



CITY OF NEW YORK
MANHATTAN COMMUNITY BOARD FOUR

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JEFFREY LEFRANCOIS
Chair

JESSE R. BODINE
District Manager

April 8, 2022

Sarah Carroll, Chair
Landmarks Preservation Commission
David N. Dinkins Municipal Building, 9th Floor North
1 Centre Street
New York, NY 10007

Re: **Certificate of Appropriateness for Proposed Modifications to Stoops
417, 419 and 421 West 20th Street, Manhattan
LPC-22-07517; LPC-22-07518; LPC-22-03633**

Dear Chair Carroll:

Manhattan Community Board 4 (MCB4), at its regularly scheduled meeting on April 6, 2022, voted, by a vote of 26 in favor, 13 opposed, 3 abstaining, and 0 present but not eligible to vote, to recommend to the Landmarks Preservation Commission (LPC) a **denial** of a Certificate of Appropriateness for addition of gates at the front stoops of three residences at 417, 419 and 421 West 20th Street. **The Board found that the proposed installation of gates in front of these row houses is not consistent with the historical design of the buildings.**

BACKGROUND

The seminary block was donated to the Episcopal Church by Chelsea's founder, Clement Clarke Moore, to serve as the town square of his planned community. Transoms above the doors to these three rowhouses still bear the addresses two, three, and four Chelsea Square, as the block was known long after notable architect Charles Coolidge Haight's transformation of the campus in picturesque English Collegiate Gothic style during the 1880s and 90s. The freestanding group of three rowhouses are of his design, built to house faculty. Their entrances harmonize with very similar Haight-designed entrances farther west on the block. The rowhouses were sold to private owners in 2011, at which time their private rear yards were fenced off from the adjacent seminary grounds.

The applicant represents all three building owners who are seeking to install gates between the running fence line to secure their stoops. The owners report having experienced issues with homeless people trespassing on these mid-block stoops and the homeowners wish to protect their homes from this infringement on their property.

APPLICATION

The proposal is for three conforming gates at each of the stoops in front of the three residences which would match the design of the adjacent areaway fencing.

CB4 RECOMMENDATION

Initially the Chelsea Land Use Committee recommended approval of the application with a split vote of 8 in favor, 7 opposed, 0 abstaining, and 0 Present Not Eligible. However, after additional discussion in the Full Board meeting, it was determined that the proposed changes are not appropriate.

While the applicant's architect argued that gates would be consistent with historic rowhouse gates across 20th Street, those neighboring buildings are of an earlier Greek Revival Style, their gates stand well forward of the entrances, and were conceived from the start as integral extensions of their garden fences. The more pertinent context is that of the seminary itself, where no grade-level building entrance is gated, including very similar entrances with which the seminary rowhouse entrances are thematic.


The steps and railings of Haight's rowhouse entrances curve into the sidewalk, creating a benign expression of openness and welcome. The proposed gates have an effect far beyond their physical presence, throwing a barrier across Haight's inviting entrances.

Although the applicant's architect has suggested the gates could remain open, it is unclear why they would if the stated motivation is to limit trespassers due to an uptick in people who are homeless loitering on the stoops. The applicant's architect stated that there was no promise the gates will remain open.

On this point, the applicant was asked to provide evidence of loitering or trespassing in the form of photographs, police reports, calls to 311 or otherwise, and none was provided. Additionally, there was discussion around alternative methods to dissuade trespassing and increase the owner's sense of safety (e.g., lighting, camera, intercom, etc.), but the applicant did not feel any were suitable for consideration. Lastly, nearby residents and neighbors report that there is very little of such issues on 20th Street and numerous community members attended the committee and full board meetings to request a denial of the application.

In conclusion, the stated reason for the addition of gates does not merit a permanent change to these top-tier historic landmark buildings, and CB4 recommends denial of the Certificate of Appropriateness.

Sincerely,



Jeffrey LeFrancois
Chair
Manhattan
Community Board 4



Jessica Chait
Co-Chair
Chelsea Land Use
Committee



Kerry Keenan
Co-Chair
Chelsea Land Use
Committee

cc: Hon. Mark Levine, Manhattan Borough President
Hon. Erik Bottcher, City Council