

Victorian Society testimony for June 24, 2025: 346 Broadway- Former New York Life Insurance Company Building - Individual and Interior Landmark (LPC-24-09650); 56 Joralemon Street (LPC-25-11594); 157 Duane Street (LPC-25-09894); 4 Bond Street (LPC-25-08326); 79 Spring Street (LPC-25-11243); 225 West 4th Street (LPC-24-11736); 160 West 10th Street (LPC-25-09731); 115 Mercer Street (LPC-25-09355); 15 East 88th Street (LPC-25-08450)

Public Meeting Item No. 1:

(Note: this testimony is not to be read)

LPC-24-09650 -- 346 Broadway (aka 108 Leonard Street, 50 Lafayette Street) - Former New York Life Insurance Company Building - Individual and Interior Landmark, Manhattan

The Victorian Society opposes the legalization of this work. The addition of lighting to the elevator doors does little to address the fact that the doors will remain largely hidden from the public by the wall behind the reception desk, which was built illegally, without permits. The wall must be removed and the lobby design originally approved by the Commission must be instituted.

It's unclear whether part of this proposal includes replacing the bare bulb or flush-mounted lighting in the rosettes at the elevators with pendant globes, as shown in the mockup. This would be inappropriate, as the existing lighting appears to match the historic, based on several historic photos in the presentation. Pendant globes did not exist here.

Much important, publicly accessible interior landmark space was lost as a result of the privatization of this building. Much of that loss was avoidable and was not necessary to the viability of the project or the restoration of the building. The last thing LPC should do now is to further disadvantage the public by approving work that was done in violation.

No action: insufficient votes for approval of the wall behind the desk.

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

LPC-25-11594 -- 56 Joralemon Street - Brooklyn Heights 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 most of the changes the applicant is proposing for 56 Joralemon. Six-over-six double-hung sash with a black finish are an appropriate choice for a Greek Revival style rowhouse. The alterations to the rear façade will require the removal of only a small amount of historic masonry and will be minimally visible when seen from Willow Place. The roof-mounted HVAC units will be installed at the rear of the roof where they will not be visible from any public way.

However, the applicant's proposal to install new black-finished aluminum panning at the windows on the front façade should not be approved.

On drawing G-009.00, photograph 05 shows a window at the parlor floor where a section of the modern, white-finished aluminum panning has been removed. The applicants note that there's existing wood brick mold under the aluminum panning. The note also says that the wood brick mold is to remain, and that new, black-finished aluminum panning will be installed over it.

Commissioners, this is simply not appropriate. Wood brick mold is perfectly compatible with aluminum sash. It's also possible to obtain extruded aluminum brick mold with complex profiles which matches the different profiles of wood brick mold used in the 19th century. Either would be an excellent choice which would bring this façade closer to its original appearance. The use of modern panning on the front facade must be denied, and the applicant required to use historically appropriate brick mold for these windows.

Approved 7-0.

Approximate time: 11:40; join Zoom by: 9:40

LPC-25-09894 -- 157 Duane Street - Tribeca West Historic District, Manhattan

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

The Victorian Society does not support legalization of this awning installation.

One of the distinctive things about 157 Duane Street is that it's one of a pair of buildings. The Designation Report states: "In the center of the block, Nos. 157 and 159 are five-story Italianate structures. Faced in brownstone above cast-iron bases, these store and loft buildings are a remarkably unified pair." We believe that any change which diminishes this unity detracts from these two buildings, from the streetscape and also from the district.

This illegally installed awning is unacceptable for several reasons. It bridges over adjacent windows with no regard for the original four-bay pattern which runs the full height of both buildings. It conceals sections of the historic cast iron pilasters set between the bays, another feature shared by both buildings. And it was installed in the center of the historic transom frames which are common to both 157 and 159.

When the tax photo was taken, both buildings had paneled bulkheads, large display windows and transoms. The transom lights at each have been changed - clear glass at 159; painted glass or infill panels at 157 - but until the illegal installation of this awning the relationship was visible. Now it's concealed by this awkwardly placed awning.

We find it disturbing, when a pair of matching buildings retain so much historic material, to see a proposal to legalize an installation done without any regard for that material. We strongly recommend denial of this application.

Approved 7-0.

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

LPC-25-08326 -- 4 Bond Street - NoHo Historic District, Manhattan

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

The Victorian Society supports the installation of new lintels above the double-hung windows on the top three floors. These would match the design of the lintels visible in the tax photo of this building. However, we recommend the use of cast stone for the lintels instead of the proposed painted stucco.

The work at the second floor would include removing sections of the stucco-clad masonry to create a large window opening at this floor, with seven black-finished operable casement windows set into the opening. The applicant has provided pictures of several historic buildings which have large, divided display windows in this location.

However, this new window opening is too tall and is uncomfortably close to the ends of the historic shallow brick arch just above the new band of windows. The slim pilasters and brick arch are so attenuated that they do not appear to have enough material to support the upper three floors. In fact, a drawing on slide 11 shows a dashed line through the new windows indicating the bottom of what appears to be the existing structural arch. The windows should be shorter, with a visually stronger lintel above the new opening.

Finally, the oval shape and the rectangular shape of the two signs proposed have no unity. They are distracting. They are on a sign band that seems excessively high in relation to the height of the storefront. These problems of proportion and design should be addressed before approval.

Approved 7-0 with modifications: work with staff on proportion and rhythm of mezzanine windows and to reduce size of the oval sign.

lunch

Approximate time: 12:50; join Zoom by: 12:00

LPC-25-11243 -- 79 Spring Street - SoHo-Cast Iron Historic District, Manhattan

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

We maintain our position that there are too many flagpoles and banners in this historic district. Their original function of directing people past long rows of abandoned and derelict buildings is no longer relevant. This storefront already has one flagpole and banner. Because it's a corner building, a small bracket sign on the shorter façade would be appropriate. This, along with the prominent sign painted on the storefront window and the freestanding sign regularly set up on the vault lights, would be more than sufficient identification.

Approved 7-0 in part: black paint on storefront approved but not on the double-hung windows, which are to remain the historic color; no action on flagpole.

Approximate time: 1:10; join Zoom by: 12:10

LPC-24-11736 -- 225 West 4th Street (aka 229 West 4th Street and 126 7th Avenue; and 231 West 4th Approximate Time: Street and 128 7th Avenue), Manhattan

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

The Victorian Society supports this proposal for quirky signs on this quirky little Village building. They're well scaled and not excessive. We especially support the use of real neon on the 7th Avenue South elevation. It's appropriate on this eclectic commercial street, and we encourage the use and retention of this historic sign technology in all appropriate situations.

Approved 7-0.

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

LPC-25-09731 -- 160 West 10th Street - Greenwich Village Historic District, Manhattan

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

This proposal bears some similarities to one we saw last week in Brooklyn Heights. In each case the interesting façade of a garage building not typical of the district is being retained. This proposal incorporates the existing building more fully into the new building, which we think is a good thing. It also sensitively handles the historic openings on the ground floor, providing new infill that maintains the sense of the historic vehicular openings.

The vertical addition is perhaps a bit large, but it respects the historic building and fits the scale of the neighborhood. This design seems to us far superior to the approved additions on other buildings shown in the precedent photographs, including the one immediately next door.

Our main objection is to the enlargement of the segmental-arch second floor window in each flanking tower bay. This change diminishes the solidity of these towers. Right now, the facade reads as 3 elements - closed towers flanking an open bridge. This contrast is reduced by enlarging these windows. Further, there is stunning historic brickwork at these windows. It consists of both rounded and wedge-shaped bricks and would be destroyed when the windows are enlarged. It isn't clear to what extent these features would be replicated.

Regarding the windows in the front façade of the historic building, we find the changes to the historic double-hung window operation, wood material, and dimensional details to be inappropriate. The windows should be restored, and if that isn't possible, the new ones should match in operation, material, and dimensional details.

We wish to point out two of the historic photos in the presentation that deserve a close look. On slide 12, the 1964 designation photo shows the subject building along with a large, faded, painted wall sign for the famous Julius's Bar. Then, on slide 16 is a view of a building just across the street from 225 West 4th Street, the subject of the previous application. This view shows a large, painted wall sign for the famous Stonewall Inn.

Approved 7-0 except for enlargement to tower window openings.

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

LPC-25-09355 -- 115 Mercer Street - SoHo-Cast Iron Historic District, Manhattan

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

This application is another good example of why we think additional flagpoles and banners in this district are inappropriate. If you look at the photographs on board 3, there is a sea of flagpoles and banners around this store, each one blocking the others and altogether obscuring the rhythms and architectural details of the buildings.

In addition to that, this small Biaggi storefront already has a sign in each of the three transom windows and a bracket sign. We do not think another sign, in the form of a flagpole and banner, is warranted or appropriate. Finally, the flagpole bracket would be attached to a masonry pier, and it's never a good idea to permit new penetrations of historic façade materials.

No action; provide more photos of context; possibly relocate proposed banner and/or eliminate blade sign.

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

LPC-25-08450 -- 15 East 88th Street - Expanded Carnegie Hill Historic District, Manhattan

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

We find the proposed windows inappropriate, as they do not match the operation, materials, or details of the historic wood windows on this finely detailed, neo-Federal style townhouse. The proposed loss of the curved sash with bent glass on the rear elevation is especially troublesome. The Victorian Society is in favor of energy conservation, but not at the expense of historic and architectural integrity.

Windows are important, character-defining features of historic buildings. Their configuration, operation, materials, and details are important. Also important is the evidence of age that comes with historic materials. The Commission once required near replication of each of these window features and allowed historic windows to be replaced only when they were beyond repair. As each window feature is modified or changed, the architectural and historic integrity of the building is diminished.

There are ways to significantly improve the thermal performance of historic windows without complete replacement or changing their essential characteristics. These include installation of high quality weatherstripping and interior storm windows. These are the kinds of options that should be considered if the goal is to maintain the historic, architectural, and aesthetic integrity of this historic building.

Approved 6-0, but applicant to investigate with staff new curved sash with interior storms at rear elevation “if possible.”