

Victorian Society Testimony for August 5, 2025: 604 Shore Road (LPC-25-09193); Fieldston Historic District street signs (LPC-25-1240); St. Mark's Playground, Crown Heights North III (LPC-25-12960); 82 East 4th Street (LPC-24-11367)

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

LPC-25-09193 -- 604 Shore Road - Douglaston Historic District, Queens

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 finds that the overall character of 604 Shore Road will be overwhelmed by the number of decorative details the applicants are proposing to add to the existing garden enclosures.

Because Douglaston was originally designed to be a “Garden Suburb,” the Victorian Society typically opposes the addition of walls, fences and hedges in the district. However, we find that the existing garden walls at 604, which are not mentioned in the Designation Report, do not detract from the overall character of the house or the district. This is in part because of the large size of the lot, and also because the walls are detailed in a manner which both reflects and defers to the Arts and Crafts detailing of the main house.

That won't be the case if the changes we're seeing today are approved. The applicants are proposing the addition of cast limestone piers, railings, balusters, coping and urns, an elaborate iron gate, limestone and marble cladding on the existing outdoor fireplace, and a three tier fountain which will be visible through the balusters from Grosvenor Street. While a few of these elements might be individually acceptable, the cumulative effect is not. We ask that no action be taken today, and that the applicant return with a significantly simplified design, eliminating most of the proposed changes, which are stylistically incompatible with the historic house and which draw attention away from it.

Approved with modifications 8-0. -Applicants must restudy the style and scale of the ornaments and the materiality of the balustrades, fireplace, and ornamental ironwork in consultation with the Commission staff.

Approximate time: 11:00; join Zoom by: 10:00

LPC-25-12401-- Fieldston Historic District, the Bronx

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

The Victorian Society finds the proposed street signs and signposts to be sensitively designed additions to the Fieldston streetscape. We assume the proposed signs are one-for-one replacements of existing signs, but in some places the smaller signs seem to be extremely close to each other. Perhaps they can be spaced more generously.

Some of the existing signposts incorporate decorative scrollwork. We wonder whether these posts are historic. If so, they should be retained and incorporated into the signage plan. If they're modern, we have no objection to their removal.

Approved 8-0.

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

LPC-25-12960 -- St. Mark's Playground - Crown Heights North III Historic District, Brooklyn

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

The St. Mark's Playground is part of a highly important neighborhood physical and social intervention of the mid-1960s. It was planned by two of the most important designers of the time, I.M. Pei and M. Paul Friedberg, working with the Bedford Stuyvesant Restoration Corporation. Parks' ill-conceived reconstruction of the playground in 2001 damaged but did not destroy the playground. It can and should be restored to its original design, complementing the historic design of the superblock in which it exists.

The importance of Pei's and Friedberg's work is increasingly recognized with sympathetic restorations. This Crown Heights neighborhood deserves no less.

Parks' proposal shows a variety of standard pavements and furnishings, resulting in a hodge-podge of styles and materials within the remaining bones of the Friedberg design. That design was a Brutalist landscape very much of its time: sharply geometric, mostly rectilinear with contrasting regular geometric circles, exposed concrete tempered by warm brown asphalt pavers, simple "lollipop" pedestrian-scale lights, seating incorporated fully into the design, and a fountain centerpiece that was a harmony of circles within a square.

The Parks Department creates many intricate water play features in its playgrounds today; a take on the original fountain could serve this function. Concrete features should be left exposed, not repainted. Seating should replicate the original ottomans. Additional seating can be provided by bracketing wood slats off existing concrete walls. The proposed 1964 "World's Fair" benches reflect the atomic, "Jetsons" aesthetic of the Fair, not the Brutalist aesthetic of this playground. The lollipop lights are simple pipes with round globes, cheap to make and easy to maintain. Parks uses asphalt block pavers throughout its parks; the existing warm brown asphalt pavers, seen throughout the superblock and contrasting with the white concrete, should be replicated and not replaced with grey, scored concrete. Fences were not original to this playground. Their use should be minimized, and they should have a less opaque design than steel pickets. Simple posts and rails infilled with mesh would be better.

We also think that removing the two original and seemingly healthy mature trees in the central area would be a serious mistake. They provide what little shade is available.

The St. Marks Playground is important as a work of Modernist design. It exists within a neighborhood reconstruction effort that was a culmination of the social and political forces at work in the 1960s. Its reconstruction should reflect this importance by adhering to its historic design aesthetic. Modifications such as those described in our testimony should be made to the design before the Commission acts.

No action. Consider a more faithful recall of the original design.

lunch

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

**LPC-24-11367 -- 82 East 4th Street - East Village/Lower East Side Historic District,
Manhattan**

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

We are very happy to support this proposal. Based on the historic photos, the work appears to be very close to the definition of restorative. The installation of the new marquee will conceal ugly scars left by the removal of the original one. It will include restoration of the historic door surround. The new doors are nicely scaled and detailed. And it seems a very appropriate project for a section of the city the designation report notes was once called "The Yiddish Rialto."

Thank you, commissioners.

Approved 7-0.