



CITY OF NEW YORK
MANHATTAN COMMUNITY BOARD FOUR

424 West West 33 Street, Suite #580
New York, NY 10001
tel: 212-736-4536
www.nyc.gov/mcb4

JEFFREY LEFRANCOIS
Chair

JESSE R. BODINE
District Manager

August 5, 2022

Jessica Tisch
Commissioner
New York City Department of Sanitation
125 Worth St., New York NY, 10013

Dawn M. Pinnock
Commissioner
New York City Department of Citywide Administrative Services
1 Centre St., The David N. Dinkins Municipal Building New York, NY 10007

Re: 128 West 17th Street or Former Colored School No 4

Dear Commissioner, Tisch and Commissioner Pinnock:

Manhattan Community Board 4 (MCB4) would like to thank representatives from The Department of Sanitation of New York (DSNY) for a very informative meeting with City Council Member Erik Bottcher, members of his administration, and representatives from MCB4's Chelsea Land Use Committee regarding DSNY support of a landmark application for 128 West 17th Street.¹

As the owner of 128 West 17th Street, also known as Former Colored School No 4, it is extremely important to have the support of DSNY in preserving this historic building and its cultural significance to the history of the African American experience in our district.

¹ Manhattan Community Board 4 (CB4), at its regularly scheduled meeting on July 27th, 2022, voted, by a vote of 39 in favor, 0 opposed, 0 abstaining, and 0 present but not eligible to vote, to approve this letter.

In our November 10, 2021 letter to LPC, CB4 strongly advocated the designation of 128 West 17th Street a landmark.²

History

Colored School No. 4/Grammar School 81 was one of a series of schoolhouses to develop from the African Free-Schools, established in 1787, to educate Black children. It represents the official racially segregated education system which existed in New York City for most of the 19th century. The school's longtime principal, Sarah J. Garnet, is recognized as one of the earliest Black female principals of a New York City public school. Throughout its thirty-four years as a schoolhouse, the school had associations with many notable figures as an institutional pillar and cultural center of New York's African American community in the Chelsea area. This building is the only known remaining "colored" school in Manhattan.

State of the Building

We understand from Mr. Anderson, DSNY Deputy Commissioner for Policy and External Affairs, that an assessment of the property was performed in February 2022 resulting in an inspection report which found the building's structural integrity to be remarkably intact. The building is not currently in use, and there is an urgent need to repair the roof which has developed a leak. Future occupancy would require the roof's repair, mold remediation and asbestos removal. While the appropriate ownership and future use of this historically important building remain under discussion, given the poor condition of the roof, it is imperative that swift action be taken to remediate the damage.

DSNY stated they would like to relinquish ownership of the building to a city agency that can more appropriately support the building's historic and cultural significance. We expect an RFP proposal will be forthcoming, but do not believe this process should impede moving forward with LPC's approval for landmarking.

MCB4 Recommendations

Any further damage to the building resulting from the roof leak must be prevented. Action to maintain the building's structural integrity must be swift and thorough. We request that DSNY provide a detailed status update regarding measures taken to repair and seal the roof. **DSNY's inspection report of the property should be immediately shared with LPC and MCB4 and access to the property should be made available to members of the MCB4 and representatives from Council Member Bottcher's office.** We also ask that DSNY reiterate its approval to landmark this property in writing to

² <https://cbmanhattan.cityofnewyork.us/cb4/wp-content/uploads/sites/10/2021/11/14-CLU-Letter-to-LPC-re-Designation-of-128-West-17th-Street.pdf>

MCB4 and LPC, as MCB4 and Council Member Bottcher continue to press for an expedited landmark status and a future use that is in keeping with its historical significance.

We are grateful for the opportunity to continue to work together toward the common goal of having this important building attain landmark status, in keeping with LPC's Equity Framework and the broad support this application has received from the community. Of note, a petition currently being circulated has already gained over 1,300 signatures from community members in favor of this effort.

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
Sarah Carroll, Commissioner, Landmarks Preservation Commission
Gregory Anderson, Deputy Commissioner for Policy and External Affairs, NYC
DSNY
Eric K. Washington
Tom Lunke