

November 8, 2004

Hon. Robert Tierney  
Chair  
Landmarks Preservation Commission  
1 Centre Street, 9th Floor North  
New York, NY 10007

**Re: 353 West 14<sup>th</sup> Street, Gansevoort Market Historic District**

Dear Chair Tierney,

Manhattan Community Board No. 4 thanks the Commission for the opportunity to comment on this proposal. Since the building before you is located on the north side of 14<sup>th</sup> Street, it is within Community District 4, unlike most of the applications that you have been hearing in the Gansevoort Market Historic District. The Board cannot support the proposal in the form presented to us.

The present condition of the ground floor to be altered is a recent approximation of traditional storefronts between the residential entrance to the upper floors on the east with its odd pediment and the entrance to the commercial ground floor on the west. The only historic feature seems to be a few of the original cast-iron posts that held up the supporting beams over the original storefronts. At the time of Board review of the application for a variance by the owners of the establishment, which is planned to be a comedy club, the Chelsea Preservation and Planning Committee was told that the intention was to restore the building to its historic appearance, including the storefronts.

We regret that the exigencies of the club's program and the requirements for egress have prevented the applicants from presenting such a proposal. On weekends well over 300 people will have to exit in the short time between shows. Because of various ownerships, leases, and concerns about impacts of residents facing the yards to the rear of the building, it is impossible to find a location for more than one alternative emergency egress. The result has been a row of theater-style exit doors filling the space between the entrances. Since these must open outwards, they must be located at least 18 inches behind the building line. In front of the doors but still behind the building line will be a roll-down mesh security gate.

If legal requirements leave no alternative to the row of doors, we believe that attempts should be made to mitigate the effect and suggest at least the historic storefront character of the building. It

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might be possible to group the doors in ways that recall the historic storefront widths. The historic cast-iron columns originally located at the ends of these storefronts might be enlisted for this purpose. The doors could be paneled in such a way as to recall the period of the building, and these panels might be so designed that the series of lower panels could suggest a bulkhead.

We also question the necessity of a security gate in this now popular all-night neighborhood. Does it have to be exterior, and placed behind the building line as well? The placement is at least partially determined by the choice of an angled sign above the doors, based on one nearby, that prevents the gate itself from being placed as far forward as the building line. Yet one declared purpose of the exterior gate, preventing persons from sleeping in front of the recessed doors, is weakened by placement behind the building line. The feeling of being sheltered remains, even if diminished. If an exterior security gate is unavoidable, the choice of signage should be reviewed to enable placing the gate in a somewhat better location.

The Board recognizes the difficulties of the situation but urges that the Commission review the application carefully to seek ways to better recall the historic condition of the building.

Sincerely,



Walter Mankoff  
Chair  
Manhattan Community Board No. 4



Edward S. Kirkland  
Chair  
Landmarks Taskforce

Cc: Community Board No. 2  
Save Gansevoort Market