

Victorian Society Testimony for July 28, 2026: 144 Spring Street - SoHo-Cast Iron Historic District (LPC-26-10512); 277 Canal Street, aka 277-289 Canal Street, and 418-422 Broadway - SoHo-Cast Iron Historic District Extension (LPC-26-01951); 250 2nd Avenue - Stuyvesant Square Park (LPC-26-05571); 91 Flagg Court - Expanded Landmark Site of the Ernest Flagg House, Gatehouse, and Gate - Individual Landmark (LPC-26-05642); 288 East 10th Street - St. Nicholas of Myra Orthodox Church - Individual Landmark (LPC-26-11301); 500 Fifth Avenue - 500 Fifth Avenue Building - Individual Landmark (LPC-26-09292); 134 East 36th Street – Murray Hill Historic District Extension (LPC-26-09323); 56 East 93rd Street and 1307-1309 Madison Avenue - 56 East 93rd Street (formerly William Goadby Loew House) - Individual Landmark - Expanded Carnegie Hill Historic District (LPC-26-12819)

Public Meeting Item No. 1

Approximate time: 9:30

LPC-26-10512 - 144 Spring Street - SoHo-Cast Iron Historic District, Manhattan

The Victorian Society New York still cannot support this proposal. As noted in our original testimony, we believe the parti for any new building in this district should include a strong base, bulkheads, large display windows, transoms and an articulated metal structure. The base should be masonry tall enough to raise the metal framework above snow and salt. The upper floors, which can't be used as display windows by most merchants, do not need to be full height and should have transoms.

The applicant has made several changes. The most notable and positive change is the redesign of the UHPC columns. They have been simplified, giving the building better vertical emphasis. It also appears that the base of the building is slightly taller. This may be a positive change, but we couldn't find "before and after dimensions" so we are not sure if this is the case. Finally, the height of the rooftop bulkhead has been reduced, and it appears to have smaller windows, improving its relationship with the more open lower floors.

However, there are several points which haven't been addressed. We believe that the use of a true bulkhead on the lower floor, instead of screens over the display windows, and transoms on both lower floors would help the building relate better to the streetscape. Providing a sign band without exterior illumination just guarantees that the Commission will see an application for exterior illumination as soon as the retail space is leased. This is the appropriate time to design a unified lighting scheme. And we continue to believe that basing the most prominent decorative feature of the design, the latticework, on the sort of

grill used on a small number of buildings in the District to provide ventilation to basement areas is a mistake.

Approved 8-1 (Mahan) as modified.

Public Meeting Item No. 2

Approximate time: 10:00

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

The Commissioners were divided in their request to the applicant following the public hearing. Some wanted the height of the building reduced, perhaps by lowering floor to ceiling heights. Others suggested that the problem isn't the scale and height of this building but the presentation, and that a more persuasive presentation would allow the Commission to approve it.

Lowering a building of this height by 12 feet as is now proposed is a meaningless reduction. The reason given—that the market in this neighborhood demands high ceilings—leads us to suggest that the number of floors be reduced instead. The applicant is trying to get the full floor area allowed by zoning. Zoning, however, is irrelevant to architectural appropriateness. The focus in the presentation on what zoning allows is itself an inappropriate distraction from the relevant issue of scale.

The suggestion that a more persuasive presentation could overcome the physical fact of excess height is, frankly, new to us. It appears to reflect an intense desire on the part of this Commission to approve a proposal by a well-known architect that is otherwise far out of scale, and which doesn't meet the most basic criteria for architectural appropriateness in a historic district.

The proposal is inappropriate and should be denied.

Approved 8-0; work with staff to make floor heights equal by raising the heights of the rental floors and possibly modify the arched windows at the top of the shaft.

Public Meeting Item No. 3

Approximate time: 10:45

LPC-26-05571 -- 250 2nd Avenue - Stuyvesant Square Park - Stuyvesant Square Historic District, Manhattan

At the public hearing, almost all commissioners agreed with testimony that it is critical to maintain the symmetry of the park's design, a symmetry which was part of the original design as well as the important redesign in the 1930s by Gilmore Clarke. The plan view on slide 8 provided by the applicant seems to show that the revised design includes elements that will maintain the appearance of symmetry. But this is illusory. In fact, the curbs outlining the former curved path will soon be covered by the proposed groundcover. And the pipe rail fence that surrounds this quadrant denies any hint that there was a path here. This can be seen in the perspective view on slide 10. This important aspect of the park's symmetry will be lost to the public.

The goals for this redesign are to restore the restroom and make it accessible, to deal with the ancient elm tree's effect on the pavement and to protect the tree, and to refurbish the deteriorated features, like the benches, in this section of the park. This design is far more aggressive than necessary to accomplish these goals.

The curved walk can be reconstructed with a soft surface of wood chips or stabilized stone screenings, either for its full length or only around the tree. These kinds of paths exist in many public parks in the city, including Central, Prospect, Verdi Square, and Bryant Park. In this case, it's more important to maintain the presence of the path and the symmetry of the park than to be fully consistent in terms of materials. To the suggestion that a soft-surface walk won't meet accessibility standards, that isn't necessarily true if it's well maintained, and anyway, a walk that's removed isn't accessible either. The rules don't require every walk in a park to be accessible.

We call your attention to the extensive testimony submitted by our colleague, Michael Gotkin. He suggests that a soft walking surface around the tree would not be a good idea, as the pressure and soil compaction over the tree roots could be dangerous to the tree. In that event, a further suggestion we can make is to leave this walk as it is but extend the pipe rail fence across the path at both ends, recessed by a few feet to create an alcove, with small signs explaining the closure of the path for the health of the tree. This would maintain the visual continuity and symmetry of the park, and circulation would occur on the inner loop next to the dog run, as currently proposed.

Parks has agreed to refurbish some of the historic benches. The Commission should require specific information about which benches will not be refurbished and why. It's hard to imagine these iron and wood benches being beyond repair. All of these benches should be refurbished and located in historically appropriate places.

We continue to believe there are better ways to make the comfort station accessible. The Commission should ask for specifics about why Parks thinks lowering the floor elevation is too difficult and also why a single walk on the south side of the park would be inadequate for access.

Approved 9-0, with applicant to work with staff to improve the definition of the historic path using fencing.

Approximate time: 11:15; join Zoom by: 10:15

LPC-26-05642 -- 91 Flagg Court - Expanded Landmark Site of the Ernest Flagg House, Gatehouse, and Gate - Individual Landmark, Staten Island

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 VSNY strongly recommends denial of this proposal to legalize the removal of wood shingle roofing and the installation of new asphalt shingles at this building at the Flagg Estate. The new shingles are overly smooth, and the pale gray color is too light. They do not relate well to the overall character of this building or to others on this site.

The garage building was designated as part of the Expanded Landmark Site on June 28, 1983. The applicant has provided replicas of drawings dated 1984 from the LPC files showing a proposal to convert the garage into a house. It appears that the wood shingles date from this renovation and were installed, post designation, after LPC review.

The applicant has also provided photographs of other houses on the expanded landmark site. These include original Flagg buildings and houses designed by Robert A. M. Stern which were added to the site after designation. Some of the roofs have slate, some have asphalt shingles, but all of these roofing materials have more texture and darker tones than the light gray shingles installed without permits.

The 1967 designation report for the Ernest Flagg House and the 1983 report for the Expanded Site mention roofing materials only in regard to the mansion and gatehouse. The only roofing material mentioned in the reports is slate.

The applicant has also provided excerpts from Flagg's book "Small Houses – Their Economic Design." It recommends the use of inexpensive rolled roofing on modest houses. We do not find this relevant. Mr. Flagg did not use any inexpensive materials at his very grand estate.

We can, however, support two aspects of this proposal, the replacement of the windows and the installation of ironwork. They appear to conform to the 1984 design and do not detract from the appearance of the building.

Thank you, commissioners.

Approved 9-0, with staff to explore possibility of removing the finials on the ironwork.

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

LPC-26-11301 -- 288 East 10th Street - St. Nicholas of Myra Orthodox Church - Individual Landmark, Manhattan

Good morning commissioners, _____ for the Victorian Society New York. Two issues need to be addressed: the material of the new windows and their configuration. For this individual landmark, new sash material should be wood, and the aluminum panning covering the brick molds should be removed. At the third floor, it appears that the transoms in the pointed arches have been covered with sheet metal. However, these windows did not originally have transoms, as is apparent in the tax photo taken for the neighboring building. See our written testimony for the image. It would not be appropriate to replace these sash in kind. The correct configuration is one-over-one with a pointed arch upper sash. There should be no transom, either glazed or covered over, at the third-floor windows.

This opportunity to begin to return the windows on this individual landmark to their historic condition should not be lost.



Approved 7-0.

Approximate time: 12:15; join Zoom by: 11:15

LPC-26-09292 -- 500 Fifth Avenue - 500 Fifth Avenue Building - Individual Landmark, Manhattan

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

The first order of business in reviewing this application is to clarify the vague and conflicting terms the applicant is using. Gilding, gold paint, and gold leaf are used interchangeably in the presentation. Gilding is a generic term that means giving something a gold color. Gold paint and gold leaf are two entirely different things—they are different materials, they are applied differently, they look different, and they age differently. At different points in the presentation, the existing gold on the east front of the building is referred to as gilding, gold leaf, and gold paint.

We think picking out certain façade details in gold on buildings such as this is often appropriate. We have no objection to that treatment here. However, only real gold leaf should be used. Gold paint looks like paint; it's a cheap substitute for the real thing and is not appropriate on this individual landmark. Gold paint is made of bronze or mica flakes and not gold and is cheap to apply, as anyone can brush it on. Gold leaf is made of real gold and requires a skilled technician to apply it. But there are many examples of real gold leaf used on exterior stone and metal surfaces in the city. It isn't a lost art and is the appropriate solution here.

Approved 8-0 with modifications: real gold leaf to be used on address text only, not to be applied to the eagles.

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

**LPC-26-09323 – 134 East 36th Street – Murray Hill Historic District Extension,
Manhattan**

Good afternoon, _____ for the Victorian Society New York. This Second Empire style corner rowhouse is one of a group of three erected by developers George J. Hamilton and Thomas Kilpatrick c. 1863-64. Of this group, 134 East 36th Street is the best preserved and retains the most original architectural details. We appreciate the proposed Vermont slate shingles at the mansard roof and relocation of the gutter downspout from the Lexington Avenue façade to the rear of the building.

We have concerns, however, about the proposed brownstone-look stucco finish for the Lexington Avenue façade. First, the brick cladding on the Lexington Avenue side elevation is typical for a speculative rowhouse of this period with brownstone cladding on the front façade. Most immediately, this can be seen directly across the street at the corner rowhouse at 135 East 36th Street. We believe this original brick cladding should be retained as a representative architectural characteristic of a rowhouse from this period. Second, the addition of non-original corner quoins muddies this building's surviving architectural details. Third, we have concerns about cracking of the brownstone-look stucco material where it covers the wrought-iron stabilizer plates caused by differential expansion and contraction of the two materials (refer to detail C on sheet LPC-13). Additionally, we see no reason to cover over the star-design wrought iron stabilizer plates.

Finally, upon viewing the 1940 tax photo, we feel an opportunity is being missed in not replicating the original cornice that once wrapped both the East 36th Street and Lexington Avenue elevations. This element not only unified the two facades with their different cladding materials but also was a correctly proportioned architectural feature celebrating the transition between the exterior walls and the sloping mansard roof above.

Approved 8-0 with modifications: specifications to be developed to ensure stability and longevity of the unusually thick stucco finish, quoins to be rethought with staff, and applicant encouraged to replace the missing cornice.

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

LPC-26-12819 -- 56 East 93rd Street and 1307-1309 Madison Avenue - 56 East 93rd Street (formerly William Goadby Loew House) - Individual Landmark - Expanded Carnegie Hill Historic District, Manhattan

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

The Victorian Society supports the carefully crafted testimony of the Friends of the Upper East Side Historic Districts. We agree that it's important to support institutions like the Spence School, but in turn these institutions have an obligation to uphold the highest preservation standards when they undertake work on their buildings. The project as it is proposed does not meet such standards.

Nos. 1305, 1307, and 1309 Madison Avenue were combined into a single, unified architectural composition in 1932, nearly 100 years ago. The symmetrical, Neo-Georgian facades with continuous cornice and central pediment are the keys to this composition. Altering this as proposed would destroy this composition without creating anything of architectural value in return. The existing facades should be retained.

A revised proposal that retained these facades would not solve the other problem with this proposal, which is the excessively bulky and visually overwhelming rooftop addition. This addition is problematic not only when viewed from the northwest, from where it is most visible, but also when viewed from directly across the street and from the northeast, where it obscures the curvature of the roof of the William Goadby Lowe House, which is currently seen against the sky.

A much-reduced addition and a more preservation-oriented approach to the Madison Avenue buildings are required before this proposal can be found appropriate.

No action: reduce bulk of addition, address Madison Avenue façade symmetry.