

Victorian Society Testimony for June 23, 2026: 145 Grand Street (LPC-26-08387); 277 Canal Street aka 277-289 Canal Street and 418-422 Broadway (LPC-26-01951); 1181 Broadway (LPC-26-10002); 313 West 77th Street (LPC-26-06258); Central Park - Kerbs Memorial Boathouse (LPC-26-10943); 98 Montague Street (LPC-26-11219); 37-25 78th Street (LPC-25-12172)

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

LPC-26-08387 -- 145 Grand Street - SoHo-Cast Iron Historic District, Manhattan

Good morning commissioners, _____ for the Victorian Society New York. There are two legitimate points of view on the appropriateness of removal of this fire escape. We present them both, as we are of mixed opinion.

The argument for removing the fire escape is that it's a later addition to a much earlier building. It obscures the design and details of the façade. It doesn't incorporate decorative ironwork. It may, over time, stress the masonry façade, though no indication of that is provided in the presentation. Removing the fire escape would allow the building to read as the single family rowhouse it was originally.

On the other side, the fire escape represents a historic change in the neighborhood from residential to commercial. It reflects the city's efforts to improve safety following tragic fires like that at the Triangle factory. As a result, fire escapes are characteristic features of the SoHo Historic District. In this case, the building is part of a row of four-story houses and tenements, all of which have added fire escapes, and all of which are visible straight-on as a group from the park across the street. So, while these aren't the iconic SoHo factory and loft buildings with fire escapes, they make an important statement about the history of the district and are seen as a group from a point of view not typically available. This argues against removal of this and adjacent fire escapes.

Approved 9-0.

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

LPC-26-01951 -- 277 Canal Street aka 277-289 Canal Street, and 418-422 Broadway - SoHo-Cast Iron Historic District Extension, Manhattan

Good morning commissioners, _____ for the Victorian Society New York. Applicant's assertion that a building lacks historical significance because it does not match the style of a specific neighborhood is both incorrect and contrary to good preservation practice. Preservation means just that: preserving a building as it existed at the time of its construction. While this building on Canal Street has certainly gone through renovations in the past century since its construction, none has so irrevocably altered its form as the applicant's proposal seeks to.

Historic districts are designated to protect their architectural character. Changing this into a 21-story building not only significantly alters this building, it also changes the neighborhood and its historic scale. A building is indeed part of the context of the neighborhood where it resides, and using proposer's logic, their extension would completely change the neighborhood itself. The previous proposal reached what was considered the limit of height that could be considered contextual; this one far exceeds that.

Nor do we find examples of other buildings in Soho with large additions at all convincing or relevant. These additions were early and not subject to historic preservation review. Nonetheless, they resulted in buildings that were unified and often beautiful. Unlike the earlier approval for this site, the proposed design is less cohesive besides being grossly over-scaled for the district. Ultimately, we testify against the extreme vertical extension of this building.

It's worth noting that the zoning change which allows this proposal is completely irrelevant to the issue of architectural and historic appropriateness. Preservation advocates opposed the rezoning for the very reason we see today--that it would put added pressure on this Commission to approve outsized buildings. Just because it's allowed doesn't make it appropriate. The proposed building doesn't pass the most basic test of appropriateness, which is scale.

No action. Return with further rationale for the height and/or a lower height.

lunch

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

LPC-26-10002 -- 1181 Broadway - Madison Square North Historic District, Manhattan

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

The Victorian Society supports some of the proposed changes at 1181 Broadway. Removal of modern infill, signage and security gates at the ground floor will allow for installation of new infill, closely based on historic photographs. Although we have often spoken against the installation of modern entrance canopies over entrances to the upper floors, we find this modestly scaled canopy to be acceptable. Installation will not require the removal of any historic material, it will have a dark subdued finish, and the address will be on a vertical panel adjacent to the entrance, not set on the top edge of the canopy as we've seen several times recently. Furthermore, the large storefront windows wrapping the Broadway and West 28th Street façades are so dominant that the upper floor entrance would almost disappear without this canopy.

We also find appropriate the small rear yard addition, in the south-west corner of the plot. It will be visible from the street, as shown on image 38, but this rear corner is so minimally detailed the addition will have no effect on the overall appearance of the building.

But we do not support all of the proposed rooftop alterations. Drawing 24 shows that the existing rooftop structures are a jumble of original material and modern accretions. The original material includes the building's unique corner pavilion and a one-story extension facing 28th Street. The extension combines stone cladding and a skylight and is visible from the street. The modern accretions include three sheds clad in a "three-little-pigs" selection of materials - brick, concrete block and aluminum siding. There's also a visible water tank.

The applicant is proposing to demolish the original one-story extension, the three modern accretions, and the water tank. They would then construct a three-story addition, visible from the street next to the unique corner pavilion.

We support the removal of the modern accretions. However, we recommend denial of the other rooftop alterations. Demolition of the original one-story extension would destroy important historic material. Construction of the proposed three-story addition, next to the building's unique corner pavilion, would visually subsume and diminish this extravagantly detailed temple-like tower. Finally, we recommend retaining the water tank, a typical historic feature of the New York skyline.

No action; revise rooftop addition to maintain primacy of the corner temple.

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

LPC-26-06258 -- 313 West 77th Street - West End - Collegiate Historic District, Manhattan

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

Legalization of changes to the dormer should be denied. The original cladding was either well-detailed wood or formed sheet metal. The new cladding appears to be cheap, bent aluminum sheeting, lacking the depth and details of the original.

Adding a short section of brownstone finished wall to the front areaway is an appropriate change that works well with the areaway configurations of the row. It is a feature typically found at grade level areaways to help separate them from the public sidewalk. However, the proposed ironwork is not appropriate. There is no historic areaway ironwork on this row. The ironwork on the adjacent building is clearly recent and inappropriate. In addition, the proposed ironwork relates awkwardly to the stone stoop wall. The volute at the lower end of this wall is fully carved, including on the top surface, and the ironwork would sit directly above it.

We also oppose the change to the window opening at the rear wall. The top floor is the only one remaining that recalls the historic rear façade. As is typically required, this floor should retain its historic window openings.

Finally, we wonder what became of the historic ironwork at the front door. According to the 2017 drawings, it was supposed to be restored and retained.

Approved in part (areaway work, rear window modification); denied in part (dormer trim alteration) 10-0.

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

LPC-26-10943 -- Central Park - Kerbs Memorial Boathouse - Scenic Landmark, Manhattan

Good afternoon, _____ for the Victorian Society New York. Our allotted 3 minutes isn't enough to describe the place of Aymar Embury II and Gilmore Clarke's mid-century work in Central Park. These designers moved from the formal Classicism of early 20th century interventions to a more whimsical approach that they perhaps thought harkened back to the park's original picturesque structures. Landscape and site furnishings were closely related to the buildings and had an identifiable character, as you saw recently at Stuyvesant Square Park, where the Commission required that this character be respected. Unspoiled examples of these pavilions and landscapes in Central Park have become scarce. Changes to relatively intact examples such as the one at the Model Boat Pond and Kerbs Boathouse must be carefully considered.

Restoration plans for the existing building are well detailed and appropriate. The proposed building enlargement is appropriate in scale and form, given its position behind the existing building, set into a slope, and the historic plan for a large conservatory on this site. However, details of the proposed addition need to be rethought. The addition should be subordinate to the Kerbs Boathouse and more evocative of its details. The most serious problem is the very contemporary ribbon windows at the east elevation. This type of window is alien to this building, other buildings of the period, and earlier historic buildings in the park. The form and details of existing window openings should guide the design.

The Roman style face brick is also a problem. The brickwork should be more subdued and similar to that of the existing building.

We think it's appropriate to introduce whimsy into the new ironwork gates, but the design proposed, based on boat hulls, is too obscure and will not be easily recognizable.

At the time of our review, we couldn't determine whether the adjacent landscape, fully detailed in the presentation materials, is being considered at this hearing. The agenda description includes only the building. Separating the reviews of buildings and their adjacent landscapes is about as wrong an approach to regulation as it is possible to take in an Olmsted park, so we will also comment on landscape.

As a scarce Clarke landscape in Central Park, designed in concert with the Kerbs Boathouse, changes need to be carefully considered. The types and placement of the Clarke-era World's Fair and wood and concrete benches should be retained, as the Commission mandated in Stuyvesant Square. Changing features like sandboxes and

fountains into planters is never a good approach. Here, the proposal to alter and rebuild the sandbox into a raised planter results in an arbitrary feature in the middle of the terrace. This type of planter has no historic precedent. A better solution is needed.

Finally, the conversion of portions of a historic walk from the 76th Street entrance into a ramp complete with handrails and landings will compromise the landscape's historic character. The continuing conversion of naturalistic walks in the Olmsted tradition into accessible ramps is having a park-wide detrimental visual effect. The ADA does not require that character-defining features be sacrificed for accessibility.

Approved 9-0. Applicant may explore with staff the visibility of mechanical equipment, finish on the new metal panels, and the types and arrangement of benches.

Approximate time: 4:15; join Zoom by: 3:15

LPC-26-11219 -- 98 Montague Street - Brooklyn Heights Historic District, Brooklyn

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

The VSNY supports some of the changes proposed for 98 Montague Street.

This is a massive building. It's got a bigger footprint and is taller than most buildings in Brooklyn Heights. As it's close to the Promenade it can be seen from many places, including Lower Manhattan. Because of this, alterations to the upper parts of the facades and rooftop alterations will be highly visible.

At the ground floor we support removal of existing masonry infill in a blind opening, and existing louvers, and the installation of a new multi-light arch-headed window. At the roof, we support removal of the existing two-story addition, a bunch of haphazard accretions which bear no relationship to the original building.

However, we do not support the proposed alterations to the east-facing rear façade, and find the proposed rooftop addition bears no relationship to the original elevations with the exception of the color of proposed Porcelanosa cladding panels.

The secondary east-facing elevation reflects the Hotel Bossert's separate wings, a feature of its original plan. This includes the extant narrow open courtyard which provided natural ventilation to the building's many small rooms. The design of this façade should be modified to better reflect this original configuration of wings separated by the "slot."

The window configurations on both this visible rear and the visible elevations of the penthouse now bear little relationship to the original building. These should be modified to create a stronger correlation between the historic facades, the altered rear façade and the addition.

Thank you, commissioners.

No action. Change railing materials; rethink rooftop addition to reduce visibility or differentiate it from the historic building/cornice.

Approximate time: 6:15; join Zoom by: 5:15

LPC-25-12172 -- 37-25 78th Street - Jackson Heights Historic District, Queens

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

The VSNY recommends denial of this application to legalize replacement windows. We note that these windows have been in place for more than 27 years. It's not unusual for aluminum windows to fail when they are this old. Legalization means that this house will never have appropriate windows. Denial, at this time, means that when these windows fail, this owner, or any future owner, knows that they are required to file an application for new windows with the Commission. Eventually, appropriate windows will be installed.

We recommend approval of some parts of the proposal to legalize the areaway wall and fence. Because the land on this street slopes down towards the sidewalk, and because the Commission has approved the installation of a number of similar brick retaining walls, we support legalization of this brick wall.

However, we believe that the iron fence and gate are too tall in a neighborhood created under the influence of the "Garden City" movement, which included what the designation report states were two new building types, "garden apartments" and "garden homes." The existing gate and fence cut the property off from the street in a way which is not in keeping with the Garden City movement. The applicant should be required to work with staff to reduce the height of the existing fence and gate.

Finally, the applicant has provided many photos of other iron fences in this neighborhood. Happily, their photos show that almost none of the neighbors' houses have panels of metal mesh attached. These mesh panels diminish the open character of this street in a way which is totally unacceptable. We recommend removal of this obtrusive metal mesh in the strongest possible way.

***Areaway wall and fence: approved with condition that fence be removed from wall;
windows: denied, 9-1 (Mahan)***