

**Victorian Society Testimony for October 29, 2024: 891 St. Mark's Avenue (LPC-24-08616); 2103 Albemarle Terrace (LPC-25-01542); 70 Perry Street (LPC-25-02666); 48 Barrow Street (LPC-25-02527); 327 Bleecker Street (LPC-25-03133); Morningside Park Staircases (LPC-25-01988)**

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

**LPC-24-08616 -- 891 St. Mark's Avenue - Crown Heights North Historic District, Brooklyn**

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.

The photographs and drawings which the applicant has provided make it clear that the stoop at 891 St. Mark's has been subjected to serious deterioration and some very ill-conceived alterations. We're happy to see that the applicant is proposing to start off by removing the thick layer of concrete which sits atop the original treads and platform. And we can see that the stairs and terrace have structural issues that require remedial action.

But rebuilding an historic stoop shouldn't require discarding all the historic stone. Commissioners, 891 St. Mark's is one of a row of six limestone-clad Renaissance Revival houses. The applicant's photos show that all six have retained their historic stoops, built of large limestone blocks, with bluestone treads and stone balustrades. These are the first features of each house a visitor sees as they approach and are an important unifying feature of the row, even if paint now obscures several of them.

The applicant would trash all this historic material, but this is simply not appropriate or acceptable. Nor is the use of stucco tinted and finished to match limestone. Or the use of cast stone when bluestone is readily available.

Commissioners, everyone sitting at the table knows projects where similar original material was successfully salvaged for reuse. The applicant should be required to salvage all sound material, replacing it in kind as necessary.

Thank you, commissioners.

***Approved 8-0, conditioned upon staff review of materials to ensure an appropriate match and level of variation.***

**Approximate time: 12:00; join Zoom by: 11:00**

**LPC-25-01542 -- 2103 Albemarle Terrace - Albemarle-Kenmore Terraces Historic District, Brooklyn**

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

The Victorian Society has no objection to the construction of a retaining wall adjacent to the public sidewalk at 2103 Albemarle. This sort of low wall is an unobtrusive addition to the streetscape and has been approved at other historic districts. However, we do not believe that stone is an appropriate material for a retaining wall in this district.

Eighty percent of retaining walls in this district are of red brick to match the houses. Some existed before designation and some were added since, including at least one approved in a staff level permit.

The two examples of stone clad buildings which the applicant has provided as inspiration for their choice of materials are the Dutch Reform Church and original Erasmus High School. These buildings, which are over 200 years old, were there long before these rowhouses were built, but the stone was obviously not an inspiration for the houses' architects.

Because red brick is the predominant material used in these historic buildings, and because it is also the predominant material used for the existing retaining walls, we strongly urge the Commission to require the use of red brick with stone copings for this wall.

*Extemporaneous addition:* The brick should match the façade brick, and the wall should be lowered, as these houses were designed without barriers to the public sidewalk.

***Denied 8-0; recommend changing material to brick and lowering the wall.***

*lunch*

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

**LPC-25-02666 -- 70 Perry Street - Greenwich Village Historic District, Manhattan**

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

We might not have testified on this application, but we are moved to do so after contemplating the perfection of this façade and its gorgeous round arch doorway. We were tempted to say it shouldn't be touched. However, the proposal's careful detailing finally persuaded us that the change will be appropriate and will not diminish the quality of the entrance doors.

We suggest two things. One is to consider beveled glass, which would maintain the sense of the raised wood panels being removed. The other is to be sure the wood panels are removed intact and stored, in case there is a desire in the future to restore the doors to their original design.

Finally, it would be nice if the pair of light sconces were replaced with something more discreet.

***Approved 8-0. Commissioners liked the suggestions to preserve the panels and use beveled glass; applicant said panels would be saved and will discuss glass with owner; however, motion did NOT include either of these requirements.***

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

**LPC-25-02527 -- 48 Barrow Street - Greenwich Village Historic District, Manhattan**

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

We started our review by reading the Greenwich Village Historic District designation report about 48 Barrow. It states that it is one of a “dignified row of six brick houses, originally Italianate in style, erected in 1851.” It goes on to state that while several had been altered, “the original appearance of this row is perhaps best seen at No. 48, which retains much of its charm and many features of the original building.”

Unfortunately, the proposal now before you retains no features of the original building, no historic material and no charm. It also has no relationship to the rear facades of the other houses in the row, seen in the aerial photo. And the design, as presented, doesn’t suggest, in any way, that it’s a building in the Greenwich Village Historic District. It could be a new rowhouse in any urban area in the United States.

We’ll note that the owner received a staff level permit to do extensive work at the building in December 2022. It included “reconstructing the north façade of the rear yard extension, utilizing salvaged and new brickwork, as necessary, and new bluestone coping stones.”

Commissioners, even in its deteriorated condition, the rear facade retains the punched window openings, red brick cladding, stone sills and lintels and the scale which mark it a historic rowhouse in Greenwich Village. These same elements have been reconfigured by many skilled architects to create new rear facades which relate to neighboring buildings. The application should be revised to include salvaging all sound material, as required by the 2022 permit. We also ask that the presentation for a revised design include the drawings approved in 2022.

Thank you, Commissioners.

***Approved 6-1-1 (Chen abstains; ? opposes—possibly Jefferson)***

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

**LPC-25-03133 -- 327 Bleecker Street - Greenwich Village Historic District, Manhattan**

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

The previously approved design attempted to recreate the lost Victorian building on this site. We think the design wasn't entirely successful in execution, and we're happy to support the new proposal. It moves further from the original building, but is, we believe, a better design. It's appropriate in scale, proportions, details, and materials.

We do think, however, that the cornice needs work. It needs to be deeper both in projection and in height. There's too much space between the top floor lintels and the bottom of the cornice. The district context photos provided by the applicant show the proper proportions for cornices on buildings of this type, especially the spacing between the tops of the lintels and the bottom of the cornice.

***Approved 8-0; consider working with staff on proportions of windows and/or cornice***

**Approximate time: 4:15; join Zoom by: 3:15**

**LPC-25-01988 -- Morningside Park - Scenic Landmark, Manhattan**

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

The staircase at 122<sup>nd</sup> Street was once an example of the extraordinary stonework that Calvert Vaux and Jacob Wrey Mould achieved in Morningside Park. The pictures provided with our written testimony show that the upper flight of the stair retains Mould's formal design at Morningside Drive, which transitions beautifully to a flight of Vaux's rustic stair with its cut boulder edges. Below this point, most of the stair was reconstructed in the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century and is nothing like the original. This part of the stair includes concrete landings and a long section with cheek walls made of small, rectangular cut stones laid in regular courses. The proposal to match the inappropriate appearance of these later walls by installing blocks of thin stone veneer on concrete is utterly inappropriate to this historic park. The stairs should be rebuilt to match the design and character of Vaux's original rustic stone staircases. Irregular boulders and/or larger rustic blocks of stone can hide the necessary concrete retaining walls.

Replacement of handrails at the three staircases is included in the project. It appears their placement and design are being reviewed at staff level. However, we think aspects of this work are inappropriate. The commissioners need to review this part of the proposal.

The handrails proposed for all three staircases are inappropriate in both placement and design. Handrails and posts placed at the outer edges of the stairs will intrude into views of the rustic stonework and landscape. We do not think there is a need for two handrails on these lightly used stairs. A single handrail in the center of the staircase will be much less intrusive. Central handrails are common on staircases of this width. Depending on the height and details of the edges and cheek walls at each stair, wall-mounted handrails could also be an unobtrusive option.

As much consideration needs to be given to the design of handrails as the original designers gave to all the details in their parks. Every feature must work to support the character of the historic landscape in which it sits, whether rustic, picturesque, or formal. The handrails on these three staircases must be harmonious in design and detail with the rustic stairs and the picturesque landscapes beyond.

The simple, square-sectioned railings shown in the proposal are not harmonious because of their sharp contrast with the soft, undulating, irregular nature of the stonework and plantings. The railings need not be elaborate, but they must be stylistically compatible.

*See captioned photos on next page.*





*Mould's formal staircase at Morningside Drive (top); the remaining flight of Vaux's rustic stair (bottom). Vaux's work should be replicated at parts of the stair proposed to be reconstructed. Imagine how modern, rectangular railings at the stair edges will adversely affect the scenic character. A single, center rail would be less intrusive.*



*Note the brilliant transition between formal and rustic and the way Vaux cut the boulders to fit the stair treads.*

***Positive report 8-0 (Goldblum and Jefferson recommended a single center handrail).***