

Victorian Society Testimony for August 4, 2026: 48 Manor Court - The Crimson Beech - Individual Landmark (LPC-25-12719); 17 Harrison Street – Tribeca West Historic District (LPC-26-09347); 80 Horatio Street - Greenwich Village Historic District (LPC-26-11567); 257 Canal Street - SoHo-Cast Iron Historic District Extension (LPC-26-12659); 112-114 2nd Avenue and 50 East 7th Street - East Village/Lower East Side Historic District (LPC-27-00094); 673 Madison Avenue - Upper East Side Historic District (LPC-26-10605)

Approximate time: 11:30; join Zoom by: 10:30

LPC-25-12719 -- 48 Manor Court - The Crimson Beech - Individual Landmark, Staten Island

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

The VSNY supports several elements of this application. The first is the removal of the existing asphalt driveway and the installation of new pavers. However, the applicant states that red bricks were original to the drive. We recommend that the applicant be required to use red brick in this location.

We also support the construction of the portion of the extension which will be set into the slope. It appears it will be minimally visible from the street, and the cladding and detailing of the section facing the pool will match the existing lower-level facade.

However, we find the pavilion with a triangular roof which culminates the extension at the western side of the property, and the use of piers topped by decorative urns at the roof line of the extension, based on a detail from the 1905 Darwin Martin house, are not in keeping with the simple Usonian character of Wright's original design. And both will be seen in conjunction with the primary facade.

The designation report for Crimson Beech states that it's an example of the "Prefab No. 1, designed by Wright in 1956, to address the problem of moderate-cost houses. "They were to be built using prefabricated components instead of more expensive site-built construction." It goes on to say, "The Prefab No. 1 design employed Wright's characteristic Usonian vocabulary with its low, horizontal emphasis."

We're aware that the Crimson Beech has had some alterations. The designation report notes that the swimming pool, the adjacent brick walls and steps were added in 1970. They were designed by Morton H. Delson who was selected by Wright to be his east-coast representative. These changes respected the original character of the design. The proposals here today do not.

The most notable feature of the proposed western extension, the pavilion's dramatic triangular roof, will be visible from the street. This is shown on image 16. The roof of the pavilion has nothing in common with Crimson Beech, or the low horizontal character and simple detailing typical of Wright's Usonian houses. We recommend that the applicant study the many Usonian Houses to develop a more sympathetic design.

Finally, we recommend denial of the use of urns set atop the piers, also visible from the street. This detail, from one of Wright's early custom designed mansions, is alien to the character of a Usonian House and should be deleted.

Thank you, commissioners.

No action; review recommendations about roof of addition, paver color, etc.

lunch

Approximate time: 1:00; join Zoom by: 12:00

LPC-26-09347 -- 17 Harrison Street – Tribeca West Historic District, Manhattan

Good afternoon, _____ for the Victorian Society New York.

The varied heights of the buildings occupying the southern side of Harrison Street between Hudson and Greenwich Streets is a direct reflection of their different purposes and periods of construction. The Tribeca West designation report informs us that the two mid-nineteenth century, Greek Revival buildings at 19-21 Harrison Street, only three stories tall, were originally built as dwellings and later combined and given a new commercial base in 1888. Whereas the subject property at 17 Harrison Street and its neighbor 15 Harrison Street, at a height of four stories, were the first store and loft buildings built on the block for commercial purposes in 1869. The lower height of the older buildings west of 17 Harrison Street results in greater visibility of the rooftop and western building elevation when viewed from the street. This is clearly illustrated in the mock-up and rendering images on pages 21-23 of the applicant presentation.

To address the visual prominence of the proposed rooftop addition from street level, we suggest the following. First, the rooftop terrace railing should be set back from the north and west facades to minimize visibility of this element. Second, the material choice of zinc panels as rendered in a light grey starkly contrasts with the adjacent brick masonry facades of the surrounding buildings. A darker material choice for the rooftop addition would better harmonize with the materials of the neighboring buildings, visually receding into the background and calling less attention to the new rooftop structure.

Approved 9-0 with modifications: existing side parapet to be maintained, work with staff to finalize finish color of the addition.

Approximate time: 1:45; join Zoom by: 12:45

LPC-26-11567 -- 80 Horatio Street - Greenwich Village Historic District, Manhattan

Good afternoon commissioners, _____ for the Victorian Society New York. We testify in opposition to the proposed alterations to 80 Horatio Street. Built in 1853 as a mixed-use building, its ground floor has carried a storefront and commercial entrance for most of its history, and that storefront, with its cast-iron pilasters and brownstone surround, is what still communicates the building's mixed-use origins today. The application proposes to demolish this storefront entirely and replace it with residential-style brick infill and double-hung windows, making the façade read as purely residential for the first time in its history. The applicant's own materials show that similar storefronts once defined this streetscape at nearby addresses on Washington and West 4th Streets, many of which are already gone. Losing this one would compound that erosion. We urge the Commission to deny this portion of the proposal and require that the storefront, its pilasters, and its brownstone surround be retained or replaced in kind.

We also point out that all the floors in the building are being removed and reconstructed, as is the roof and much of the rear wall. At the front, by the time the ground floor is rebuilt, the small windows and fire escape are removed and the brickwork infilled, and the brownstone trim reconstructed, this will essentially be a new building. It should have been calendared as a demolition and reconstruction.

We also find that the new façade design is overly simple for a single house of this size. It is like the simplest of two- or three-story houses but inappropriately stretched both in width and in height. The typical differentiation of the ground and parlor floors is missing as is an emphasis on the main entrance. The entire design needs to be rethought.

No action; most work appropriate but front façade requires modifications, possibly recall of commercial use at ground floor.

Approximate time: 2:15; join Zoom by: 1:15

LPC-26-12659 -- 257 Canal Street - SoHo-Cast Iron Historic District Extension, Manhattan

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

The Commission's approval of the tower down the block at 277 Canal Street took only a week to become a precedent for this proposed tower at 257 Canal Street. That may be a record, and not one to be pleased about. The Commission has used various justifications for approving over-scaled and overly tall buildings in historic districts: the building is at the edge of the district, there are other tall buildings in the district—usually pre-dating designation--and there are tall buildings outside the district that can be seen from within the district. We do not believe that any of these are valid reasons to find overly bulky or tall buildings appropriate within a historic district. In fact, we think the Commission should be doing its utmost to retain and reinforce the distinctive scale and character of each district. Integrating historic districts into the physical character of the city outside the district is the opposite of what landmarks preservation should be about.

This application also illustrates the problem with the way the Commission draws district boundaries. By any logic, the west side of Lafayette Street between Canal and Grand should have been included in this district extension to prevent the kind of structure now under construction behind the site of the current proposal. That new building on Lafayette impinges on and degrades the historic district. The Commission should recognize and embrace its role as a land use agency in guiding the city's development in a way that expands the positive effects of historic districts, rather than minimizing them.

Regarding the current proposal, the design tries to be contextual through its masonry material, base-shaft-and-crown configuration, and side wall design. However, the "crown" is weak and unresolved. It appears to be less Mansard than extra floors in a defensive crouch, trying to hide themselves so the building doesn't look as tall as it is. And of course, height is the primary issue.

Finally, we are puzzled about the selection of this site for housing for what appears to be a rather fragile population. Canal Street is one of the most chaotic, noisy, polluted, and generally unpleasant streets in the city. It doesn't seem to us a good place for this kind of housing.

No action. Consider lowering floor heights, changing brick color, adding or subtracting details, strengthening base, making "Mansard" more differentiated.

Approximate time: 3:30; join Zoom by: 2:30

LPC-27-00094 -- 112-114 2nd Avenue and 50 East 7th Street - East Village/Lower East Side Historic District, Manhattan

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

Even though this proposal is described as “interim,” without any further information we have to assume it will be in place for a long time, perhaps decades. We therefore find it unfortunate that the fragments of stone left from this tragic event are to be hidden away in an underground vault. We note that there is no indication in the presentation materials of what is to become of the considerable amount of historic ornamental fencing left on the site.

We think a more imaginative solution would incorporate these elements into the vast amount of space available on the lot and the adjacent blank walls. This would help keep memories of the lost church alive and provide inspiration for the future of the site. Without these fragments, the site as designed could be anywhere. There is no reference to the church’s history or design or to the site being within a historic district.

Approved 8-0, with applicant to work with staff on possibly enlarging the hatch so stones can be retrieved.

Approximate time: 4:30; join Zoom by: 3:30

LPC-26-10605 -- 673 Madison Avenue - Upper East Side Historic District, Manhattan

Good afternoon commissioners, _____ for the Victorian Society New York. When it reviews proposals for architectural lighting, the Commission regularly notes that it does not regulate light levels, effects, or quality. Instead, it regulates only the presence and visibility of lighting hardware and conduit and the effect the installation would have on the physical fabric of the building or structure. It's explained that it would be too hard to regulate lighting quality. The result of this regulatory policy, taken to the extreme, is evident in this proposal. Combining the lighting proposed today with the lighting approved by the staff, the effect on this ordinary brownstone rowhouse would be overwhelming. We understand the owner's desire to show off the restoration work that is underway, but the proposed lighting scheme is not appropriate for this type of building and would be a distraction both to it and to the surrounding historic district. Once installed, given the Commission's current policy, there would be nothing to prevent the owner from using colored, flashing, moving, or pulsating lights.

We also think it isn't a good idea to weld the fixture attachment plates to the sheet metal cornice. This work would be difficult to reverse without damaging the cornice and the act of welding galvanized metal may make it more susceptible to rusting. And we note the difficulty in accessing all of these fixtures for repairs. LED lamps are long lasting, but they do malfunction. Random outages in a scheme like this would introduce aesthetic disharmony.

Even if it were possible to find that the attachments could be made without damage and that the visibility of the fixtures is acceptable, we urge denial of this application because of the visually distracting effects of the lighting scheme. Aesthetics are under the purview of the Commission—the Landmarks Law's purpose and declaration of public policy say so. Architectural lighting can have a significant aesthetic impact on buildings and districts and must be considered in reviewing appropriateness. The lighting proposed here is excessive and will adversely affect the perception of the building and district.

Laid over.