

Victorian Society Testimony for January 14, 2025: 66 Perry Street (LPC-25-04620); 43 East 70th Street (LPC-25-05924)

Approximate time: 11:15; join Zoom by: 10:15

LPC-25-04620 -- 66 Perry Street - Greenwich Village Historic District, Manhattan

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

We consider a stoop to be a semi-private area of someone's home: a place for people to not only enter and leave a house, but also a place for community building and connecting with neighbors. Typically, we have opposed gates on stoops similar to the one proposed here, as they betray the semi-public nature of these stoops.

In the case of 66 Perry Street, though, we are willing to make an exception. As the owner points out, the extraordinary fame of Sex and the City and the Carrie Bradshaw character has turned this townhouse, and more specifically, this stoop, into an entertainment landmark, and it has completely obliterated any sense of its privacy. I would wager that as we present this opinion, people are standing outside 66 Perry and taking pictures.

While we typically do not approve of stoop gates, we would prefer this attractive gate that complements the existing ironwork over the apparently ineffective chain that crosses the stairway. And while this gate may also prove to be ineffective, especially if it's kept unlocked, it's an alteration that is ultimately reversible, and we are willing to support it. Thank you.

Approved 8-0, but work with staff to possibly simplify the design.

lunch

LPC-25-05924 -- 43 East 70th Street - Upper East Side Historic District, Manhattan

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

This application is advertised as having two components. The Victorian Society is happy to support the proposed alterations to the entrance and stoop. The work will not require the removal of any significant historic material and will bring this building closer to its original appearance.

However, we do not support the construction of the visible rooftop addition.

The north side of East 70th Street contains a unique group of remarkably intact and cohesive mansions. The designation report notes that these three, at Numbers 41, 43 and 45, “reflect the affluence and elegance which characterized this fashionable district in the early part of the century.” And all three were designed by distinguished architects – Numbers 41 and 45 by Aymar Embury II, and number 43 by Mott Schmidt.

The Victorian Society has sometimes supported the construction of a visible rooftop addition when the addition would be seen against taller buildings on adjacent lots. That’s not the case here. This bulkhead, the first to be added to this sophisticated group since designation, will be clearly visible against the sky. For this reason, we find it overly obtrusive and inappropriate.

We must also question the necessity of adding this visible bulkhead and the related roof deck. 43 East 70th Street is a 30-foot-wide mansion. It has a 30 X 30 rear yard. There’s also a terrace on the fifth floor. Approving a proposal which will diminish both this building and this wonderful trio in exchange for a roof deck at a property which already has ample garden and terrace space does not seem to meet the Commission’s preservation mandate.

But there’s a point which needs to be clarified about the size of the actual property here. The application was advertised as 43 East 70th Street, but all the drawings are labeled 41 East 70th Street. The properties have the same owner. And the proposed floor plans in the appendix show sections of the demising walls at the sub-cellar, basement, 2nd, 3rd and 6th floors being removed to join the buildings.

If this pair of mansions are being combined, the rear garden will measure 58 feet by 30 feet, and an additional terrace, on the 6th floor at 41, will be available for the owner. This would make the new roof deck even more redundant.

In addition, the roof plan for 41, drawing LPC-52, appears to show an existing elevator bulkhead giving access to that roof. If 41 and 43 are being combined, using that existing elevator to the roof would eliminate the need for a new bulkhead at 43.

Approved 8-0, but applicant to work with staff to reduce visibility of new elevator bulkhead.