



CITY OF NEW YORK

**MANHATTAN COMMUNITY BOARD FOUR**

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**JEAN-DANIEL NOLAND**  
Chair

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

October 6, 2008

Hon. Robert Tierney  
Chair  
Landmarks Preservation Commission  
Municipal Building 9<sup>th</sup> Floor  
One Center Street  
New York, NY 10007

**Re: Former IRT Powerhouse  
59<sup>th</sup> Street and Route 9A**

Dear Chair Tierney:

Manhattan Community Board 4 is writing to reaffirm its long-held support of the designation of the former Interborough Rapid Transit Powerhouse as a New York City landmark and to welcome the recent initiative of the recently created Powerhouse Group in pursuing this designation and in seeking new uses for the underutilized interior spaces of the building.

The importance of the powerhouse to the first subway in New York is reflected in the amount of space given to an elaborate treatment of the advanced technology of the building in the third chapter of the commemorative book, *The New York Subway*, produced after the subway opening. This makes clear both the dominant role played by technical requirements and the skills of the engineers that resolved them in shaping the interior spaces and the general form of the building.

An interesting passage on page 74 reads, "Several plans were taken up looking to the construction of a power house of massive and simple design, but it was finally decided to adopt an ornate style of treatment by which the structure would be rendered architecturally attractive and in harmony with the recent tendencies of municipal and city improvements from an architectural standpoint. At the initial stage of the power house design Mr. Stanford White, of the firm of McKim, Mead & White, of New York, volunteered his services to the company as an advisor on the matter of the design of the facework, and, as his offer was accepted, his connection with the work has resulted in the development of the present exterior design and the selection of the materials used."

The resulting structure shows an impressive exterior and remarkable interior spaces, some of them of them now unused. Above all, the great hall that contained the huge

generators or dynamos is now empty. Suggestions for reuse like those of the Powerhouse Group could point the way toward making this extraordinary interior into one of the great public spaces in New York, and recent changes in the area might support reuse of the underutilized portions of the interior for purposes that would turn the building into a source of income that could enable adequate long-term maintenance and possibly even restoration of missing or destroyed elements of the exterior.

Community Board 4 recognizes that the present moment may not be ripe for such improvements; but we urge that designation be no longer delayed. The building is important both for its historic importance and for its impressive architectural quality. It is risky to rely on the presumably still existing standstill agreement to protect the building indefinitely, and it is essential to ensure preservation of the exterior and, we hope, the interior spaces it encloses until a time when the proposals of the Powerhouse Group might be the seeds for future uses that may truly enrich New York. The IRT Powerhouse must not be defaced or lost.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Jd', with a long horizontal stroke extending to the left.

Jean-Daniel Noland  
Chair  
Manhattan Community Board 4

c.c.  
The Power House Group