



CITY OF NEW YORK

MANHATTAN COMMUNITY BOARD FOUR

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DELORES RUBIN
Chair

JESSE BODINE
District Manager

February 10, 2016

Hon. Meenakshi Srinivasan, Chair
Landmarks Preservation Commission
Municipal Building, 9th floor
One Centre Street New York, NY 10007

Re: Recurring Seasonal Bar, High Line Hotel, 180 Tenth Avenue

Dear Chair Srinivasan:

On the recommendation of its Chelsea Land Use Committee, Manhattan Community Board No. 4 (CB4), at its regularly scheduled meeting on February 3, 2016, voted, by a vote of 36 in favor, 0 opposed, 0 abstaining and 2 present but not eligible to vote, to recommend denial unless certain conditions are met, of an application to the Landmarks Preservation Commission (LPC) for a Master Plan for a recurring seasonal bar in the areaway/forecourt of the High Line Hotel at 180 Tenth Avenue. The hotel is part of a complex of English Gothic style buildings, the General Theological Seminary, which is in the Chelsea Historic District.

The conditions CB4 is placing on its recommendation are informed by the community's deep disappointment with the loss of visibility of the General Theological Seminary's historic facades. This loss is caused by features added to the building's areaway that are far beyond those presented to CB4 and in a public hearing of the Commission in 2013, and as approved by the Commission under Certificate of Appropriateness (CofA) 14-5938, issued on 7/8/13.

The current areaway is unrecognizable as the design for which this CofA was issued. The CofA specifically noted that the proposal would "not create a visual barrier in the streetscape." The originally-proposed entry gate in the perimeter fence was in fact scaled back in response to the Commission's stated concerns specifically regarding creation of a visual barrier. This concern has since been disregarded by the Hotel in its introduction to the areaway of a tall perimeter privet hedge and a multitude of commercial elements, of which the bar and its canopy are only the greatest obstructions to views of the historic architecture.

CB4's conditions align with the Commission's original intent to avoid visual barriers and they reflect the community's lack of confidence in the Hotel to honor the specifics and spirit of permits it is issued by the Commission.

Background

The High Line Hotel is seeking a Master Plan permit for the same bar that was first installed illegally in the summer of 2014. The Landmarks Preservation Commission cited the bar as a violation in Warning Letter WL15-0086, issued on August 5, 2014, for “installation of bar in the areaway without (permit[s]).” The violation was cured when the bar was removed as the end of the outdoor dining season approached.

The bar was reinstalled at the beginning of the outdoor dining season in 2015 under a temporary permit issued by the LPC staff without public review or a public hearing. The permit, which may not be renewed, allowed a temporary installation to be in place for up to one year.

Working with Manhattan Borough President Gale Brewer’s office, the community obtained the agreement of the Commission not to issue a further permit for the bar without a Master Plan. The current application is for a Master Plan for a recurring seasonal bar, considered to be a permanent fixture, and requires both community board review and a public hearing.

Community Board 4 Conclusions and Conditions to its Recommendation

The original illegally-installed bar had seating for multiple patrons as well as room for stand up service, despite its designation as a service bar. Acknowledging that the bar could only be a service bar, the owner removed the bar seating and replaced it with seating facing the forecourt for the 2015 season. However, the owner did not reduce the size of the bar, which is much larger than is necessary for a service bar.

The applicant states that there are no changes between the proposed bar and the one installed for the 2015 season. The 2015 bar was large and could easily be seen from the sidewalk, towering over the courtyard fence and blocking views of the historic building facade (see attached photos). CB4 believes that an appropriately sized service bar would be far less damaging to the community's views of this beautiful building. Therefore, we recommend denial of the application for a Master Plan unless the following conditions are met:

- No part of the bar will be higher than the fence currently enclosing the forecourt;
- There will be no shade canopy or other attachment to the bar that increases its height above this limit;
- The length of the bar from north to south will be no greater than one half the width of the building facade it will partially obscure, specifically, no more than one half the clear dimension from the south handrail flanking the entry walk stair to the south perimeter fence; and
- The depth of the bar from east to west will be no greater than the depth of the bar installed for the 2015 season.

In addition to these conditions designed to protect the views of the building, CB4 requires the opportunity to review the plan annually to ensure that the installed structure conforms to any approved Master Plan.

Sincerely,



Delores Rubin
Chair



J. Lee Compton
Co-Chair
Chelsea Land Use Committee



Betty Mackintosh
Co-Chair
Chelsea Land Use
Committee

Enclosure

cc: Hon. Gale A. Brewer, Manhattan Borough President
Hon. Brad Hoylman, State Senate
Hon. Richard Gottfried, State Assembly
Hon. Corey Johnson, City Council
Bill Borock, President of Council of Chelsea Block Associations
Stanley Wong, Architect PLLC



