

Victorian Society Testimony for September 16, 2025: 69 Atlantic Avenue (LPC-26-00022); 341 Waverly Avenue (LPC-25-12756); 634 Avenue of the Americas (LPC-26-01659); 390 Fifth Avenue - Gorham Building (LPC-26-00194)

Approximate time: 10:15; join Zoom by: 9:30

LPC-26-00022 -- 69 Atlantic Avenue - 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 is pleased to support this application for the installation of a new neon sign at 69 Atlantic Avenue. It's well scaled for this small storefront. It's on a busy commercial street where there are existing neon signs as well as ample evidence of the historic use of this type of signage. The installation will not damage or conceal any significant historic materials. And we believe it's extremely important to support use of this historic sign technology.

Finally, we must note that this is the third application we've seen recently for the installation of real neon signs at small storefronts. These include a pizza restaurant at 2878 Broadway in Morningside Heights early this year and a café at 126 7th Avenue in Greenwich Village, last June. We find it ironic that small businesses can afford to support the use of this historic material while major institutions, such as the Apollo Theatre and Rockefeller Center, have claimed that maintaining important historic neon signs is overly burdensome. We wish the Commission would be more questioning of statements by major property owners and institutions and their preservation consultants when they make unsubstantiated claims about cost, practicality, safety, and so on about historic materials and technologies such as neon.

Approved 8-0.

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

LPC-25-12756 -- 341 Waverly Avenue - Clinton Hill Historic District, Brooklyn

Good morning commissioners, _____ for the Victorian Society New York. The Victorian Society finds this application largely inappropriate for several reasons.

The combined scale of the proposed rooftop and rear yard additions are too much for this diminutive house. The additions will be quite visible, especially at the rooftop, where the historic roof pitch at the side wall will be severely altered. The assertively modern detailing of the dormer windows and large, glassy rear façade will result in a stylistically incoherent design. Finally, missing historic features such as the front and rear cornices and stylistically correct windows are not being restored. Such restorations might help mitigate the other changes.

This proposal needs to be considerably scaled back and redesigned in order to be appropriate.

Approved with modifications 8-0; work with staff to narrow rear dormer windows, refine details of addition and rear cornice, and consider changing sidewall addition material to differentiate it from historic brick gable sidewall.

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

LPC-26-01659 -- 634 Avenue of the Americas - Ladies' Mile Historic District, Manhattan

Good afternoon commissioners, _____ for the Victorian Society New York. This is a largely appropriate proposal that could be made even better with a few small changes. The historic storefronts had significant transom windows separated from the main show windows by a strong transom bar. This served to help provide scale to the extremely tall ground floor. Reinstating a bold transom would go a long way towards restoring the historic character of the storefronts.

We don't have a clear historic image of the south elevation, but the proposed alterations are thoughtfully done. These changes include modifying the piers with new limestone and installing a marquee that's well proportioned and unobtrusive. The modest size of the sign is welcome.

The proposal for replacing the historic triple, pivoting windows at the second floor and the large, arched window on the 19th Street façade includes replicating the original, existing wood windows in configuration, detail, and wood material. This is a better approach than we often see. And yet, it's a shame to lose the pivoting operation of the historic windows. It seems that everyone wants single-light pivoting windows unless they already have them. We think also that a comprehensive restoration of the existing, historic windows would probably outlast new windows.

Finally, we believe the rooftop addition, while visible, will be inconsequential and therefore can be found appropriate.

Approved 8-0, with applicant to consider a heavier transom bar design.

lunch

Approximate time: 1:15; join Zoom by: 12:15

LPC-26-00194 -- 390 Fifth Avenue - Gorham Building - Individual Landmark, Manhattan

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

The Gorham Building was designated as an Individual Landmark on December 15, 1998. The Designation Report states that this major building, by what was then possibly the nation's leading architectural firm, was lavishly praised at the time. "One writer stated that its design 'raised the standard of excellence in commercial architecture . . . to a height previously unknown,' and declared it 'to be one of the most artistic buildings in the city.' Other critics thought it was 'the best piece of work that Mr. White ever did' and 'perhaps the most beautiful store building in America.'"

But when we looked at the designation photos, it's clear that there has been almost no significant façade restoration at this building in the 27 years since its designation. Among the 26 LPC permits the owners have received since 2016, there was only one for work on the façade – it was a permit to re-attach the existing metal cornice and repair select areas of the cornice and roof, issued on July 30, 2014.

Commissioners, the problems of the Gorham Building are not being addressed. It's time to use every tool the Commission has to encourage the owners to develop and implement a plan for façade restoration. The Commission has no obligation to approve work such as the louver being proposed today, which only perpetuates and increases the degradation of this façade. Approving work such as this disincentivizes the owner to restore the building. The Commission should deny applications for work such as you see before you today.

Thank you, commissioners.

Approved 8-0.