



CITY OF NEW YORK

**MANHATTAN COMMUNITY BOARD FOUR**

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**CHRISTINE BERTHET**  
Chair

**JESSE R. BODINE**  
District Manager

July 30, 2015

Hon. Gale A. Brewer  
Manhattan Borough President  
1 Centre Street, 19<sup>th</sup> Floor,  
New York, NY 10007

**Re: High Line Hotel**

Dear Borough President Brewer:

This letter requests your intervention on behalf of Community Board 4 in regard to the Landmarks Preservation Commission's unilateral approval of alterations to the Highline Hotel's forecourt at 180 Tenth Avenue in the Chelsea Historic District. The Commission has acted in a manner dismissive of CB4's formally stated concerns and subverted the public participation on which the Community Board system is based.

Specifically, the Commission recently issued two Permits adversely affecting the historic General Theological Seminary architecture, which is the focus of the Chelsea Historic District.

On May 9, the Commission issued Permit CNE 17-0010 (attached) allowing "a free standing bar with canopy at the southwest corner of the property to be removed by September 30, 2015." This covered bar was first installed without a permit last summer. CB4 objected to it in a letter to LPC Chair Srinivasan last year, resulting in the attached LPC Warning Letter. While the bar was removed for the winter season, it reappeared this spring, legalized by the Commission's Permit, which was granted without presentation to - or opportunity for comment by - CB4. Our greatest concern is that the Permit sets the stage for annual renewal of approval for the bar and its permanent, unsightly presence. It should be noted that the bar is not "free standing" but bolted to a permanent foundation and that it substantially blocks views of the Seminary façade, as shown in the attached photos from Tenth Avenue and West 20th Street.

On June 6, the Commission issued Permit PMW 17-1087 (attached) allowing "two HVAC units and a transformer . . . partially screened by an existing stone wall, with two ducts extending from the units and attaching to the west façade . . . and extending through existing window openings . . ." As seen in the attached photo, this equipment detracts

extraordinarily from the historic Seminary architecture, designed for picturesque effect by notable architect Charles Coolidge Haight. Confronted with community complaints about a similar eyesore in place for much of last summer, a representative of the Hotel then stated that it was a temporary measure pending installation of central air conditioning. This clearly was not the case. As with the LPC Permit for the bar, the stage is set for annual permit renewal and the permanent presence of an HVAC solution that is only “temporary” in being seasonal.

Issuance of these Permits follows on a sweeping staff-level Amendment legalizing several violations in the same forecourt, as documented in our letter to you of \_\_\_\_\_ (attached). This Amendment allowed about 90% of the forecourt to be paved. The amount of paved area versus green space had been a major subject of discussion by the Community Board and among Landmarks commissioners in the two public hearings held on the issue. The Commission eventually approved increasing the paved area from approximately one-third to about 71% of the total forecourt area, reducing it from the approximately 74% sought by the applicant during the permitting process, significantly less than the 90% allowed by staff. What had been a garden oasis is now a paved commercial venue unrecognizable as the design presented to CB4 or the public in LPC hearings.

It should be noted that none of the Commission’s actions favoring the Hotel can be justified on grounds of practical difficulty or unnecessary hardship. They all benefit the Hotel’s commercial ends, including its use of the historic Seminary refectory as an event venue demanding increased air conditioning. It is also remarkable that the Commission is so willing to accommodate an owner who built so much without regard for the permit process, creating a dangerous, pernicious precedent and making fools of owners who play by the rules.

We ask your help in gaining assurances from the LPC that it will not Renew Permits for the bar and HVAC equipment in the future. We also ask your help in reducing the forecourt’s paved area to the 71% approved by the Commission, and having the surrounding privacy hedge reduced to allow the public to enjoy this historical resource, as presented to and expected by the Commissioners and the community. Such actions would go far toward renewing our faith in the Landmark Preservation Commission and in the public participation promised by the Community Board system.

Sincerely,



Christine Berthet  
Chair



J. Lee Compton  
Co-Chair  
Chelsea Land Use Committee



Betty Mackintosh  
Co-Chair  
Chelsea Land Use  
Committee