



CITY OF NEW YORK
MANHATTAN COMMUNITY BOARD FOUR

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JESSICA CHAIT
Chair

JESSE R. BODINE
District Manager

January 9, 2024

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

Re: Proposed renovation of 549 West 26th Street

Dear Chair Carroll:

Manhattan Community Board 4 (MCB4), at its regularly scheduled meeting on January 3, 2024, voted, by a vote of 39 in favor, 0 opposed, 1 abstaining, and 0 present but not eligible to vote, to recommend to the Landmarks Preservation Commission (LPC) approval of a Certificate of Appropriateness for proposed alterations to 549 West 26th Street in the West Chelsea Historic District. The Board finds the proposed work appropriate and asks LPC to require careful salvage and on-site storage of original bricks to be removed, for use in future restoration efforts. MCB4 takes exception to LPC's removal of the project's proposed skylight work from public hearing review.

Background

349 West 26th Street dates from 1900-01. It was one of several factory buildings constructed for the John Williams Bronze and Iron Works in the early twentieth century, all of which were designed by architect Charles H. Caldwell. These include 536-542 West 27th Street, a sister building to 349 that matches its six-story height and façade design. Williams' foundry was a nationally prestigious manufacturer that produced bronze doors for the Library of Congress and works by Daniel Chester French including the bronze doors of the Boston Public Library and his statue, Alma Mater, for Columbia University.

The Application

The project will introduce new glazing and entrances in first- and second-story openings to accommodate an art-gallery tenant on these two floors. The head of the 26th Street façade's easternmost first-floor opening will be raised to match earlier-raised openings

to its west. In raising the head of this opening, original bricks will need to be removed. The building's fully painted street façade will be stripped of paint at only the first two stories which will be occupied by the gallery. A truck bay will be removed from the rear façade and partially filled in to yield two smaller windows aligned with existing windows above.

MCB4 Recommendation

While raising the head of the easternmost first-floor opening requires removal of historic fabric, MCB4 finds that this change will beneficially regularize the building's primary façade. MCB4 asks LPC to condition any permit for this work on careful salvage and secure onsite storage of removed brick for future restoration purposes.

MCB4 welcomes any paint removal from the building's brickwork, but notes that limiting removal to the lowest two floors will result in an awkward overall appearance. We encourage LPC and the building owner (who is copied) to work together toward full-façade paint removal. This could take advantage of the on-site presence of a paint-removal contractor and might be approved by the Commission together with the current proposal. Full paint removal would reveal the building's appealing original façade treatment including the "segmental-arched voussoirs of alternating brick and limestone" at both the second and fifth floors, which the West Chelsea Historic District Designation Report makes special note of. 549 would then match the very pleasing appearance of its matching building at 536-542 West 27th Street.

We understand that this project includes skylight alterations which are under separate review by LPC staff and will not be discussed in the project's public hearing. MCB4 regrets being denied the opportunity to weigh in on these changes. Placing part of this project under staff review does not seem to make sense as it will not expedite matters by avoiding a public hearing. In the future, we would appreciate the opportunity to advise on all aspects of any project that is the subject of a public hearing.

Sincerely,



Jessica Chait
Chair
Manhattan Community Board 4



Kerry Keenan
Co-Chair
Chelsea Land Use Committee

cc: Hon. Mark Levine, Manhattan Borough President
Hon. Erik Bottcher, City Council
Nicole Shkreli, Operations Coordinator, Vornado Realty Trust