

Victorian Society Testimony for October 8, 2024: 54 West 22nd Street (LPC-24-07428); 99 Wooster Street (LPC-25-00606); 560 Broadway (aka 560-566 Broadway, 72-78 Prince Street, 98-104 Crosby Street) (LPC-25-02137); 565 9th Street (LPC-25-00544); 4401 Manhattan College Parkway (LPC-23-04449); Central Park - Swedish Cottage (LPC-25-01251)

LPC-24-07428 -- 54 West 22nd Street - Ladies' Mile Historic District, Manhattan

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

The dilemma here is whether to return the building's façade to its original, unencumbered appearance or retain a historic, decorative fire escape that's been present for over 100 years. In this case, we come down on the side of retaining the fire escape.

This fire escape is highly decorative, it's been on the building a very long time, and its presence possibly results from the Triangle Shirtwaist fire. Fire escapes are character-defining features of loft buildings in this district. And we do not believe its presence significantly reduces the ability of the public to appreciate the design and details of the original building.

Approved 9-0.

LPC-25-02137 – 560 Broadway (aka 560-566 Broadway, 72-78 Prince Street, 98-104 Crosby Street) – SoHo-Cast Iron Historic District

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

When we started our review of this proposal, we thought that this location, this tenant and this architect seemed very familiar. We checked. It turned out we were correct - Acheson Doyle Partners presented their proposal for signage, for their client Aritzia, at this location, at the December 23, 2023, public hearing.

At that time the Commission approved the installation of twelve retractable cream colored fabric awnings with green trim at second floor windows, eight of which have the tenant's name, (ARITZIA) on the skirts; three 8" tall brass finished signs (ARITZIA) at select ground floor storefront windows; two 12" tall gold colored halo-lit stainless steel dimensional letters ("ARITZIA") on raceways at the masonry sign bands at the Broadway and Prince Street facades; and a 14' aluminum flagpole featuring a 10' by 5' wide banner (ARITZIA) at the second floor sill course. There are also seven awnings over the ground floor windows. Four of them have the name of the tenant (ARITZIA) on the skirt.

It appears that all of the approved signs and awnings have been installed. We count a total of 18 times the name ARITZIA now appears at this corner.

We believe that this display of signage can reasonably be called excessive. We therefore find the applicant's proposal to add more signage, in the form of LED signs, 14 feet tall, and a total of 22 feet long, behind windows on both facades of this over-burdened corner, to be totally unacceptable.

We'll note that the applicant has provided a photo of the Aritzia store in the Ladies Mile where LED signs were recently approved. We also note that the store at that location, which has much greater street frontage than the store at 560 Broadway, has much less signage than the applicant is now proposing for 560.

We urge the Commission to deny this proposal to add more signage to the excessive amount already in place.

No action. Reduce size and/or number of LED signs.

LPC-25-00606 -- 99 Wooster Street – Gay Activists Alliance Firehouse - Individual Landmark and SoHo-Cast Iron Historic District, Manhattan

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

This circa 1882 firehouse by Napoleon LeBrun and Son deserves to be seen in a streetscape without additional visual distractions. Located within the SoHo-Cast Iron Historic District, the handsome individual landmark was so designated in 2019 for its importance to the 1970s gay liberation movement.

The proposed banner is enormous at over 3 feet by 11 feet. Almost all of it is blank. The lettering on the banner would fit perfectly on a bracket sign of the type shown in the designation picture. This type of sign is more appropriate than a banner that competes with the fine architecture of 99 Wooster Street.

No action. Consider other options—bracket sign or smaller banner evoking the historic prototype at this building.

LPC-25-00544 -- 565 9th Street - Park Slope Historic District – Brooklyn

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

The Victorian Society supports the removal of the existing stair adjacent to the rear extension of 565 9th Street. The stair is a minimally detailed modern addition whose removal will not destroy any historic material. We also support opening up the east wall to provide new windows. These will face a side courtyard and will not be visible from the donut. And we support the construction of the new deck and stair giving access to the rear garden. None of this work will conceal or damage any significant architectural features of the building.

However, we do not support the removal of the existing oriel window to give access to the rear deck; removing the masonry panel between the existing double-hung windows on the west wall of the extension to create a larger opening; or installing frameless sliders in the new and modified openings.

We are most concerned with the removal of the oriel window. Each of the 12 houses in this row featured either three sided or curved bay windows on the front. On the back facades, seen on Boards 2 and 4, the eleven which remain retain their historic oriel windows. These are also visible in the historic block plans. It's evident that bay and oriel windows are a reoccurring and significant feature of these houses. We strongly recommend that the oriel window be retained at 365.

The enlarged window openings on the west façade will be perfectly visible from the donut, contrasting with all the punched window openings in place at the other houses in this row. This is not a question of providing legal light and air – the photo of the interior on Board 13 shows the room already has large windows on two sides. The two punched openings on the west façade should be retained.

Finally, we object to the use of frameless sliders in all the existing and proposed openings. They are a scaleless modern intrusion which has no relationship to the houses facing the donut.

We recommend that the sill at the central window in the oriel be dropped to provide access to the new deck; that the sills on at the west windows also be dropped if more access is desired; and that wood framed French doors be used to relate better to the existing fenestration.

Approved 10-0.

LPC-23-04449 -- 4401 Manhattan College Parkway - Fieldston Historic District, the Bronx

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

We do not believe we have ever seen a Landmarks violation more egregious than this one. It is a thicket of inappropriate and destructive work. We do not believe there is a point in trying to find selective work that can be approved; the house should be restored to its pre-existing condition. After that, proposals for alterations can be considered.

The beautiful ironwork isn't likely to have been discarded. It should be searched out, repurchased, reinstalled, and reproduced if necessary. All masonry and masonry opening alterations must be undone. New aluminum windows must be replaced with windows matching the historic ones. Canopies, railings, and other modern features must be removed and original conditions restored. Finally, the poor repointing of the historic wall isn't listed as being in violation, but it should be.

No action (Goldblum recused). Most of the completed work is inappropriate, including the pointing raised by VSNY; the pool can possibly be approved with additional information.

LPC-25-01251 -- Central Park - Swedish Cottage - Scenic Landmark, Manhattan

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

The proposed flagpoles are relatively modest in scale, but nonetheless we find they are inappropriate to Central Park and should not be approved. We count the Swedish Cottage as an original park building: it is of the right age and style, and Olmsted apparently was responsible for its relocation to the park. Park buildings are secondary to the landscape. They are purposely designed and sited so as not to call attention to themselves. Flagpoles have the opposite purpose and effect. They are designed to call attention to themselves as focal points and are thus inappropriate.

We believe that the only Central Park building that originally had a flagpole is Belvedere Castle. This is the exception that proves the rule, as the Castle is the only building in the park intended to be the focal point of a view. And that view was accentuated by the pair of magnificent flagpoles and gonfalons at Bethesda Terrace, which serve to frame the view of the Lake, Ramble, and Castle. We should follow the intent of the park's designers and respect the secondary nature of park buildings like the Swedish Cottage and their relationship to landscape.

The existing single rooftop flagpole has been on the Cottage since long before designation. It can remain and continue to fly the American and Swedish flags. Adding two freestanding flagpoles to this existing pole is too much. If the protocols for flying the flags of two nations together are behind this proposal, the correct response for Central Park is not to fly either flag. This is not Rockefeller Center or the U.N.

We also respectfully suggest that any available resources for this building should go to the roof, which looks as though it's in an advanced state of deterioration.

Approved 7-0 (Goldblum, Chapin, Bland recused)