



CITY OF NEW YORK

MANHATTAN COMMUNITY BOARD FOUR

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COREY JOHNSON
Chair

ROBERT J. BENFATTO, JR., ESQ.
District Manager

June 5, 2013

Hon. Robert B. Tierney
Chair
Landmarks Preservation Commission
Municipal Building, ninth floor
One Center Street
New York, NY 10007

**Re: Storefront at 239-241 Eleventh Avenue
West Chelsea Historic District**

Dear Chair Tierney:

Manhattan Community Board 4 is writing about the application for a Certificate of Appropriateness for modifications at 239-241 Eleventh Avenue in the West Chelsea Historic District, within Community District 4. The Board recommends approval of the application, but has serious concerns about future changes to the existing windows under an anticipated master plan.

The elements that are subject to the Certificate of Appropriateness are limited to three first floor openings, two on Eleventh Avenue and one on West 26th Street, and a new exterior access platform at the West 26th Street opening. The openings were originally open loading docks without glazing.

We find replacement of the steel roll-up doors with storefronts to be appropriate as there is no change to masonry openings or their surrounds.

We find introduction of the proposed steel platform at the West 26th Street storefront to be appropriate. This location will be a lobby for future office space. Although open stairs at either end of this platform will not provide ADA wheelchair access to the lobby, such access will be provided by an existing adjacent elevator which opens onto both the sidewalk and the lobby floor by way of opposed elevator doors.

We understand that the new storefronts may serve as prototypes in developing a master plan for building-wide window replacement. We are very concerned about the effect the master plan may have on the character of this historically significant building. It was erected in 1912-13 as a freight terminal for the B&O Railroad and is thought to have been the largest reinforced concrete structure in Manhattan at the time, and the first with flat slab construction.

The freight terminal closed in the early 1970's and the current owner bought the building in 1981. Since then, it has been used primarily for storage. The future plan is for a mixed-use building with retail on the lower levels and offices above. The existing windows are small and widely spaced, befitting the original use of the building. Its new use and market forces may exert pressure to enlarge and/or increase the number of windows in the anticipated master plan. Although the existing window pattern is not part of a sophisticated architectural composition, it embodies the historic industrial character of the building and the district. It is not too soon to begin considering how fully the building's windows and openings should be preserved, as features of changes like those currently proposed may come to be regarded as justifying precedents.

Sincerely,



Corey Johnson
Chair



Pamela Wolff
Chair, Landmarks Committee

cc: NYC Council Speaker Christine Quinn