

Victorian Society Testimony for March 25, 2025: 817 Washington Street (LPC-25-06717); 167 West 72nd Street (LPC-24-0875); 122-124 Fifth Avenue (aka 3-7 West 17th Street) (LPC-25-04027)

Public Meeting Item No. 1: Do Not Read

LPC-25-06717 -- 817 Washington Street - Greenwich Village Historic District, Manhattan

The minimal changes made by the applicant in response to comments at the hearing demonstrate a lack of good faith in meeting the commissioners' objections to the previous design. This proposal is still inappropriate.

Several commissioners stated that the corbelled brickwork should be preserved. Some of these same commissioners stated it would be all right to lower the windowsills of the small windows. These two positions are incompatible, as the corbelled brickwork is immediately below the windowsills (it architecturally supports them). Lowering the windows will destroy the corbelling.

We note further that this is one large, corner retail store. This store already has more storefront to floor area than most. It's absurd to suggest that even more show windows, at the expense of the historic architecture, is necessary. If there really is a hardship, the applicant can apply for a C of A under the hardship provision, section 25-309, of the Landmarks Law.

We state once again that destroying this nearly intact, historic primary façade with outstanding Queen Anne features for what will likely be a short term retail occupancy goes against every tenet of historic preservation and is utterly unsupportable on appropriateness grounds.

Our testimony from the March 2, 2025 public hearing is below:

The proposed alterations to the modern storefront infill that would convert some doors into windows and regularize the bulkheads are innocuous and appropriate. However, the proposed destruction of the historic masonry wall at the Gansevoort Street façade is not. The beautiful, corbelled brickwork, belt course made of rotated soldier bricks, brownstone trim, and small, square windows are significant historic features and are typical of the Queen Anne style. Note also the former cellar entrance with remnants of carved faces near the sidewalk. All this would be tossed out to add a few show windows to a ground floor that is already almost entirely show windows and doors. The applicant does not seem to be aware, or care, that this decorative historic masonry is nearly 140 years old. The Commission *should* care and should *not* allow the removal of any of this material.

We point out that the city recently completed a major street reconstruction project in this district. Historic streetscape elements like cobblestones, granite crosswalks, and cast-iron manhole covers for the old refrigerating company piping systems were salvaged and reinstalled. Vast amounts of additional, compatible materials were added, including granite cobblestones, curbs, and crosswalks and bishop's crook lampposts. All this was done by the city to support and strengthen the historic architectural character of the district and its sense of place. In light of that public investment, it would be a travesty to allow private owners to remove significant historic features of their buildings for what's likely to be a short-term storefront reconfiguration. There should be no compromises here; this is a definite "no."

Finally, what looks to be recent electrical conduit destructively installed on this façade should be removed and the masonry repaired. Hopefully an LPC permit was not issued for this destructive work.

Approved as modified 9-0 (somewhat more masonry retained and corbeling reinstated below lowered sills).

Approximate time: 10:00; join Zoom by: 9:30

LPC-24-0875 -- 167 West 72nd Street - Upper West Side/Central Park West Historic District, Manhattan

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

At the last hearing, the Commission saw the positive effects of the recent restoration of multilight casement windows at Harlem River Houses. The importance of retaining or restoring historic window configurations and details is a lesson that should be applied to this application.

Historic tax photographs of 167 West 72nd Street show that this building had nine-over-one wood windows on the upper floors. These windows almost surely date from the 1909 alteration that gave the house a neo-Federal style façade. Nine-over-one windows are stylistically correct for a neo-Federal rowhouse and were an intentional part of the redesign. We therefore recommend that the illegal windows be replaced with nine-over-one wood sash that match the 1909 windows and support the historic style of the building.

In investigating the history of Commission activity concerning this building, we were extremely disappointed to discover that Notice of Violation 06-0651, issued for the “replacement of windows at the front façade without permit(s)” was dated June 26, 2006. It’s been outstanding for 19 years.

We were just as disturbed to see that four other Notices of Violation have been issued against the property since 2010; that the violations are all still in effect; that since 2016 staff has deactivated or withdrawn six applications; and that on March 4, 2025, last week, a Certificate of No Effect was issued to correct one of the them, issued for the installation of signage in 2010.

For decades the Commission has worked with owners and preservation advocates to restore West 72nd Street to a retail and residential street befitting its historic neighborhood. Public funds have improved the streetscape to support the district’s character. This owner should get on board and contribute to this architectural and commercial revitalization.

Commissioners, these windows are inappropriate in terms of style and materials. As the building has many other violations not being addressed by this application, we think the owners should be required to return with a fully detailed presentation for the installation of multi-light, painted wood windows. This application for legalization should be denied.

Approved 9-0.

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

LPC-25-04027 -- 122-124 Fifth Avenue (aka 3-7 West 17th Street) - Ladies' Mile Historic District, Manhattan

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

This proposal has two aspects – alterations to the ground floor infill on West 17th Street, and the installation of a flagpole. Neither is appropriate as presented.

Retaining the existing pair of wood panels, evidence of the original service entrance, would be an excellent decision. However, if it's determined that removing them is appropriate, the existing historic material, including that great bay window, and the pedimented opening next to it, should be the inspiration for all new elements. The proposed glass and metal door on the east is inappropriate. It bears no relationship to anything on this narrow façade. It's also, at 3'-11", overly wide. The existing pair of glass and metal doors under the scrolled pediment match those in the historic bay and help to unify this narrow façade. They should be kept, whether the doors are used or not.

The minimally detailed display windows which the applicant is proposing are also inappropriate for a building of this age. These new windows are going to be right next to the historic bay windows. Designing them with bulkheads similar to those on the bay would help to unify this façade.

Finally, the proposed flagpole is overly large for this side street. Commissioners, this storefront is not on Fifth Avenue. A bracket sign, conforming to the Rules, would be an excellent solution here.

But we must also note that these applicants do not seem to understand the appropriate way to install a sign on an historic masonry clad building. They are proposing to drill four sets of holes into the face of the stone, permanently disfiguring it. There are no notes about locating these holes in the mortar joints, or in the recesses between blocks. If any sign is found to be appropriate here, the applicant must ensure that it will be installed in non-historic material, at the masonry joints, or by following other techniques carefully set out in the Commission's rules. Thank you, commissioners.

Approved 9-0, with staff to ensure minimal stone damage.