



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](http://www.nyc.gov/mcb4)

**JEFFREY LEFRANCOIS**  
Chair

**JESSE R. BODINE**  
District Manager

January 5<sup>th</sup>, 2023

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

Re: Proposed facade alteration of 458 West 20th Street and legalization of previous LPC violations

Dear Chair Carroll:

Manhattan Community Board 4 (MCB4), at its regularly scheduled meeting on January 4, 2022, voted, by a vote of 43 in favor, 0 opposed, 1 abstaining, and 0 present but not eligible to vote, to recommend to the Landmarks Preservation Commission (LPC) denial of the application for a proposed renovation to an existing Greek Revival rowhouse in the Chelsea Historic District. MCB4 particularly objects to: the proposed removal of historic façade brick for incongruous through-wall air-conditioning units; the proposed addition of a further coat of moisture-trapping and potentially damaging paint to the brick façade; and the proposed legalization of existing violations that detract from the building's character-defining rowhouse form.

#### Background

458 West 20th Street was built in the Greek Revival style in 1845. It is currently subdivided into apartments. The building's parlor-floor entrance was dropped to basement level and its stoop removed, and a fourth floor was added prior to designation of the Chelsea Historic District in 1970. A photo provided by LPC shows that the center windows on each floor had been filled in with recessed brick at time of designation, but the remaining lintels and sills remained intact. Sometime thereafter, the sills and lintels were removed without LPC approval. LPC staff has previously approved an application for wood six-over-six window replacement in the flanking window openings.

## Proposal

The proposed work would remove through-wall air conditioners at various locations on the building façade, fill in their openings with new brick, and remove historic brick below windows to allow installation of new through-wall air conditioners. The building's brick façade would then be repainted. The building's front door hardware, entry lighting, and intercom would be replaced, and basement window gates would be removed. The applicant also proposes legalization of several existing violations, listed below.

## Existing Violations

The applicant came before the Chelsea Land Use Committee (CLU) at its November meeting, returning in December per the Committee's request to explain information that had come to light regarding multiple LPC violations. Per the applicant's architect, these violation include:

- Center-window brick infill made flush to the remaining façade.
- Center-window lintels and sills removed.
- Top-story window lintels protruding in a different configuration from the designation-date photo.
- Window sills painted.
- Rustication lines added to brownstone material at the base of the basement facade.

The applicant requests legalization of these violations rather than their correction.

## Recommendation

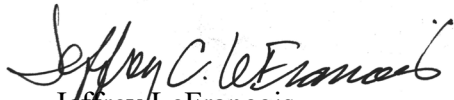
MCB4 feels that legalizing the building's violations would only encourage others to alter designated buildings without LPC approval, and strongly objects to the proposed legalization. The recessed infill of the center windows at the time of designation at least expressed the iconic three-window-wide form of a Greek Revival rowhouse, and the loss of this reading to flush infill should certainly not be legalized. We note that removal of historic brickwork for current through-wall air-conditioning units appears to be a further violation, which should obviously not be legalized. The current paint coating of the façade brick may also be in violation. We ask LPC to investigate. The proposed removal of historic brickwork for modern air conditioners is patently inappropriate. MCB4 has recommended that the applicant instead explore use of ductless mini-split air conditioners which would not require façade penetrations or disruptive interior ductwork. We have also recommended reinstatement of actual windows at the infill locations. Given the extraordinary, protected view they would provide across the General Theological Seminary's grounds to some of its most picturesque architecture, this would not seem a hardship. Any brick used to fill in existing air-conditioner penetrations should be carefully selected to match original unpainted brick, to the satisfaction of LPC.

No color sample of the proposed façade-brick paint was provided, but MCB4 opposes further painting of the brick as it may contribute to trapping moisture within the brick

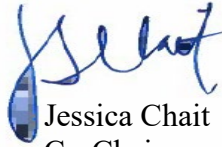
body and potential deterioration. MCB4 suggests that the façade brickwork should be stripped of paint rather than repainted.

MCB4 does not object to the proposed alterations to the building's entrance or removal of its basement window grills. These changes would, however, best be evaluated in the context of a comprehensive resubmission that responds to our other comments and LPC's enforcement of the building's violations. We request this resubmission to MCB4 before any public hearing of the Commission.

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