



CITY OF NEW YORK

**MANHATTAN COMMUNITY BOARD FOUR**

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**John Weis**  
Chair

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

July 27, 2009

Hon. Robert B. Tierney  
Chair  
Landmarks Preservation Commission  
Municipal Building, ninth floor  
One Center Street  
New York, NY 10007

**Re: Storefront at 409 West 12<sup>th</sup> Street  
Gansevoort Market Historic District**

Dear Chair Tierney:

Manhattan Community Board 4 is writing about the application for a Certificate of Appropriateness for modification of a storefront at 409 West 14<sup>th</sup> Street in that portion of the Gansevoort Market Historic District within Community Board 4. The Board recommends approval of much of the application, but has serious concerns about various aspects as presented to the Landmarks Committee on June 16, 2009, in particular the orange fixed awnings and the smoked glass in the storefront windows.

The removal of the recent wooden infill elements in the façade now underway is appropriate, as these elements bore no relation to the historic architecture or materials. We commend the extension of the historic storefront cornice on the eastern portion of the building westward to include this portion. We have no objection in principle to the minor modifications of the doors and windows in the storefronts, as these are in a largely modern but mostly grandfathered storefront base. We believe in particular that most of the regularization of the openings at the base of the building and in particular the relocation and other changes to align the muntins and other dividers or at the top of the doors and show windows are commendable as giving more order and unity to the façade. We have some concerns, however, about the new solid infill proposed for the three easternmost bays in the general context of glass at this level. At the major time of significance historic photographs show that much of the ground floor was occupied by loading docks under a canopy extending well over the width of the sidewalk, and the glass at the base recalls this condition.

The Board considers two elements in particular of the proposed façade as presented at the committee meeting definitely inappropriate: the smoked glass shown for the windows and the conspicuous orange fixed awnings, both apparently proposed to diminish the

effects of bright sunlight on persons inside the tall, south-facing front. Neither of these elements is consistent with the historic character of this building or the Gansevoort Market Historic District in general. Smoked glass is a recent product, unknown for architectural use at the period of significance of the historic district, inconsistent with the appearance of historic windows, and giving a clearly modern effect at the street level. It was suggested at the committee meeting that wire glass might be a more historic material than smoked glass that would reduce glare in the interior. The orange fixed awnings proposed would introduce a glaring modern element on the street and are clearly inappropriate.

Instead of smoked glass and fixed awnings a metal canopy based on historical precedents in the historic district by tie-rods from above or metal posts from below would shade the windows, be fully appropriate, and link the storefront to the major period of significance for the district. Historic photographs show large canopies on this building as on many others nearby, and modern canopies recalling the old ones have been approved by the Commission at several locations in the district.

Since the Landmarks Committee meeting CB4 has learned that boards for this proposal were available at a recent Public Review Session that showed a proposal apparently differing from that seen by the Landmarks Committee only in the removal of the awnings. While this is an improvement, we remain concerned both with the nature of the glass and that advantage was not taken of the opportunity to require creation of a modern canopy, as has been approved by the Commission for nearby buildings in the Gansevoort Market Historic District. The board has been consistently concerned by the completely modern storefronts on this section of 14<sup>th</sup> Street, which is producing in the north side of 14<sup>th</sup> Street within the historic district a character inconsistent with that of the major period of significance of the district.

Sincerely,



John Weis  
Chair, Manhattan Community Board 4



Edward Kirkland  
Chair, Landmarks Committee

c.c.  
Applicant