



CITY OF NEW YORK

MANHATTAN COMMUNITY BOARD No. 4

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J. LEE COMPTON
Chair

ROBERT J. BENFATTO, JR., ESQ.
District Manager

October 6, 2006

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

Re: 343 West 20th Street, Chelsea Historic District

Dear Chair Tierney:

On September 21, 2006, the architect/developer for this project presented to the Landmarks Task Force of Manhattan Community Board No. 4 revised designs for restoration of the 20th Street façade of this Greek revival rowhouse and the still considerable proposals for alterations and additions to its back and rooftop. These would be visible from West 21st Street over the public open space of a school playground. The Task Force adopted a letter recognizing the improvements to the proposal but opposing the extensions proposed in the rear of the building. At the regular full Board meeting on October 4, 2006, the Board unanimously voted to adopt the following letter:

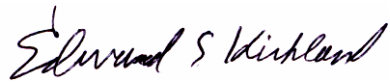
In the front façade on 20th Street the Board supports the proposed restoration and has no objections to the insertion of attic windows and placement of a cornice in the existing awkwardly raised parapet. In the rear facing the playground we acknowledge that the proposed additions have been reduced, but believe that even so almost all the proposed rear yard additions are inconsistent with maintaining the character of the largely intact historic rear façade. The rear of this row is of exceptional value in that the brick walls with the original window openings are almost wholly preserved on the lower floors without rear extensions and that this historic character is fully visible from the public way.

Because of existing additions to neighboring buildings, the Board does not object to adding a fourth floor, but it should be of brick and based on the relatively high existing wall. Further additions upward should be allowed only if they can be so designed that no new wall or roof shall be visible from the public way on West 21st Street. The visual scale of the row as seen from the rear must not be lost.

Since the rear of the row is visible from the public way, maintaining the historic character of the existing walls and windows on the lower levels is essential. The intact second and third floors should be preserved without significant change. Historically these floors were not extended to the rear in the period of significance of rowhouses. In this application the proposed addition on the second floor is completely unhistorical with its huge window and its cantilevering out in an awkward attempt to provide partial light though a clerestory to the rear windows of the parlor floor apartment occupied by the remaining legal tenant. Neither historic preservation nor tenants' rights are served by such contrivances.

Although rear additions like tea porches have a historic basis on parlor floors, there is no evidence that any existed here. In any case the addition proposed here has no relation to historic additions typical at this level. Further, as designed it blocks the tenant's protected light. In view of the intact character of the visible lower floors of this row the Board cannot accept as appropriate any rear extension above the basement level. Even at this level the size and character of the addition might be reviewed with a view to making it less obtrusive.

Sincerely,



Edward Kirkland
Chair
Landmark Task Force
Manhattan Community Board 4



J. Lee Compton
Chair
Manhattan Community Board 4