



CITY OF NEW YORK
MANHATTAN COMMUNITY BOARD FOUR

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JESSICA CHAIT
Chair

JESSE R. BODINE
District Manager

November 14, 2024

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

Re: Proposed modifications to entrances, awnings, and signage at 635-641 Sixth Avenue

Dear Chair Carroll:

Manhattan Community Board 4 (MCB4), at its regularly scheduled meeting on November 6, 2024, voted, by a vote of 37 in favor, 0 opposed, 0 abstaining, and 0 present but not eligible to vote, to recommend to the Landmarks Preservation Commission (LPC) approval with conditions of a Certificate of Appropriateness for the proposed modifications at 635-641 Sixth Avenue in the Ladies Mile Historic District.

The Board supports the proposed storefront and awning modifications and signage with the exception of the proposed surface-mounted banner and second-floor-cornice signs, which will permanently damage granite and limestone historic fabric. Even if attachments are located at masonry joints, they will permanently damage stonework; this is evident from loss of stone where this was done in the past. The masonry's elegant one-quarter-inch joints simply do not lend themselves to this approach. We may support appropriate surface-mounted signage only with attachments into replacement stone or filler where original stone has already been removed and patched. Our recommended approval is contingent upon substitution of non-invasive signage for these surface-mounted signs.

Background

635-642 Sixth Avenue was built in 1900-1902 as the Simpson, Crawford & Simpson department store. It was designed in a restrained Beau-Arts style by the notable architectural firm of William Hume & Son and stands within the Ladies Mile Historic District, designated in 1989.

The proposed storefronts, awning, and signage changes will support the new tenancy of the National Museum of Mathematics on much of the building's first and second floors. CB4 welcomes this educational and cultural use to our district and hopes that the monumental building will enhance the museum's civic presence.

CB4 Recommendations

Storefronts

We support the proposed storefront modifications and ask the Commission to ensure that the new knee wall next to the service door on Nineteenth Street matches nearby limestone knee walls including tooling.

Canopies

We do not object to the proposed modification of non-original storefront framing on Nineteenth Street where retractable awnings are to be installed. While no such modification is proposed for original storefront framing which is also to receive awnings, *no attachment detail is provided for these locations*. We ask the Commission to ensure that awnings are attached here with minimal impact on the historic storefront framing, which has decorative features. The existing awning attachments on Sixth Avenue are appropriate and should serve as a guide.

Signage

We support the proposed interior and glass-mounted signage but not the proposed surface-mounted banner and second-floor-cornice signs, which would be invasive of historic fabric. This signage would not respect the principle of reversibility, as its future removal would leave permanent scars on the building's refined limestone and granite surfaces. This is a special concern for a landmark-protected structure that may stand for centuries to come. The applicant has suggested that the attachments could be limited to existing masonry joints, but these are only one-quarter-inch thick and will not accommodate insertion of anchors without damage to adjacent stone edges. Such damage from earlier joint attachments is apparent on the building's facades.

We do not object to the new, fixed, Sixth Avenue entrance canopy, but note that a further perspective view of it from below as seen by a nearby pedestrian would help the Commission better evaluate its design. We would not object to prominent signage incorporated into the front of this canopy in place of the second-floor-cornice signage now proposed above it.

We recommended to the applicant reuse of existing two facade flagpoles in place of the proposed banner signs, and were told that the building owner would not allow it. We encourage finding an accommodation to put these flagpoles back to use as they were by the previous tenant, as can be seen in an application presentation photo.

We encourage the applicant and LPC to work toward a signage solution in keeping with the Commission's guidelines for signage that can be approved by staff.

Protection of thistle mosaics

We note that the building has particularly fine mosaic-tile thresholds just outside original building entrances. These feature a thistle motif symbolic of Scotland, a nod to the nationality of the Simpson, Crawford & Simpson department store's founders, as well as that of architects Hume & son. They are miraculous survivors of 122 years of foot traffic and deserve protection and restoration. We ask the Commission to ensure that they are protected during execution of the proposed work and any other construction at the building.

Sincerely,



Jessica Chair
Chair
Manhattan
Community Board 4



Kerry Keenen
Co-Chair
Chelsea
Land Use Committee

[Signed 11/14/24]
Gregory Morris
Co-Chair
Chelsea
Land Use Committee

cc: Hon. Mark Levine, Manhattan Borough President
Hon. Erik Bottcher, City Council
Applicant for 635-641 Sixth Avenue