

Victorian Society Testimony for July 22, 2025: Governors Island - Building 19 (LPC-25-09619); 1 West Kingsbridge Road - Kingsbridge Armory (Eighth Regiment Armory) - Individual Landmark (LPC-25-12069); 202 Adelphi Street (LPC-25-11563); 945 Madison Avenue - (Former) Whitney Museum of American Art - Individual and Interior Landmark (LPC-25-12480)

Note: Do not read public meeting item no.1. Start with 1 West Kingsbridge Road.

Public Meeting Item No. 1

LPC-25-09619 -- Governors Island - Building 19 - Governors Island Historic District, Manhattan

DO NOT READ:

This proposal has been significantly improved. The historic fabric, design, and character of this Victorian house are now being respected for the most part.

We don't understand, however, why the applicant continues to design a covered space at the west façade that's so out of character with the house. The newly proposed, heavy, unpainted wood supports for the roof and the large deck are not typical accretions on a Victorian house. There are many historically appropriate ways to provide shade: a covered porch, pergola, or canvas awning. These could be used singly or in combination to create a seamless and appropriate addition to this façade.

We're also concerned that the images of the proposed work do not show the ornamental, jigsaw cut brackets at any of the porches. There are no historic images provided in this presentation to show whether the existing brackets are historic. But this house very likely had such brackets originally, and they should remain or be reproduced if the existing brackets aren't original.

Approved 7-0.

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

LPC-25-12069 -- 1 West Kingsbridge Road - Kingsbridge Armory (Eighth Regiment Armory) - Individual Landmark, the Bronx

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

The Victorian Society New York was happy to see this application to stabilize, restore and utilize the spectacular Kingsbridge Armory. The proposed changes will enhance the overall character of the building and halt further deterioration.

The proposed demolition of modern accretions, including the National Guard buildings, a secondary exit stair, and the corrugated plastic infill at the gable-ends of the drill hall, is both sensible and appropriate. The small amount of historic material which the applicant would remove seems acceptable in the context of this enormous structure, and in response to the new functions being proposed.

The new materials, including the glazed infill, louvers, doors, skylights, solar panels and roof railings are simply detailed and will not call undue attention to themselves. We were particularly pleased with the banners used as signage which seem very fitting for this Medieval-style structure.

But the presentation is lacking in actual material and finish samples, in manufacturers catalog cuts, and in detail drawings. As an example, we couldn't find dimensioned details or a finish sample for the new storefront infill. It appears to be standard square aluminum tubing set directly on the walking surface without a stone curb. This sort of storefront detailing is too lightweight for a building this massive, and aluminum framing installed without a curb will rot when winter salts are applied. A more appropriate, weightier storefront infill is needed. And detailed drawings and finish samples are needed for all new materials.

At the site, the ponderous, rusty steel supports proposed for the market canopy remind us of the remains of a partially demolished highway support structure. This hardly seems like an appropriate image at the entrance to a new facility in the Bronx.

The proposal seems lacking in the kind of signage which is easily changed as different uses are booked into the space. Historic entertainment venues often featured sign-boxes adjacent to the entrances. This is the time to consider how to meet this need.

While we understand that the interior is not within the Commission's purview, the structures proposed for the drill hall seem heavy and opaque. We think a lighter touch could help maintain the open, airy feeling of the drill hall.

We could only have hoped that the new apartment structures wouldn't exceed the height of the Armory roof, or at least its towers. The tendency of the city to propose towers everywhere, regardless of the context, reveals a disregard for principles of urban design. Despite the proximity to the landmark, properly scaled and well-designed apartment buildings here would be a net benefit. As it is, we limit our objections to their height only because of the importance of finally getting a viable project moving forward.

Thank you, commissioners.

Approved 9-0; continue to work with staff on details and proportions of storefronts and surrounding brickwork, signs, and other details (including market canopies?); return to public meeting for changes to new buildings, including the presence and design of the bridge and views to the Armory and the symmetry of the two new buildings.

Approximate time: 11:50; join Zoom by: 10:50

LPC-25-11563 -- 202 Adelphi Street - Fort Greene Historic District, Brooklyn

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

When we looked at this proposal, we found a lot to like. We're pleased to see the recreation of a parlor floor entrance and stoop on a once charming house that's been stripped of its details. The replacement of aluminum one-over-one sash with wood two-over-two sash, over brownstone sills, is equally welcome. The bay window proposed for the Willoughby Street façade will restore a missing feature typical of houses of this era. The rear addition is detailed to suggest a tea porch, also historically typical. The design of the iron stoop railings and areaway fence is in keeping with the overall character of the neighborhood. And we feel the applicant has made a reasonable proposal to incorporate the one story addition made to this house before designation into the overall design.

However, we do not support all the changes the applicant is asking for. The proposal to eliminate the cast-iron window lintels from the front façade is destructive. These lintels have been in place for 165 years. The originals should be retained as a remnant and reminder of the original house.

We also believe the design misses some opportunities to better integrate this house into the neighborhood, which consists largely of pre-Civil War Italianate style houses. These include the decision not to remove the infill below the parlor floor windowsills on the front façade. Tall parlor floor windows are an elegant detail seen in the tax photo of this house. They're also seen at their neighbor at 204 Adelphi, and at 2 of the 3 houses shown on Board 1 as reference images. The remaining arched cast-iron lintels should be used as a guide for other lintels, especially at the third floor of the front façade.

The original builder's decision to extend the cornice along the Willoughby Street side façade was excellent. The current proposal, with minimal coping stones atop the parapet, leaves this façade looking under-designed. The cornice should be extended across this developed side façade, and its detailing should better reflect the Italianate style of the original building and the district.

Finally, we question the decision to use zinc cladding on the new bay window and rear yard addition. Wood or cement beadboard cladding would be more in keeping with the character of the district.

Approved 8-0, but retain cast-iron lintels at second floor and explore with staff returning the cornice on the side façade.

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

LPC-25-12480 -- 945 Madison Avenue - (Former) Whitney Museum of American Art - Individual and Interior Landmark - Upper East Side Historic District, Manhattan

Good afternoon commissioners, _____ for the Victorian Society New York. We testified earlier this year on other work proposed for this building, which is important despite not being Victorian.

We think the proposal for the below-grade sculpture garden is appropriate for the most part. Sculptures on pedestals were part of the original design, so including them here will restore this missing feature. The tables and chairs seem ephemeral, and we think they won't interfere with the appreciation of the space. We're less certain about the trees in planters—both their viability in this relatively dark space and their effect on the experience of the space. They may overly soften a space meant to be very hard and angular. This should be a garden of sculpture, concrete, and glass, not plants. Original planting in this space was very limited.

We also believe that the planters along the western wall of the garden were expanded or added to in recent years, with the plants already growing above the wall and obscuring the view to the building. These planters aren't clearly shown in any of the presentation materials, nor is it clear whether they are to be retained along with the additional tree planters shown.

The changes to the south entrance, including the bronze stair treads and lighted sign above the door are reasonable and will have a minimal impact. The planters proposed here are less of a concern than those proposed for the sculpture garden. The one problem is the lighted sign on the south wall, specifically the conduit that feeds it. Visible conduit is almost always problematic; here, running a vertical conduit on this flat concrete wall with its horizontal board form pattern would be completely inappropriate. There are at least four ways to solve this. One is to have an unlighted sign. Another is to use solar technology built into the sign. This could likely provide light for a few hours after dark. The third is to use a spotlight from one of the planters, which are already going to be fitted with up lights fed from below. And the fourth would be to install a freestanding sign on a pedestal, in bronze matching the other metal hardware on the building and electrically fed from below.

Approved 8-0; applicant can if desired work with staff on alternatives to the electrical conduit on the south wall.