

Victorian Society Testimony for May 20, 2025: Pier A (aka 22 Battery Place) (LPC-25-07606); 16 East 16th Street (LPC-25-08741); Verdi Square (LPC-25-06032); 157 East 78th Street - Individual Landmark (LPC-25-07704)

Approximate time: 11:40; join Zoom by: 10:40

LPC-25-07606 -- Pier A (aka 22 Battery Place) - Individual Landmark, Manhattan

Good morning commissioners, _____ for the Victorian Society New York. Charts on pages 10 and 11 of this presentation document the accelerating rate of deterioration of the building's wood windows and doors between the years 2016 and 2025. We suspect that, during this time, no maintenance was performed on these features—no painting, no caulking, no repairs of any kind. It's like a real-time experiment that demonstrates the result of this city's inattention to the maintenance of its facilities.

Over the years, we have seen numerous city-owned designated structures undergo restoration, including Pier A. Some of these restorations are given preservation awards. Then, after receiving no maintenance, the same building returns 20, 30, 40 years later with a new restoration proposal. Sometimes, this second restoration gets another award. The lack of attention and funding for maintenance of its facilities is gross malfeasance on the part of the City of New York and should be called out at every opportunity, especially by those whose objective is the preservation of historic structures.

The Commission has seen several applications like this one to replace wood features on city-owned individual landmarks with so-called maintenance-free modern materials. Perhaps the most notable was the proposal to install plastic rooftop railings at the Morris-Jumel House. The Commission denied that proposal. At the public hearing for Morris Jumel and at least four other public hearings, we recommended the use of acetylated wood where maintenance is difficult or likely to be lacking. If you are not familiar with this material, we urge you Google "acetylated wood." A link is in our written testimony.

Acetylated wood has been specified for several public projects approved by LPC at staff level. One was completed many years ago at the designated Onderdonk House.

It's true that Pier A is in an extremely vulnerable location. It's also true that it's mostly clad in metal. Because of this, perhaps well-detailed aluminum windows aren't inappropriate. But retention of wood material should be the first option, and we ask the Commission to require the applicant to investigate fabricating the new windows with painted acetylated wood.

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Acetylated_wood

Also see many other articles by Googling "acetylated wood."

Approved 9-0.

Approximate time: 12:10; join Zoom by: 11:10

LPC-25-08741 -- 16 East 16th Street - Ladies' Mile Historic District, Manhattan

Good morning commissioners, _____ for the Victorian Society New York. The Victorian Society wants to express its appreciation to the owner for the spectacular restoration of the base of this building. It has made the building architecturally whole. Work of this kind should be the goal for the many designated commercial buildings whose ground floors and entrances have been stripped, simplified, and modernized.

We support the proposed canopies. They fit the openings, are of traditional materials and design, maintain the building's symmetry, and don't overly obscure its architectural features. Similar canopies were found historically at entrances to hotels and restaurants. They are, therefore, appropriate.

Approved 9-0.

lunch

Approximate time: 1:00; join Zoom by: 12:00

LPC-25-06032 -- Verdi Square - Scenic Landmark, Manhattan

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

Verdi Square is the smallest of our 12 scenic landmarks. It was designated for its presence as a quiet, green foreground to the landmarked Central Savings Bank across 73rd Street, making for an elegant and urbane ensemble.

Many cycles of neglect and restoration have characterized Verdi Square. Its 1960s nickname, *Needle Park*, was brought to the world's attention with the 1971 movie *Panic in Needle Park*. In an act of courage and hope, the Commission designated the park in 1975. But by 2018 it had a new nickname--*Vermin Square*--due to the hundreds of rats living in its neglected and overgrown plantings. The founding of Friends of Verdi Square in 2019 finally provided the volunteer resources to clear out, replant, and to this day, maintain the scenic landmark.

Today's application originally included a new asphalt path through the park. Public advocacy thankfully resulted in the change to a stabilized gravel path that will blend with the informal, gravel-surfaced seating area at the north end. This is an appropriate part of the proposal.

It's the other part of this proposal, for a new water service, that's the real problem. Even though it will have a significant visual impact on the scenic landmark and will cause long term disruption to the landmark as well as the adjacent subway plaza and west garden, it's being approved at staff level. We think a proposal of such import deserves a public airing.

A large, above-ground backflow preventer enclosure will be placed within the landmark adjacent to the seating area and near the Verdi Monument. DEP's "Cross-Connection Control Handbook" tells us that such an installation may not be necessary or can be subject to an exemption for aesthetic reasons. We ask that the Commission request a determination from DEP based on the particulars of this site.

Construction of the water line and hose bibs will result in long-term disruption to Verdi Square and the subway plaza and garden to the west. While the plaza and west garden aren't under LPC jurisdiction, we believe it's our civic responsibility to call this out as an unnecessary waste of public funds.

There are two existing hose bibs on the exterior of the new subway station building. These were intended to provide water for the plaza and plantings. One of them is just two feet from the west garden. We ask that the Commission work with Parks to investigate the use of these hose bibs by the volunteer gardeners. This will save hundreds of thousands of

dollars and avoid the disruption and visual intrusiveness of the proposed backflow preventer and waterline installation.

We also note that a Parks Department food service kiosk is located just 10 feet from the scenic landmark. It appears to have water service, and a quick and inexpensive modification could bring a hose bib to the back of that structure, with easy access to Verdi Square.

Please see the pictures in our written testimony.

Approved 9-0 (Chapin notes the intrusive qualities of RPZs and asks that Parks work with DEP on alternatives.)

See five pictures below.



The blue arrow shows the hose bib box on the north side of the new station entrance. This is immediately adjacent to the west planting bed, on the right. There is a second hose bib on the south side, closer to the scenic landmark part of the site.



Close up of the box, clearly labeled "WATER."



*Hose bib on the south side of the station building.
The missing cover shows the standard hose connection
And valve. This hose bib is 40 feet from the scenic landmark.*



Parks' food service kiosk, which appears to have a water supply—there is a sink inside. A simple and inexpensive alteration could add a hose bib to the back of the kiosk on the left, facing the Verdi Square planting bed, just 10 feet away.



This image provides an idea of what is likely to be encountered if an attempt is made to install a new water line under the plaza pavement, which is directly above the subway tunnel and the old Broadway roadbed. This view by Michael Minn was taken during construction of the new control house, ca. early 2000's.

Approximate time: 1:20; join Zoom by: 12:20

LPC-25-07704 -- 157 East 78th Street - 157 East 78th Street House - Individual Landmark, Manhattan

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

The Victorian Society supports the parts of this proposal that are restorative. At the front façade these include the removal of the existing service door on the left side of the façade, replacing it with a window matching the one in the center bay, and installation of a new stone water table and masonry infill. We also support the removal of the one-over-one sash in the third floor dormers and their replacement with two-over-two sash matching the historic configuration. However, we couldn't find information on the material or dimensions of the new window proposed for the ground floor, or the three at the top floor. There are also no notes on finish or material for any of the replacement windows. All the French doors, casements and double-hung sash should be painted wood. The dimensions of all of them should be provided. The French doors at the parlor floor should retain their historic fixed transoms.

We also support the replacement of the six-panel wood door at the main entrance as well as the modification to the masonry surround. This entrance has been altered before and the proposed change respects the character of the basement entrances seen on this row. However, there are no dimensions or finish notes for the existing or proposed doors. Dimensions should be provided; the new door should match the existing door. Either a painted or stained finish is acceptable, but it should be stated.

We find the iron gate at the main entrance inappropriate to a house which already has a tall areaway fence and gate. If a gate is acceptable here at all, it should not be simplistic and modern. It does not relate at all to this historic facade. There's beautifully detailed historic ironwork in adjacent districts which could serve as inspiration here. Interior security, behind the wood door, would be a much better solution.

But our strongest objections concern the destruction of the upper two floors of the rear façade. This destruction of historic material wouldn't be acceptable on a simple rowhouse in an historic district. This building is an individual landmark. It shouldn't be acceptable here and must be denied.

Thank you, commissioners.

No action; eliminate gate at entrance; split on rear and whether to retain historic top floor.