report states that 51 Barrow is part of a row of speculative houses built between 1826 and 1828. It describes them as “seven attractive, though modest, houses of the late Federal period.” It goes on to say that the original tenants included two carpenters, a mason, and a stonecutter, “all of whom may have played a part in the construction of these houses.” These were workmen’s cottages.

The rear facades of many of the neighboring houses have an informal quality and retain smaller, punched window openings. We believe that the generic, formal design proposed for 51, as presented, is not in keeping with the overall character of this block, nor does it reflect the very early period of this house. We urge review of the proposed floor plans to find ways to break down this formal symmetry.

We also do not support the use of brick cladding on this façade. The original construction was timber framing with brick infill, faced with wood clapboards and later wood shingles. This is a significant feature, denoting the early date and modest character of the house. A new rear façade should reflect this history in its design and materials.

***Approved 9-0.***

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

**LPC-25-00284 -- 900 Broadway - Ladies' Mile Historic District, Manhattan**

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

The Victorian Society supports most of the changes which the applicant is proposing.

The entrance ramp might be too decorative, too apt to draw attention to itself, if installed outside a more austere building. However, the elaborate detailing original to 900 Broadway is in no danger of being upstaged by this small ramp. In addition, it seems it would to be completely reversible. The curved signs which are to be secured to the pillars flanking the main entrance appear to match the size and location of historic signs seen in the 1886 photograph. The existing double doors at the corner entrance are modern – replacing them will not destroy any historic fabric. The double doors to be installed at this entrance are simple and straight-forward and will not compete with the historic features of the façade. The projecting blade sign is modestly scaled and is to be installed into the granite cladding using existing penetration points. The power supply to the sign will be by a low voltage cable installed within the grout lines, an unobtrusive and non-destructive method which we'd like to see used more often. And the security cameras are to be secured to the modern window frames.

The striped fabric the applicant would use to clad the proposed awnings is appropriate – striped awnings were popular in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. A few can be seen in the historic photographs the applicant has provided. However, the awning frames are too rigid and boxy. They give the awnings the appearance of being made of painted plywood, not cloth. For many years, the Commission required fixed awnings to have open sides and flexible skirts which looked similar to the retractable awnings seen in those 19<sup>th</sup> century photos. We urge their use in this case.

Thank you, commissioners.

***Approved 9-0; applicant can consider open sides and solid color awnings without further commissioner review.***

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

**LPC-24-09829 -- 8 West 86th Street - Upper West Side/Central Park West Historic District, Manhattan**

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

When reviewing applications like this one from important and often beloved New York City institutions like the Bard Graduate Center, we sometimes find it difficult to remain focused on the actual proposal. Endorsement of the good work of these institutions, described in their presentations and often in effusive public testimony, should not color our mandate to support the preservation of the actual fabric of New York's designated landmarks. In this case, despite our appreciation for all Bard does, we do not feel that the proposed changes are entirely appropriate.

One would not know that the new rear and side elevations proposed have any connection to the historic house itself. Perhaps that's all right, given the hemmed-in conditions, with much taller buildings at either side and limited visibility. The additions will, however, have an adverse effect on the small yard of the house to the south and its flowering backyard tree.

What we think is not all right are the changes proposed for the front elevation. The perfectly balanced symmetry of the façade would be destroyed by the removal of historic brick and creation of a door to replace one of the ground floor windows. The removal of the steps at the main entry would alter for the worse its careful design and perfect proportions. Together, these changes would severely compromise the facade.

We believe there are better solutions to both problems. Regarding the second door, the Building Code's provision for a "street floor lobby," should be considered. This allows for multiple means of egress to join at a single lobby that opens directly to the street. That is, in fact, the way current egress from the stair hall works.

At the stoop, we believe the "disappearing stairs" solution, which the Commission approved recently at another building, could work here. Such an installation would not only maintain the historic appearance, but it would avoid the necessity of lowering the floor level, which will require reconstructing a significant part of the first floor interior. Whether these suggestions are viable or not, the proposal for this façade as presented is not appropriate.

**Approved 8-0.**

