



CITY OF NEW YORK

MANHATTAN COMMUNITY BOARD FOUR

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Burt Lazarin
Chair

Jesse Bodine
District Manager

January 7, 2019

Honorable Sarah Carrol
Chair
Landmarks Preservation Commission
Municipal Building, 9th Floor
One Centre Street New York, NY 10007

**Re: LPC Application to Expand Theater Lobby
Al Hirschfeld Theatre, 302 West 45th Street**

Dear Chair Srinivasan,

At its regular Board meeting on January 2, 2019, Manhattan Community Board 4 (MCB4) voted to recommend approval by a vote of 34 for, 0 opposed, 0 abstaining, and 1 present but not eligible, of an application to expand the theatre lobby at the Al Hirschfeld Theatre (“the Hirschfeld”), at 302 West 45th Street.

The current application to expand the theater lobby, according to the applicant, comes in response to concerns about the convenience, comfort, and safety of the theater’s patrons. The applicant argues that creating a larger lobby footprint will open space for better crowd control of over 1,400 guests nightly when the theatre is sold out. MCB4 agrees. Opening up the public gathering space will create a larger safe haven for hundreds of guests nightly. The theater could open earlier and, by letting more people into a larger lobby, limit the number of people queuing up early outside on the sidewalk on West 45th Street — and sometimes around the corner and down Eighth Avenue.

The Hirschfeld, formerly known as the Martin Beck Theatre, opened in 1924 and is one of the largest houses on Broadway. Designed in the Moorish style by G. Albert Lansburgh, the detailed columns and arches and opulent ornamentation give it the appearance of a temple. In 1996, a renovation to “return the theatre to its original splendor” won the 1997 New York Conservancy Preservation Award. Both the interior and exterior of the theater were designated New York City Landmarks in 1987.

The applicant suggests a larger lobby could also help resolve overcrowding and safety concerns. For instance, even with the additional stalls added in the 1996 renovation, the line for the women's restroom snakes through the lobby and up the stairs and can create a very crowded lobby. An expanded lobby will mitigate this situation.

Recently, Jujamcynn Theaters, owner of the Hirschfeld, undertook a successful renovation at the St. James Theatre, which it also owns. According to Jujamcyn, establishing a larger lobby space at the St. James created a safer and controlled environment for patrons entering and exiting the building. The additional space allows for a larger queue area inside the building and prevents congestion between the restrooms and concessions areas.

Jujamcyn says the goal at the Hirschfeld is "to mirror the success of the St. James expansion."

Jujamcyn Theaters also says it takes great pride in reflecting the deep historic legacy of its theatre buildings. The modifications at the Hirschfeld, MCB4 is happy to learn, will maintain the Moorish design of the interior, highlighting the columns and stylized moldings, as well as maintaining focus on the three domed sections of the ceiling that contain a mural by Albert Herter.

Sincerely,



Burt Lazarin
Chair
Manhattan Community Board 4



Jean-Daniel Noland
Chair
Clinton/Hell's Kitchen Land Use Committee