

Victorian Society Testimony for February 25, 2025: 186 8th Avenue (LPC-25-04579); 28 7th Avenue (LPC-25-04975); 186 Underhill Avenue (LPC-25-04543); 21-20 45th Avenue (LPC-25-05359); 112-114 Chambers Street (LPC-24-05964); 74 MacDougal Street (LPC-25-04391); 640 Park Avenue, aka 65-75 East 66th Street (LPC-25-05481); 2878 Broadway (LPC-25-05250)

Approximate time: 10:40; join Zoom by: 9:40

LPC-25-04579 -- 186 8th Avenue - Park Slope 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 VSNY does not support this proposal for a rear yard addition as it now stands. The rear facades of this building and its neighbors in the row are predominantly brick with punched window openings. The rear façade of the proposed addition is predominantly glass. And the applicant's photo montages show that the addition's upper level, at the parlor floor, would be clearly visible from First Street.

We do support the removal of the existing windows and sections of the rear façade: the masonry is minimally detailed, and most of this work is hidden from view by the rear wings of neighboring buildings. We support dropping the sill at one parlor floor window opening to gain access to a new balcony and spiral stair leading to the garden: it will destroy a very small amount of historic material and is almost identical to another stair in the row. And the ahistoric sliders on the basement level will be hidden by the neighbor's garden walls.

But the new infill at the parlor floor is overwhelmingly glassy. It will draw undue attention to itself. It bears no relationship to these historic masonry facades. The cladding on the visible upper floor should be predominantly masonry with a punched window opening.

Thank you, commissioners.

Approved 9-0, with addition's cornice not to project beyond adjacent masonry.

Approximate time: 11:20; join Zoom by: 10:20

LPC-25-04975 -- 28 7th Avenue - Park Slope Historic District, Brooklyn

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

We remind the commissioners that this brownstone row house was recently demolished following years of neglect by a previous owner. We also point out the failure of the City and this Commission to successfully enforce the law that requires landmark properties to be maintained. It makes no sense that the city will spend public funds to demolish a designated building but won't spend those same funds to stabilize it and make it safe. This situation, whether caused by current law or policy, must change, and the Commission should be working to make it happen.

Finally, we note that the historic stoop was present at the time the building was demolished.

We applaud how quickly this owner has proposed replacing the lost building. We also find appropriate the replication of the historic building. However, without a stoop, the building as designed is not appropriate. It makes no sense to replicate a building with what appears to be an egregiously inappropriate alteration. To repeat: replicating a transitional, neo-Grec style brownstone rowhouse in this district is appropriate. But this building type is meant to have a stoop. Building a new one without a stoop will look like, and is, a mistake. It's especially ironic, as the Commission now sees many applications to reconstruct missing stoops.

The building isn't proposed to have an elevator, so accessibility to the upper floors is not an issue. Access to the basement unit can be in the traditional way, under the stoop, or by changing one of the two basement windows into a door. Alternatively, the applicant can consider a building in a different traditional style, appropriate to the district, that accommodates a stylistically congruent entrance at the ground floor.

There is little information about the stucco façade. Is it stucco on masonry, wood, or Styrofoam? Why is it proposed to be painted?

Approved with conditions 8-0-1 (Ginsburg): façade to be 3-coat stucco aligning in appearance with neighboring building or cast stone, and that the entrance be further studied with staff.

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

LPC-25-04543 -- 186 Underhill Avenue - Prospect Heights Historic District, Brooklyn

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

When we first saw this proposal, we were concerned that the new sign would conceal a portion of the decorative masonry set between the storefront and the windowsills on the second floor. However, we then saw the excellent historic photos the applicant provided. The tax photos show that there's a long tradition of signs in this position on this row, and that the best ones work well architecturally with the building.

But we don't feel that the proposed sign is in the best location. The applicant provided 4 tax photos: We feel that the historic signs at 188 and 192 Underhill, which were centered on their façades, enhanced those facades. We believe this new sign should also be symmetrically placed on the building. Its placement should also respect the underlying masonry pattern and not leave random bits of it exposed.

Some members of our committee questioned the use of a plastic sign here. Those great looking historic signs were all either metal or painted wood. However, others felt the jaunty, period design of the proposed sign is enhanced by the use of plastic. We look forward to hearing the Commissioners' comments on the proposed material.

Approved 8-1 (Chapin), but applicant can determine with staff whether to install as presented or as a longer sign centered on building rather than storefront.

lunch

Approximate time: 1:30; join Zoom by: 12:30

LPC-25-05359 -- 21-20 45th Avenue - Hunters Point Historic District, Queens

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

The Victorian Society does not support this proposal for rear facade alterations at 21-20 45th Avenue based on the information being presented today.

The drawings call for the entire rear wall to be removed. There's no engineer's report stating the reasons for this intervention. They call for the reconstruction of the rear façade at the third floor, but there's no elevation drawing showing that the new window openings will match the size and location of the existing openings in this building or the four other houses in this row. There's no mention of salvaging and reusing the historic brick, stone lintels or stone sills. There are no photos of the existing sills and lintels. And the applicant hasn't provided the dimensions and materials of the existing sills and lintels, or of the ones they propose to install. All this material must be provided before an informed determination on appropriateness can be made.

We also believe that the new addition is too large in height and depth. It should extend no farther into the rear yard than the rear addition at 21-16, the only other building in this row which has been extended into the donut. It should also match the two story height previously approved at 21-16.

Thank you, commissioners.

No action; volume is out of scale, reduce addition to two floors or three floors at a shallower depth; also more documentation required about need for demolition of entire façade; also more documentation and dimension information for rear façade.

Approximate time: 1:50; join Zoom by: 12:50

LPC-24-05964 -- 112-114 Chambers Street - Tribeca South Historic District Extension, Manhattan

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

The Victorian Society does not support many of the proposed changes to these adjacent buildings.

The overall design philosophy here seems incorrect. These buildings were put up by different builders, one in 1854, the other in 1857. Unfortunately, the applicant seems to have made the decision to ignore this and make them look as similar as possible.

At the ground floor of 112 the two cast iron colonettes would be retained. However, the large blank sign panel, surely not original, cause the proportions of the new storefront to be awkward and incorrect for an 1854 building. There are many well-proportioned historic storefronts in this district. Beyond that, a full building renovation like this demands that a stylistically appropriate Italianate-era storefront be considered. There are many extant examples.

Historic fire escapes are a significant feature added to buildings built before the Triangle Shirtwaist Fire in 1911. They are character-defining features of this district. This fire escape has decorative elements and should be retained.

At 114 the proposal would remove the display window which is called out in the designation report as an “historic second-story wood-and-glass show window.” The report notes that’s it’s been altered, but there is significant historic material here, including what may be original pivot windows. This second floor show window should remain in place and be restored.

Painted features of the two facades should be differentiated by color, unless a paint analysis reveals they were the same. In fact, a paint analysis should be standard procedure for a renovation of this scope.

At the rear facades there are many historic cast iron fire shutters still in place. The applicant is proposing to remove all of them and presumably destroy them. This is unacceptable. New replica shutters at the new window openings at the rooftop addition are no substitute. The existing shutters should be restored and retained in place.

Finally, the handrails at the rooftop addition need to be shown in the building sections on Board LPC-15. They are shown in the mock-up. They will be visible.

The design should be significantly revised before a vote is taken.

Approved 8-1 (Ginsburg), with modifications: details of ground floor storefronts to be revised to better reflect historic storefronts of this age and style.

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

LPC-25-04391 -- 74 MacDougal Street - MacDougal-Sullivan Gardens Historic District, Manhattan

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

We will address two aspects of this proposal—the rooftop addition and the rear façade alteration. Regarding the rooftop, this small addition is problematic only because of the one-story building next door. This causes the side wall to be highly visible. We believe the inappropriately intrusive effect of the addition would be considerably reduced by eliminating the windows in the lot line wall. Instead, it should be a simple extension of the building’s brick side wall. It hardly seems that additional light is needed for this small room that has windows front and back. Skylights could provide this extra light if desired.

The proposed change to the rear façade is perhaps even more problematic. MacDougal-Sullivan Gardens is an important district in the history of housing in NYC. The 1920 alterations to then deteriorated Greek Revival houses created uniform rear facades facing a common garden. The architectural significance of these rear facades is much greater than for typical row house districts. The presentation materials give little indication of the uniformity of appearance of these rear facades. The three pictures in our written testimony show that most, and likely all, of the rear facades at the parlor floor retain their historic configuration of three multi-light, double-hung windows in punched masonry openings. Some of the ground floor facades have been changed, but the overall effect of the facades facing the common garden is of a consistent treatment throughout.

The proposed alteration of the rear parlor floor windows is typical of the kind of change the Commission regularly approves in other districts. In this district, however, such a change is not appropriate.

See three pictures below.

76 MacDougal Street

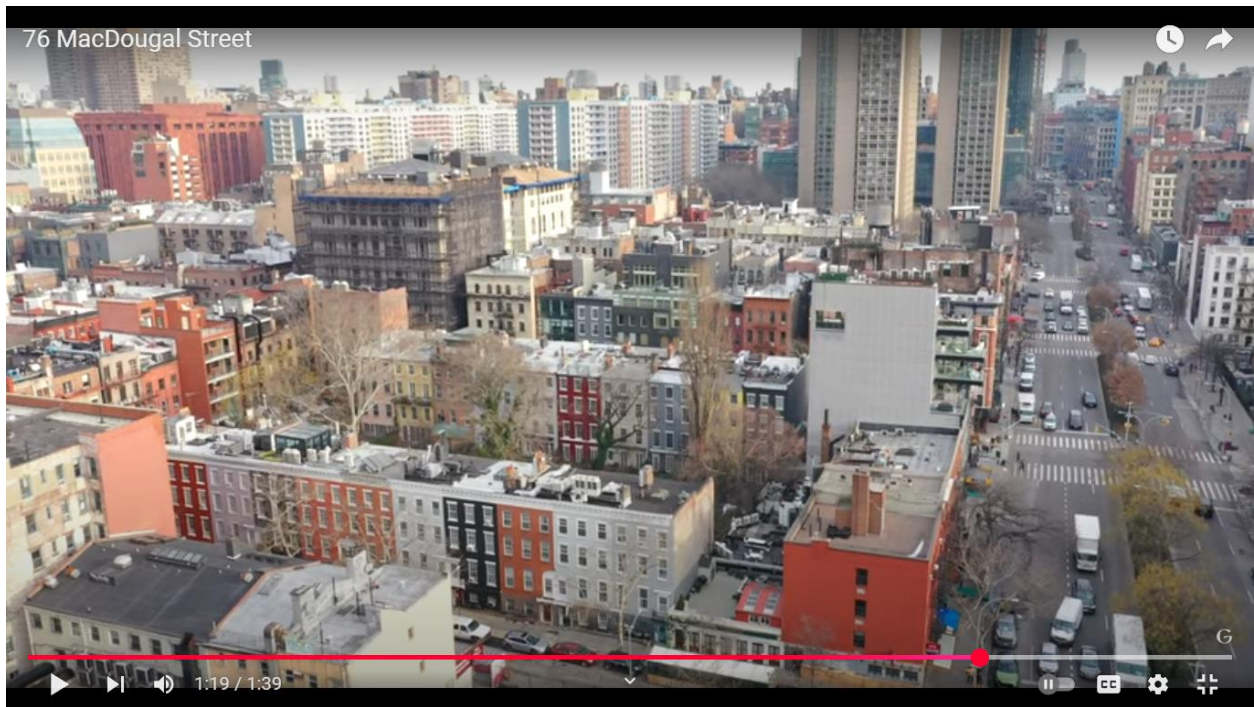


1:06 / 1:39

76 MacDougal Street



0:27 / 1:39



No action; reduce visibility of rooftop addition.

Approximate time: 3:30; join Zoom by: 2:30

LPC-25-05481 -- 640 Park Avenue, aka 65-75 East 66th Street - Upper East Side Historic District, Manhattan

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

We continue to find these faux double-hung windows inappropriate on historic buildings. The dimensions and details are far from those of historic windows. Their appearance when the casement section is open is incompatible with any historic window on any historic building.

On the 13th floor, these differences aren't likely to be very noticeable, especially when the casements are closed. We are concerned, however, about the *de facto* precedent that will be set for the building. Without a master plan, can we expect to see other units, on lower floors, request the same thing? Will the Commission be willing to say this type of window isn't appropriate at lower floors? Will we get a hodge-podge of windows on the building-- exactly the kind of thing designation is supposed to prevent?

Approved 8-0.

Approximate time: 3:50; join Zoom by: 2:50

LPC-25-05250 -- 2878 Broadway - Morningside Heights Historic District, Manhattan

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

The most interesting part of this proposal is that the proposed new sign is real neon. The fabricator, Noble Signs, has provided examples of their recent neon work. Their website is worth a look (<https://www.noblesigns.com/>). It includes more examples of neon as well as other traditional signs, many types of which would be happy additions to historic buildings.

This proposal exposes the nonsense about neon espoused by the recent applications for removal of neon at the Apollo Theater and Rockefeller Center. Why did the Commission not challenge their misleading statements about neon being outdated, unsafe, and increasingly unavailable? The shame is, those are historic neon signs, on buildings for which the neon technology and aesthetic are especially fitting and appropriate.

This proposal, for a neon sign on a building that pre-dates the development of such signs, raises interesting questions. Can signs that we would once have considered inappropriate in design and materials for the buildings on which they were placed be found appropriate today? Has the passage of time rendered these kinds of mid-century signs significant designs in themselves and comfortable as layers on our historic buildings?

The Commission regularly approves sign designs and materials that post-date their buildings. We see no reason that neon should be treated differently, and we don't object to its use here. An issue is that the signs would be located on a band that was originally a series of transom windows. The transom windows were filled in prior to designation. The Commission can't require that these be reopened, so using the space as a sign band is reasonable.

The last question is whether some of the details should be revised. For example, should the sign not wrap the corner, but allow the corner masonry pier to carry down to the sidewalk? We note that the famous Tom's Restaurant neon sign facing this corner across 112th Street wraps the corner of its building. That sign is in theory protected by the Commission.

Approved 8-0.