

The Dwight School 22 West 89th Street, (Central Park West)
Statement of Council Member Gale A. Brewer (D-Manhattan), 6th district
Landmarks Preservation Commission, June 9, 2009

I am Gale A. Brewer and I represent residents of Manhattan's West Side and parts of Clinton in the City Council. I am here today to support the decision of Community Board 7 and to urge your disapproval of the Dwight School's proposed rear-yard addition and rooftop structures (bulkhead and canopy) at 22 West 89 Street.

I sat through most of the deliberations and meetings at Community Board 7, and have reviewed the architectural plans detailing the bulk of the proposed rear-yard addition, and rooftop structures, and have listened closely to neighbors of the school who articulated their opposition.

The Dwight School is currently sited at the corner of 89 Street and Central Park West, and has purchased another brownstone for its use as the student body is growing from 350 to 500.

This addition to the Dwight School would significantly infringe on the "doughnut" aspect of the backyards on the blocks behind West 89 and 88 Streets between Central Park West and Columbus Avenue. We are working on legislation in the City Council to preserve these "doughnut" backyards across the city for environmental as well as historic reasons. In this case I strongly urge LPC to disapprove the encroachment on the backyard green space between 88 and 89 Streets in order to help preserve the historic and architectural integrity of these blocks.

Architectural drawings show that the proposed addition to 18 West 89 Street would build to the lot line in the backyard, further altering the integrity of the "doughnut." This particular setting is largely intact today, although it has been infringed upon in the past by the connection of the Dwight School's 88th and 89th Street buildings. This further addition would dramatically add to the infringement on several lot lines that lie to the west.

I agree with the members of CB7 who are concerned about the materials for the rear-yard extension. Proposed is an orange stucco façade with large windows (with what could be bright lights), as well as orange stucco for the rooftop bulkhead, as well as a black chain-link fence at the roof line. At the Community Board, we see many designs for proposed changes in the historic district, and these are not typical or sympathetic historic materials by any measure or precedent.

Finally, the number of students attending the school is an issue. In previous representations Dwight School had indicated that it would max out at 350 students, but their new number is 500. As the Council Member, I am concerned that many such institutions want to grow in our residential areas, removing housing and adding to the traffic and noise. While I respect the fact that Dwight is popular and obviously is a good academic institution, I also believe that when an institution has made official statements to a neighborhood and to government bodies, it should honor them. When seeking variances in the past for expansion, which were granted, Dwight representatives indicated that they would not need to "enroll any additional students..."

Again, for the above reasons, I urge LPC to disapprove this application. Thank you for your on-going attention to the preservation of our city.