



CITY OF NEW YORK
MANHATTAN COMMUNITY BOARD FOUR

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JESSICA CHAIT
Chair

JESSE R. BODINE
District Manager

April 11, 2024

Herb Peak
Project Manager
United States Postal Service
475 L'Enfant Plaza SW
Washington, DC 20260

Beverly O'Leary
Accessibility Compliance Manager
US Postal Service
Facilities R&A Programs
6 Griffin Road North
Windsor, CT 06006-0300

Re: Modification of Old Chelsea Station, 217 West 18th Street, accessible entrance

Dear Mr. Peak and Ms. O'Leary:

Manhattan Community Board 4 (MCB4) Thanks you for the opportunity to comment on the proposed modifications to the Old Chelsea Station Post Office at 217 West 18th Street. MCB4 has long advocated for the preservation of the Old Chelsea Station Post Office.¹ At the Full Board meeting held on April 3rd, 2024, Manhattan Community Board 4 voted, by a vote of 38 in favor, 0 opposed, 0 abstaining, and 0 present but not eligible to vote, to approve the following comments.

Background

Built in 1935-37, the Old Chelsea Station Post Office at 217 West 18th Street is described in its 1988 nomination for listing on the National Register of Historic Places as “a well-proportioned Colonial Revival building” that is “architecturally significant as an *intact* [emphasis ours]

¹ https://cbmanhattan.cityofnewyork.us/cb4/wp-content/uploads/sites/10/downloads/pdf/agendas/2013_05/2-LAND-Letter%20to%20%20LPC%20re%20Designation%20for%20Old%20Chelsea%20Station.pdf

https://cbmanhattan.cityofnewyork.us/cb4/wp-content/uploads/sites/10/downloads/pdf/agendas/2015_01/19%20CLU%20Letter%20to%20USPS%20re%20Sale%20of%20air%20rights%20-%20Old%20Chelsea%20Post%20Office,%20217%20W.%2018th%20Street.pdf

representative example of the federal architecture erected as part of the public works projects initiated by the U.S. Government during the Great Depression of the 1930s.”

The United States Postal Service is proposing modifications to make the postal station’s designated accessible front entrance fully compliant with accessibility rules, including replacement of the door’s overhead closer, its metal threshold, and—most sensitively—its historic granite sill measuring about eight feet by fourteen inches in plan. The proposal calls for the sill’s replacement with a new beveled sill “to match exactly existing granite.”

MCB4 recommendation

MCB4 would like to know why USPS is proposing to remove and replace the granite sill instead of re-grading the historically non-sensitive concrete sidewalk. This would remove the need to disturb the sill and its matching granite door surround, plinths, and flanking façade base. This technique can be seen at many sites around the city. The sill is part of the historic fabric of this valuably intact building and is matched by contiguous granite surfaces and the sill at the nearby east entry. As such, every effort should be made to retain it in place. Given the low lip of the existing sill, the necessary sidewalk re-grading would be minimal.

Conversely, the current proposal to exactly match the existing granite with new seems unrealistic given the stone’s many years of patination. While the granite sill at the accessible entrance is cracked, there is no apparent displacement around the crack and it might be inconspicuously patched. Replacing it with new stone of a downward sloping profile would also expose now covered parts of contiguous granite elements, likely revealing distractingly different patination. (Section drawings showing the proposed new sill profile in context, which would clarify the extent of this impact, are notably not provided.)

Sincerely,



Jessica Chait
Chair
Manhattan Community Board 4