

October 27, 2003

Hon. Robert Tierney
Chair
Landmarks Preservation Commission
Ninth floor, Municipal Building
1 Center Street
New York, NY 10009

Re: 202 Ninth Avenue

Dear Chair Tierney,

Manhattan Community Board No. 4 thanks you for the opportunity to comment on the application for a Certificate of Appropriateness seeking to legalize violations for alterations, many of long standing, to the ground-floor restaurant at 202 Ninth Avenue in the Chelsea Historic District Extension. Because of the scheduled hearing on October 28, this letter was adopted by the Executive Committee at its regular meeting on October 27th and is subject to ratification by the full Board at its regular meeting on November 5th.

The restaurant, although far from typical of historic architecture in Chelsea, is regarded as an informal landmark in the immediate neighborhood because of its idiosyncratic design, which has lasted since 1935 on a changing commercial strip and corresponded to the personality of a long-time owner of the establishment. At the presentation by a representative of the present owner to the Chelsea Preservation and Planning Committee on October 20, the committee focused on the continuing integrity of the character of the storefront design. Although the Committee was not aware of the details of all the violations, the Committee felt that the changes made by the existing tenant are on the whole positive.

The principal concerns were the color of the painted wooden elements and the signage. The committee felt that the conversion of the side windows into doors some years ago by a previous owner did not have a major impact on the design.

The bright blue color of the doors and their frames, although based on the color of some of the blocks in the lower part of the front, dominates the effect of the façade and disturbs the balance of the design, which is based on an arrangement of red, blue, and lighter elements. It is also jarringly inconsistent with the color of the side door to the apartments above that can be seen on the right. A more neutral color would bring out the character of the storefront.

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For many years the main signage was on a canopy present at designation but removed fairly recently by a previous occupant. This has improved a streetscape cluttered with other canopies and is therefore appropriate, but the substitute signage obscures features of the design that add to its character. The little awnings over the side doors carrying the name of the establishment effectively hide an interesting design element, the projecting hoods over these doors, which seem to have once been covered with slate or shingles. The upper porthole windows are hidden by round signs bearing the words "BAR" and "CAFE" These little windows originally formed significant voids in the design. Although sometimes partially filled in the past, they remained recessed elements and lose some of their effect if they are flat with the surface. Alternative signage should be sought.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Walter Mankoff". The signature is written in a cursive, somewhat stylized script.

Walter Mankoff
Chair

cc: Applicant