



CITY OF NEW YORK

**MANHATTAN COMMUNITY BOARD FOUR**

P.O. Box 2622 New York, NY 10108

tel: 212-736-4536

www.mcb4.nyc

**Lowell D. Kern**  
Chair

**Jesse Bodine**  
District Manager

December 8, 2020

Sarah Carroll, Chair  
Landmarks Preservation Commission  
Municipal Building, 9<sup>th</sup> Floor  
One Centre Street  
New York, NY 10007

**Re: 400 West 57<sup>th</sup> Street, The Windemere — Storefront Design Project**

Dear Chair Carroll:

On November 24, 2020, at Manhattan Community Board 4's (MCB4) Clinton/Hell's Kitchen Land Use (CHKLU) Committee meeting, Albert Faks, the Project Manager for the Windemere historic restoration team, along with Ilya Chistiakov, the architect for the restoration, presented plans for the restoration of the building's storefronts along Ninth Avenue and the corner of West 57<sup>th</sup> Street.

The Windemere is a landmarked building on the southwest corner of Ninth Avenue and West 57<sup>th</sup> Street.

The restoration work includes cleaning and repairing the original cast iron columns, restoring brickwork, adding wood cornices, new glass and wood bay windows and doors to match the originals.

At its December 2, 2020, regularly scheduled full board meeting, MCB4 with 38 in favor, 0 opposed, 0 abstaining, and 0 present but not eligible, voted to commend the meticulous restoration work undertaken by Mr. Faks' team and to recommend approval of the proposed historic restoration work on the storefronts. The Board finds restoring the stairs to the cellar and railing on the Ninth Avenue sidewalk is not called for as both features were removed before the building was landmarked and restoring them would create unacceptable obstacles to current pedestrian traffic.

**Storefront Historic Restoration**

Originally, three bays of storefronts were on the Ninth Avenue front of the building and one storefront on the corner of Ninth and West 57<sup>th</sup> Street. The historic cast iron columns are still present and will be cleaned, repaired, and restored to the original condition. The brickwork will be restored to match brickwork above the ground floor and a new wood cornice will match the original. A storefront pilaster, which is missing, will be restored.

To match the originals, there will be a new glass and wood storefront entrance, new windows, and new store bases. The historic archway above a former entrance to the cellar will be restored back to its original condition and with a new keystone to match the original.

To match the original 57<sup>th</sup> Street corner storefront, a new glass and wood bay window and door will be installed, the existing cast iron columns will be cleaned and repaired, and a new wood cornice added.

Mr. Faks pointed out that one detail which will not be restored back to its historical condition was an opening in the historic archway on the Ninth Avenue facade near the 57<sup>th</sup> Street corner which allowed light to go down into the cellar. There had been a staircase to the cellar and railing extending six or seven feet out on the sidewalk. Since these features had been removed prior to the landmarking of the building, restoring them is not required. Furthermore, even had it been required, it was felt that they would create an obstacle to a now busy, and at times congested, sidewalk. The Board concurs.

Mr. Faks agreed to look into adding a feature, such as a frosted glass window, to the original opening to the cellar to enliven the now bricked up archway (which will be restored to its original landmarked condition).

### **The Windemere**

Located on the southwest corner of Ninth Avenue and West 57<sup>th</sup> Street, the Windemere has 100 feet of frontage along West 57<sup>th</sup> Street, 125.42 feet of frontage along Ninth Avenue and a lot area of 12,542 square feet.

Most of the property, comprising approximately 10,000 square feet, is located within a C1-8 zoning district and Subarea C1 of the Special Clinton District. The southernmost portion of the property is located in an R8/C1-5 district and Preservation Area A of the Special Clinton District.

The building has been vacant since 2007.

### **Vigorous Victorian**

The building is a vigorous representative of Victorian style. Since it represented an emerging type of housing, it needed to establish its status and respectability and set about doing so by adapting an elaborate style of luxury building to the demands of the new large-scale domestic structure.

Its considerable bulk is clothed in red brick laid in elaborate patterns including blind windows, angled brickwork, patterned arches over the windows on alternate floors, and corbel tables rising on small arcades rising above the center of the facades. The whole is enlivened with patterns of

yellow bricks and inserts of a bluish stone. Columned porches identify the residential entrances. Near the corner a prominent false gable faces northward up Ninth Avenue and the elevated railroad that once ran above it.

### **Before There Was Greenwich Village, There Was The Windemere**

The Windemere was built in the early 1880s. Andrew Alpern in his history of New York apartment houses records it as the second-oldest surviving house in the city, dating from only a year later than the one older survivor and predating the first wave of well-known apartment houses like the Dakota that were to come a few years later.

In 1895 the Windemere was converted into a residence for artists and writers, most of them women and as such, a pioneer in the field of providing respectable housing for unmarried women. It proved also to be a precursor of the Greenwich Village art scene.

### **Violent Tenant Harassment**

In the 1970's, some floors were converted from large apartments to Single Room Occupancy (SRO) units and smaller apartments, but it was still well run. By the 1980s it was in serious disrepair and the subject of violent tenant harassment, such as apartment doors being cement blocked with the tenants' belongings inside and managers issuing death threats and moving prostitutes into the building. Eventually, the owners and managers of the Windemere were indicted by former District Attorney Robert M. Morgenthau, convicted of felonies for this harassment, and jailed.

The Windemere's history of violent tenant harassment was a major factor in developing the groundbreaking Clinton Cure For Harassment.

### **Landmark Designation**

The Landmarks Commission designated the building a landmark in 2005. In its designation report, the Commission took note of the building's significance as "the oldest-known large apartment complex remaining in an area that was one of Manhattan's first apartment-house districts" and found that the building's "exuberant display of textured, corbelled, and polychromatic brickwork" made it "a visually compelling, imposing, eclectic, and unified" complex.

MCB4 was at the forefront in pushing for Landmark designation of this historic building. The Board commends the restoration team for their careful and detailed work. And we express our gratitude for the championing of the Windemere by former MCB4 Landmarks Task Force chair, Ed Kirkland. His tireless advocacy has paid off with a stunningly restored landmark building in Hell's Kitchen.

Sincerely,



Lowell D. Kern  
Chair  
Manhattan Community Board 4,

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

Cc: Hon. Jerold Nadler, Congressman  
Hon. Brad Hoylman, NYS Senator  
Hon. Linda B. Rosenthal, Assemblymember  
Hon. Corey Johnson, NYC Council Speaker  
Hon. Gale A. Brewer, Manhattan Borough President  
Albert Faks, Representative  
Pamela Wolff