



CITY OF NEW YORK
MANHATTAN COMMUNITY BOARD FOUR

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Lowell D. Kern
Chair

Jesse Bodine
District Manager

February 5, 2021

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

Re: The McGraw-Hill Building, 330 West 42nd Street

Dear Chair Carroll,

On January 13, 2021, at Manhattan Community Board 4's (MCB4) Clinton/Hell's Kitchen Land Use Committee meeting, historical preservation consultants from Higgins Quasebarth & Partners presented proposals for renovations of the exterior of the McGraw-Hill Building, at 330 West 42nd Street. The exterior was landmarked in 1979.

The proposed renovations include:

1. *West 42nd Street Main Entrance* —to change the doors and make identity-related changes at the main entrance of the West 42nd Street façade;
2. *West 41st Street Secondary Entrance and Facade* — to make changes to the dock infills at the ground floor and make a new secondary building entrance;
3. *Upper Floors* —to replace non-original doors to the terraces and make the terraces usable for the building tenants.

At its February 3, 2021, regularly scheduled Board meeting, MCB4 with 42 in favor, 0 opposed, 0 abstaining, and 0 present but not eligible, voted to recommend approval of the proposed changes to the West 42nd and West 41st Streets ground floor facades and to the terraces.

The McGraw Hill Building, West Side Icon

A New York City Landmark, a United States National Historic Landmark, and one of the great examples of 1930's International Style architecture, the McGraw-Hill building on West 42nd

Street is one which the word “iconic” can be applied without hesitation and without pretension. Designed by Raymond Hood, an architect who was also the lead architect designing Rockefeller Center, and opened in 1932, the same year the Empire State Building, the building is one of the most notable modernist buildings in a city renowned for its 20th Century architecture.

With alternating horizontal bands of double hung windows and blue-green terra-cotta blocks composing all four facades of the building, the building’s unique design was innovative at the time and remains a vibrant and esteemed presence on the West Side today. Rising 34 stories above West 42nd Street, with setbacks on the north and south elevations on the 11th, 16th, 32nd, and 34th floors, the building’s top is crowned by 11-foot high letters that spell “McGraw-Hill,” the sight of which for three-quarters of a century, has been a beacon for the Hell’s Kitchen neighborhood.¹

PROPOSED CHANGES

42nd Street Facade

Proposed: Replace the main entry doors and add an address above the doors.

Although the name “McGraw-Hill” originally had been installed over the main entrance, it had long since been removed and replaced sometime in the 1980s with “GHI”, the logo of the main occupant of the building at that time. The proposed “330 West 42nd St” address above the entrance would approximate the font and scale of the original “McGraw-Hill” lettering which had been above the doors.

A new set of entry doors to replace the non-original entry doors is also proposed with the new doors raised from a height of seven feet to eight feet, four inches.

MCB4 approves of the proposal to add a new set of entry doors and putting the address “330 West 42nd St” above the doors of the main entrance.

West 41st Street Facade

Proposed: Install a new entrance on West 41st Street and replace three of the non-original loading dock infills with glazed infill.

The proposed new secondary entry would be in the same area of the existing one but have more architectural character, an understated treatment, and a simple canopy with just the address of the building on it, in keeping with the original function and character of the original entry.

The area will remain the loading dock area of the building but three of the original roll-down loading dock infills would be replaced with glazed infill to allow viewing into the public spaces of the building. The proposed glazed infill would allow the depth of the columns bracketing the docks to be expressed as originally intended.

¹ The massive McGraw-Hill sign atop the building is embedded in a crown so iconic that it was referenced by the 1987 Riverbank building on the corner of West 42nd Street and Eleventh Avenue.

The Board points out that the Port Authority is committed to building a new terminal between Eighth and Ninth Avenues and that the stretch of West 41st St. the McGraw-Hill building faces will change dramatically, with ground floor retail along the south side of the street. The consultants may want to reconsider the fixed glazing proposal in light of the fact that there will be storefronts immediately opposite.

MCB4 approves replacing the secondary entrance and the current infills of the loading docks.

Terraces

Proposed: Replace non-original doors with new ones in horizontal muntin divisions that do not duplicate but harmonize with the adjacent windows and make usable the terraces (and remove most, or all of, the HVAC equipment from the terraces).

The north elevation of the building has four terraces (at the 11th, 16th, 32nd, and 34th floors) and the south elevation has five (same as the north elevation plus one on the 8th floor). Each of the terraces has doors. Many are new openings, which previously were windows, and some are original openings with later doors. Because of the depth of the setbacks, they are hardly visible from the street but as they are changes to the facade, they need to be reviewed. No new openings are proposed.

MCB4 approves the replacement of the doors. The Board is reassured that its concern that every precaution will be taken to forestall the potential for suicide and create the safest possible environment once the terraces are made more available for tenant use.

Conclusion

The Board is proud of Hell's Kitchen's 19th and 20th Century architectural heritage, from Raymond Hood's McGraw-Hill building on 42nd Street to Stanford White's Beaux-Arts IRT Powerhouse on West 57th Street, to the remarkably intact 19th Century row houses, tenements, and flats in between. It is a heritage worth preserving.

We are grateful to Higgins & Quaesbarth for its thoughtful presentation, its respect and sensitivity to the architecture of the McGraw-Hill Building, and its openness in hearing our concerns (even about the green stripes embedded in the West 42nd Street sidewalk which are damaged and in need of repair.) The Board understands that the interior of the building, discussed at length in the original designation, is not landmarked. But we are encouraged that the consultants will make every effort to ensure the renovation of the interior lobby will be in keeping with the extraordinary blend of the Moderne, Art Deco and International Styles that distinguishes this great building.

Sincerely,



Lowell D. Kern
Chair
Manhattan Community Board 4



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

Cc: Hon. Jerry Nadler, U.S. Congress
Hon. Brad Hoylman, New York State Senate
Hon. Richard Gottfried, New York State Assembly
Hon. Corey Johnson, Speaker, City Council
Hon. Gale Brewer, Manhattan Borough President
Historic Districts Council