



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

October 14, 2022

Kurt Arnold
Business Unit Leader
New York State Office of General Services
33rd Floor, Corning Tower, Empire State Plaza, Albany, NY 12242

Re: 550 West 20th Street Preservation Concerns

Dear Mr. Arnold:

We are deeply concerned that the exterior of 550 West 20th has been altered without legally-required oversight by the New York State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO). Members of the community noticed that many of the building's terra-cotta elements had been removed and replaced in an apparently permanent manner with brickwork. When told of this, SHPO indicated that it had not been notified of the work as required by law. This amounts to a serious breach of accountability.¹

As noted in [CB4's February 12, 2019](#), letter to Empire State Development:

"The building was declared landmark-eligible during the West Chelsea rezoning. Accordingly, the preservation of the historic elements of the building, reflecting its history as the Seamen's House YMCA as well as the Bayview Correctional Facility, was a critically important goal for us during the lengthy discussions and zoning work."

Most of the polychrome terra-cotta elements that were removed are a particularly important, visually crowning part of the building, which was designed by notable architects Shreve, Lamb & Harmon at about the same time that the firm designed the Empire State Building.

¹ Manhattan Community Board 4 (MCB4) at its full Board meeting of October 6, 2022, and on the recommendation of the Chelsea Land Use Committee, voted 37 in favor, 0 opposed, 0 abstaining, and 0 present but not eligible, to approve this letter.

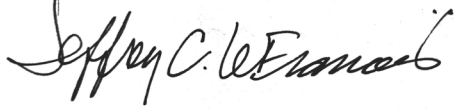
We understand that the Office of General Services (OGS) has since told SHPO that the removed terra-cotta elements had been stored for preservation and reinstallation by the building's future tenant in its reuse to supportive housing. The Community Board would like to know where these elements have been stored and expect to receive that information posthaste.

CB4 requests a meeting with OGS and SHPO to view the removed elements firsthand and discuss how their restoration will be ensured, and how the overall renovation will proceed under SHPO oversight.

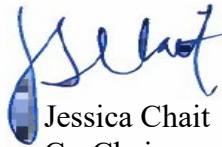
Please contact CB4's District Manager, Jesse Bodine, to arrange a meeting as soon as possible at jbodine@cb.nyc.gov.

We look forward to hearing from you shortly.

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: Jeanette M. Moy, Commissioner, Office of General Services
Hope Knight, President, CEO and Commissioner, Empire State Development
Alyson Beha, Vice President, Real Estate Development and Planning, Empire State Development
Erik Kulleseid, Commissioner, NYS Parks, Recreation & Historic Preservation
Daniel McEneny, Director, Division for Historic Preservation, NYS Parks, Recreation & Historic Preservation
Kathy Howe, Director, Community Preservation Services Bureau, NYS Parks, Recreation & Historic Preservation
Olivia Brazee, Historic Site Coordinator, Division for Historic Preservation, NYS Parks, Recreation & Historic Preservation
Hon. Brad Hoylman, New York State Senate
Hon. Richard Gottfried, New York State Assembly
Hon. Mark Levine, Manhattan Borough President
Hon. Erik Bottcher, City Council