

Victorian Society Testimony for November 26, 2024: 136 Kane Street (LPC-25-02824); 137 Waverly Place (LPC-25-03611); 23 East 9th Street (LPC-25-01663); 727 Greenwich Street (LPC-25-00163); 17-19 West 88th Street (LPC-25-01525); 823 Madison Avenue (LPC-25-03381)

LPC-25-02824 -- 136 Kane Street - Cobble Hill 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 Victorian Society supports some aspects of this proposal, including the new window openings facing Cheever Place. The applicant has provided many pictures of rowhouses of this period, situated at the end of blocks, where the original builders took advantage of their location to provide window openings on three facades. The number, size and proportions of the proposed windows all seem appropriate, although we couldn't find any note stating that the new window openings will align with the historic openings on the primary façade. If this isn't spelled out on the drawings a note to this effect should be added before the permit is issued.

We can also support the construction of the rear extension. When seen from Cheever Place the new side wall will be similar to historic rear extensions in terms of materials, scale and details, but we believe it could be improved. The 19 foot wide window opening at the rear of the parlor floor will not only be visible from the street, but it's also becoming a cliché for rear yard additions. We know these architects can do better. A trio of full length French doors, aligned with the windows on the upper floors, would provide ample access to the rear deck and help unify this visible façade.

What we cannot support are the use of simulated double-hung windows and the proposed rooftop addition. When tilt-and-turn windows are open, it's immediately apparent that they are not historically appropriate in a 19th century rowhouse. Also, because of this building's position on a corner, these windows will be very visible.

The proposed rooftop addition, which will be fully visible, is not appropriate. We appreciate the architect's clever use of chimney extensions, but they don't disguise what is a box set on the roof. Except for the use of multi-light windows, it bears no relationship to the historic house.

We also fear the inevitable application, a few years after construction is complete, to build new roof decks front and rear and push the handrails out to the parapets where they will be

very visible. The architects may state that there are no plans to do so, but that children's classic, "When You Give a Mouse a Cookie", gives a good forecast of what happens when New Yorkers see a way to expand their outdoor space.

Thank you, commissioners.

Approved 8-0, but work with staff on reducing glazing of rooftop addition and altering its materiality and design to help it recede.

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

LPC-25-03611 – 137 Waverly Place – Greenwich Village Historic District – Manhattan

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

The Victorian Society has testified against stoop gates at many buildings in historic districts, and we do not support this proposal to add a stoop gate to a circa 1829 rowhouse. This very old federal style brick house has a gracious and welcoming entry of brownstone steps and period-appropriate ironwork.

It is our opinion that stoop gates detract from the appearance of historic streetscapes. They change the stoop's traditional role of providing a semi-private transition zone separating the private house from the public street. The design of this one is especially unfortunate, as the end posts crowd the lovely cast-iron newels.

It's also apparent that by approving these gates on a regular basis, the Commission is virtually guaranteeing that they will become ubiquitous. As the percentage of ungated stoops becomes smaller, owners of those houses will be more and more incentivized to install gates themselves, especially knowing the Landmarks Commission will not stand in the way.

Thank you, commissioners.

Approved 8-0, with applicant to work with staff on a different design, lower height, framing and post sizing to be reduced.

lunch

Approximate time: 12:30; join Zoom by: 12:00

LPC-25-01663 -- 23 East 9th Street - Greenwich Village Historic District, Manhattan

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

The Victorian Society supports most of the changes proposed for 23 East 9th Street. As we noted last week when we testified on 39 Sidney Place, we support preserving examples of the architecturally important reimagining of 19th century rowhouses which went on in the first decades of the 20th century.

We commend the applicant for their proposed use of painted wood casements and transoms on both the front and rear facades and at the new roof bulkhead. We also commend them for the pair of wood and glass doors they propose for the main entrance and for the restoration of the historic cornice, which remained on the house as part of the 20th century conversion.

The roof bulkhead will be visible, but from such small areas, and in conjunction with other buildings, that we don't feel it will detract from the district. Because of the building's position at the end of the block, and because they are reducing their footprint, the construction at the rear will not diminish the donut. And because the rear façade has been altered many times, the proposed reconstruction, using salvaged brick, will not destroy any significant historic material.

However, we found it difficult to determine, from the photos provided, what percentage of brick on the street façade is original, what percentage of that is sound, and what percentage is replacement. Proper cleaning and pointing may well result in a satisfactory appearance. Note that in the tax photo the areas of replaced brick appear to be a perfect match. If needed, there are translucent and semi-opaque Keim coatings that can reduce variations in appearance without changing the essential character of the red brick façade, which seems never to have been painted. We urge the applicant to work on an alternative to a bright white opaque coating.

Thank you, commissioners.

No action: concerns about type and color of façade coating. At rear, keep top two floors intact if possible, retain rear skylight, and lower proposed bulkhead.

Approximate time: 1:15; join Zoom by: 12:15

LPC-25-00163 -- 727 Greenwich Street - Greenwich Village Historic District, Manhattan

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

This group of six houses, of which 727 Greenwich is a part, is an important example of an early 20th century reimagining of six decrepit rowhouses into a unified complex. According to Andrew Dolkart, who discusses this conversion in “The Rowhouse Reborn,” the buildings were redesigned in a hybrid Mediterranean-Medieval style. A real estate advertisement noted the “artistic” common garden in the back, reached through an archway opening onto Greenwich Street. Residents of the rear apartments entered them via this garden. This project upgraded what had been rowhouses occupied by over 150 laborers and other working class people into housing for just 50 mostly young, single people or couples.

It appears that the proposed work would retain all the remaining character-defining features of the 1928 conversion. The proposed new garden-facing facade conforms stylistically to the 1928 work and in fact enhances the charm and character of the rear garden. We suggest only that the design be modified to incorporate the small arched openings in the parapet that are typical of the complex, visible both elsewhere in the garden and on the street facades.

Approved 8-0 with modifications: work with staff to incorporate arched openings in rear parapet. (Subsequently, the applicant reported that they are amenable and the architect would be able to make this change.)

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

LPC-25-01525 -- 17-19 West 88th Street - Upper West Side/Central Park West Historic District, Manhattan

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

This application brings to mind Frank Lloyd Wright's comment about the architect who, seeing his mistake, advises his client to plant vines. Painting a masonry façade and installing multiple poles and banners are things we would normally testify against. But here, the reverse is true. Both the paint and the banners help to call attention away from this dreadful building.

Unlike Wright, who may have been joking, we are entirely serious. We think the work that was done is not only appropriate, but beneficial to the building and streetscape.

Approved 8-0 with modifications. Applicant to work with staff to determine whether the paint applied to the façade is of a breathable type and whether it can be removed; a new color to be applied to better reflect the building and streetscape; banners to be reduced to maximum of two, at the lower level. A compliance date to be included. [Note: no commissioners found the work as completed appropriate; yet the vote was to approve it—with modification.]

Approximate time: 2:15; join Zoom by: 1:15

LPC-25-03381 -- 823 Madison Avenue - Upper East Side Historic District, Manhattan

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

The Victorian Society has no objection to the removal of the modern two-story storefronts and masonry cladding at 823 Madison, but we have two problems with the proposed redesign.

First, we find inexplicable and destructive the building's mutation from what was a symmetrical 1926 Neo-Colonial façade to one where the lower two floors have no relationship to the upper floors.

The applicant has provided a good set of historic images which show that the symmetrical façade at 823 survived until 2007. At that point, the left-hand display window grew wider, and the cladding on the central pier shifted right. This time, the right-hand display window grows wider, to 13'- 6", the central pier shifts left, the left display window shrinks down to 10'- 8", and a new display window on the far left replaces a door opening which originally matched the one at the far right.

The applicant has also provided two photos of other red brick Neo-Colonial buildings which have two-story storefronts facing Madison Avenue. 748 Madison is on Board 5. 702 is on Board 6. We urge the applicant to study these very successful projects and come back with a design that respects the symmetrical Neo-Colonial façade.

Second, we found the applicant's proposal to install tilted, black-anodized aluminum grilles over the display windows on the second floor to be equally inexplicable. We must note that the first page of the MASTER PLAN FOR STOREFRONTS ON MADISON AVENUE IN THE UPPER EAST SIDE HISTORIC DISTRICT states that "Most of the shops have a transparency derived from their large areas of glass which contrasts with the rich masonry facades of the rowhouses and apartment buildings which rise above them." When we studied the detail drawings for the grilles, we estimated that the vertical bars would block 25 to 30% of each window. The rendering on Board 16 shows that from an angle they will cut off views of the interior. They will eliminate the transparency this street is known for. We urge that the window grilles be denied. If the applicants want sun protection, we suggest they review the LPC Awning Rules.

No action: review transparency of 2nd floor window louvers; review composition of storefront openings, including the question of symmetry.