



c/o Village Alliance
8 East 8th Street
New York, NY 10003
(212) 886-3742

www.vicsocny.org

LPC-22-06302 131 Charles Street - 131 Charles Street House - Individual Landmark - Greenwich Village Historic District Extension Manhattan

In its testimony at the January 10, 2023 public hearing for this project, the Victorian Society stated:

“Commissioners, the designation report for 131 Charles describes this Individual Landmark as ‘Intimate in scale, the proportions and details ... marked by a modest simplicity.’ It notes that it is ‘a charming, late Federal brick house of excellent proportion and scale, built of sound materials in the best tradition of craftsmanship.’ And it ends by stating that 131 Charles ‘represents one of the best examples of the small New York town house.’”

This house, together with its backhouse, was designated *because* it is an exemplar of a rare, intact, modestly simple and once common type. It must not be treated as just another rowhouse in a historic district. A much more conservative approach is demanded. The “horse walk,” or passageway to the back house, is a critical feature of the entire site, central to its historic function. It is a protected feature under the Landmarks Law definitions. It must be maintained.

The usual criteria for alterations to a non-visible rear façade are not applicable to this early, individual landmark. The rear of the main house must largely retain its historic and current configuration, including the roof. And the façade of the back house must remain faithful to its current 135-year-old design, as documented in an 1889 drawing and as later experienced by the lengthy occupancy of Diane Arbus.

Our January 10 testimony continued:

“The proposal before you today will result in a building apparently designed to get as far from modesty, simplicity, intimacy and charm as possible. It is bloated. It is excessive. And it is destructive, eliminating not only original materials, proportions and details, but also the adroit architectural solution, the ‘Horse trot,’ which 19th century builders devised to provide open access to a ‘back house.’ If this proposal is approved, the Research Department might as well re-write the designation report to read ‘It is one of the best examples of the front façade of a small New York town house left in place to conceal an early 21st century building.’”

Despite the minor improvements made to the earlier proposal, the Victorian Society continues to find the design inappropriate to the designated landmark and urges its rejection.