

Proposal Gets Nod

By ROBERTA D. GRATZ

The Landmarks Preservation Commission has approved the revised plans of builder Harry B. Helmsley for his proposed skyscraper that would incorporate the landmark Villard Houses in the

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The 1880s U-shaped landmark—an Italian Renaissance palazzo designed by McKim, Mead & White—faces Madison Av. at 50th St. and is considered one of the city's most important landmarks.

The "certificate of appropriateness" issued by the commission yesterday gives Helmsley the official go-ahead to further develop his plan, now revised to include apartments in the hotel-office tower and to preserve the richly ornamented "Gold Room" originally scheduled for demolition.

Final Approval Needed

Approval is still required from the City Planning Commission because of the bulk, configuration and multi-purpose nature of the proposed 57-story building.

Helmsley's proposed marriage of landmark and skyscraper has been hailed as a promising solution for reuse of an endangered landmark which has for years been an economic drain on its owner, the Archdiocese of New York. But it has also created controversy because it requires sacrificing some valued elements of the landmark.

Only Covers Exterior

The jurisdiction of the Landmarks Commission only covers the exterior of the structure—so designated in 1968. There is the matter of preserving the irreplaceable interior rooms, which have been called "incomparable specimens of 19th century workmanship." Preservationists have been arguing they should be incorporated into the new structure rather than demolished.

The Landmarks Commission's decision comes 10 months after it first gave conditional approval to the proposal's concept and asked for revision of the skyscraper design to be more in keeping with the landmark.

The original design, with its columned expression with arches at the top and bronze tinted glass, was almost a carbon copy of Helmsley's Park Lane Hotel on Central Park South. The new design calls for bronze aluminum and dark brown glass which provide a more uniform facade, considered a more sympathetic backdrop for the brownstone landmark.

Stringent protection of the landmark during construction of the tower is required and Helmsley and his architect, Richard Roth Jr. of Emery Roth & Sons, must return for approval of further details.