



CITY OF NEW YORK

**MANHATTAN COMMUNITY BOARD No. 4**

330 West 42<sup>nd</sup> Street, 26<sup>th</sup> floor New York, NY 10036  
tel: 212-736-4536 fax: 212-947-9512  
www.ManhattanCB4.org

**J. LEE COMPTON**  
Chair

**MICHELLE SOLOMON**  
Acting District Manager

February 10, 2006

Hon. Robert Tierney  
Chair  
Landmarks Preservation Commission  
One Center Street, Ninth floor  
New York, NY 10007

**Re: 323 West 22<sup>nd</sup> Street**  
**Chelsea Historic District**

Dear Chair Tierney,

Manhattan Community Board No. 4 thanks you for the opportunity to comment on this application for alterations for the Greek Revival rowhouse at 323 West 22<sup>nd</sup> Street on the edge of the Chelsea Historic District. On January 25, 2006, the architect made a detailed presentation to the Landmarks Task Force of the Board, which failed to have a legal quorum. At its monthly meeting on February 1, the full Board voted to oppose the application as inappropriate by a vote of 30 in favor, 2 opposed, 2 abstaining, and none present but not eligible to vote.

The treatment of the street façade, which is largely intact, is thoughtful and appropriate, and has received a staff-level permit. The remaining issues involve the rear of the building, where it is proposed to create an entirely new façade that will be invisible from the public way, completely contemporary in character, and requiring the removal of the few existing historic features. This work includes replacing the existing addition, which is relatively recent and contains no historic elements, with a new addition slightly shallower in its enclosed bulk but continuing to the rear lot line in the form of a staircase leading down from the parlor floor and six-foot white concrete walls enclosing the entire rear yard. Some concrete elements are significantly higher: the solid railings of the steps leading into the largely paved garden area, and two square elements described informally as surfaces “to bounce balls off.”

This treatment raises two issues. The first is the impact on the garden interior of this partial rowhouse block. This portion is largely open and planted, with dividers of varying height and character. A recent light wooden fence somewhat west of the property is the most prominent one. There is nothing nearby like the heavy concrete walls proposed, which are even doubled on the west side of the garden. While the garden of this property has indeed been recently raised by roughly two feet of earth so that some enclosure may be required, the height and solidity of the enclosure bordering the entire rear garden is incompatible with the historic open feel of the garden interior of the block and is inappropriate. The enclosure would to a very significant extent divide this “doughnut hole” into two distinct parts. The solid wall serving as railing on the

**R. Tierney**  
**January 5, 2006**  
**Page 2 of 2**

exterior of the upper stairs and the inappropriate vertically projecting elements are particularly intrusive and would reinforce this effect.

The other issue is the removal of the existing window openings on the third floor (the original top floor). Their replacement by a large modern window extending upward to the floor above would remove the only remaining historic element of the rear façade and should not be approved. Most of the buildings backing on the garden on the side included in the Historic District preserve at least one story containing the historic rear windows. Preserving these windows would require recasting the contemporary façade proposed, but appropriate revision of the treatment of the garden should itself entail a restudy of this façade in any case.

Only indirectly related to this permit, but necessary to the view of the proposal as a whole, is the fact that construction inside the building has caused some damage to the adjacent properties, particularly to the house to the west, which is separated only by one of the thin party walls frequently found in the simultaneous construction of related houses in this period. There has been damage in this building, including the historic parlor fireplace and the carefully restored wall covering nearby. The Commission should ensure that no further damage is done and that damaged features are made whole.

Sincerely,



J. Lee Compton  
Chair  
Manhattan Community Board No. 4

cc: Hon. Michael Bloomberg, Mayor  
Hon. Scott Stringer, Manhattan Borough President  
Local Elected Officials  
Applicant  
Ms Hilda Regier (327 West 22<sup>nd</sup>)  
Ms Eleanor Horowitz (323 West 22<sup>nd</sup>)