

Victorian Society Testimony for September 30, 2025: 59-39 70th Avenue (LPC-26-01231); Grand Army Plaza Scenic Landmark (LPC-26-02253); 27-29 Great Jones Street (LPC-25-09484); 831-837 Madison Avenue (LPC-26-01649); 132 West 130th Street (LPC-25-12461)

Approximate time: 9:45; join Zoom by: 9:30

LPC-26-01231 -- 59-39 70th Avenue - Central Ridgewood 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 Victorian Society strongly recommends denial of all of the work done without permits. Each of the changes has destroyed historic material or introduced modern replacements which diminish the unity of this house, this block and this historic district. They are also extremely visible because the house is so close to the sidewalk. This is the kind of work designation is supposed to prevent.

The Rules call for window replacements to match the original one-over-one wood windows in terms of “configuration, operation, materials, details and finish.” The tilt-and-turn windows installed without permits do not conform to even one of these requirements. The applicant’s proposal to attach a bar suggesting a meeting rail would actually make this worse. When the windows are tilted open, the meeting rail will move away from the frame in a manner never seen on any double-hung window in history. The fact that the building still has its one-over-one double-hung windows on the second floor makes this change especially disturbing.

On Board 24 the applicant supplied a photo of one house with similar windows, but since they didn’t provide the address there’s no way to know if the house is in the district or if the windows are legal. The window replacement must be denied.

The installation of the HVAC units has concealed historic masonry and required drilling multiple holes in the brick. The proposed wood fence, too tight against the historic iron, is an inappropriate band-aid. These HVAC units and the fence must also be denied.

Finally, the vinyl siding is not a suitable replacement on a rear extension on a historic building which is so visible and close to the street. It doesn’t have the appearance, texture or detailing of any materials available when 39-59 was built. This must also be denied.

No action; all work inappropriate except change to number of windows at rear ext.

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

LPC-26-02253 -- 1 Grand Army Plaza - Grand Army Plaza - Scenic Landmark, Manhattan

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

This lengthy presentation seems to be about only the installation of four tall floodlight poles in the scenic landmark. Nighttime lighting of monuments can add to their appreciation and enjoyment by the public. But when the required hardware is revealed by the light of day to be ugly and obtrusive, it is not appropriate. These poles will intrude into the viewsheds of the Sherman Monument, Pulitzer Fountain, and the landmark buildings surrounding the Plaza. No matter the viewer's location, the poles will be a looming presence, spoiling views and diminishing the grandeur of the monuments and buildings. The precedent images provided only serve to confirm that this method of lighting is not worth the daytime effects of the hardware.

There are other methods for providing nighttime monument lighting. These include in-ground lights and lights in the fountain basins, which the applicant's photos show has been used to great effect. Modern, small LED fixtures unobtrusively mounted to existing ornamental poles or other features are another possibility. If the applicant does not find any less intrusive methods viable, then our recommendation is that no special monument lighting be provided. The damage done to the landscape during the day isn't worth the nighttime effects.

The Commission has the right—and we would say the obligation—to require the applicant to consider and present more appropriate alternatives for review. We urge the Commission not to act on this application until that is done.

Favorable report 8-0, but consider relocating the control box to a lower place on the poles and relocating the poles to the perimeter of the plaza and study color of the poles.

Approximate time: 11:45; join Zoom by: 10:45

LPC-25-09484 -- 27-29 Great Jones St. – NoHo Historic District Extension, Manhattan.

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

The Victorian Society objects to the proposed changes to the sidewalk in front of 27-29 Great Jones Street. We recommend that the necessary repairs be made to the structural supports without removing the existing granite flags. If the granite must be removed in order to do the structural and waterproofing work, it should be returned after the work is done. Granite sidewalks are part of the historic character of Lower Manhattan and should be preserved.

We note that the applicant hasn't even suggested tinting and scoring the proposed new concrete sidewalk to match the color and configuration of historic stone sidewalks. This basic treatment is standard in these districts when non-historic concrete sidewalks are replaced. We're concerned that the applicant hopes that such treatment would be considered an acceptable compromise by the Commission. It is not.

Stone sidewalks have been considered character-defining, protected features of downtown historic districts since the designation of SoHo in 1973. It is essential to preserve the historic character of this area by maintaining historic sidewalk materials.

Denied 8-0.

lunch

Approximate time: 12:45; join Zoom by: 12:00

LPC-26-01649 -- 831-837 Madison Avenue - Upper East Side Historic District, Manhattan

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

The Victorian Society recommends denial of this proposal for many reasons. We begin with the applicant's premise that it is appropriate to construct a 200 foot tall building mid-block on Madison Avenue. In support of this they've provided a Bromley Map locating all the buildings 10 stories or more on Madison between 61st and 77th Street. But the map they're showing is from 1950, 31 years before this district was designated. They've also provided photos of three modern buildings constructed on the Avenue since designation. Two of them are only 4 stories tall. We do not believe that the third, a 14 story corner building at 760 Madison, sets a strong precedent for the construction of a 200 foot tall building in the middle of this block.

The massing models also show taller buildings along Fifth and Park Avenues. We do not believe these set a precedent for new buildings on Madison. Both Fifth and Park are very wide avenues where 15 story pre-war apartment buildings are the predominant building types, and rowhouses have essentially disappeared. Five story rowhouses are still a significant part of the streetscape on Madison. New 200 foot tall towers are not.

The minimalist detailing proposed at 831 is inappropriate. The historic rowhouses which flank 831 all have the visual richness which is a dominant characteristic of the historic buildings which line Madison Avenue. 831 doesn't reflect this in any way. It is two materials, stone and glass, assembled in large simple planes. It could be in any urban area but should not be at this mid-block location on Madison. We think the existing 1956 building at number 831, despite its obsolete label of "no style," is more appropriate to the historic district in scale, details, and materials than the proposed replacement.

Finally, we object to the creation of two-story interior spaces at the storefronts at the historic buildings, 833, 835 and 837 Madison, which would be joined to the new tower. Two-story storefronts are not typical here. The change will be visible from the street. It will diminish the domestic character of these rowhouses. We also object to the proposed removal of historic, protected components of the existing storefronts.

We strongly recommend denial of all aspects of this proposal.

No action; revise design for tower and rowhouses, including preserving some of the volume of the rowhouses, differentiating the storefronts, lowering the three-story addition; making the tower more contextual.

Approximate time: 2:45; join Zoom by: 1:45

**LPC-25-12461 -- 132 West 130th Street - Central Harlem – West 130-132nd Street
Historic District, Manhattan**

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

The Victorian Society enthusiastically supports this proposed new building. It would replace a historic building that stood at the time of designation and was demolished while under the jurisdiction of the Landmarks Commission. LPC failed to prevent the historic building's demolition or to achieve the retention of a nearly intact historic façade. The Commission has approved time and again proposals that retain historic facades even when the structure behind them is demolished. The Commission should take the position that when the Department of Buildings deems a structure unsafe the façade should be shored and retained.

The proposed new building matches the lost historic building quite closely in design and detail. The rear elevation is roughly in line with the neighbors, and the rear façade is typical of historic rear facades that have had lower floors altered. Of course, real brownstone is no longer available for the front façade, but many historic brownstones have largely been resurfaced with stucco. The proposed replication of the cornice in wood and the recreation of the ornamental balcony railing and stoop gate will be important to maintain the consistency of this row of houses.

It will be necessary to closely monitor the quality of the stucco work, cast stone trim, and other features. If badly done, these features can make the building look like a poor imitation of the original, especially after a bit of weathering.

Laid over to another hearing.