



CITY OF NEW YORK

MANHATTAN COMMUNITY BOARD FOUR

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

JOHN WEIS
Chair

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

October 1, 2009

Hon. Robert B Tierney
Chair
Landmarks Preservation Commission
Municipal Building, 9th floor
One Center Street
New York, NY 10007

Re: Former New York Savings Bank, 81 Eighth Avenue, Manhattan

Dear Chair Tierney:

Manhattan Community Board is writing about the former New York Savings Bank, an individual and an interior landmark designed by the distinguished architect R. H. Robertson and located at the northwest corner of Eighth Avenue and 14th Street within the Chelsea portion of Community District 4, and most recently a Balducci's store. While the Board has no objection to the major aspects of the alterations proposed in order to convert the space into a CVS retail outlet, it has concerns about several parts of the proposal.

On the interior the impressive banking hall is essentially intact and at this point fully visible after the removal of the stands set up for the gourmet store. The marble and terrazzo floor is largely intact except for the penetrations for lighting the stands, and will be preserved and restored. The concrete risers or "platform" at the base of the western wall date only to a later period of the bank's occupancy, as is shown by the fact that they extend into the later and undesignated northern wing; and so their removal is appropriate. Locating the counters on the south side of the space is appropriate and roughly corresponds to the historic location of the bank counters, although these were slightly farther to the west, as reflected by the floor materials in this area. The stands of the new store appear to be slightly less obtrusive than those of its predecessor, and much less so than the carpet store that preceded it. Both stands and cases should be supplied with power from the existing floor penetrations with minimal visible conduits.

We regret that practically all the base of the side walls is proposed to be hidden behind modern installations like cases and counters; and we believe that at least the area around the bases of the two tall, all but engaged columns of fine variegated marble located at the

corner of the wing on the north side and directly opposite on the south should be kept fully clear so that these features can properly recall the historic grandeur of the interior.

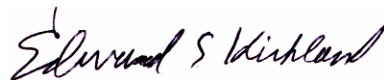
The major concern of the Board is the proposed location of the pharmacy at the far end of this fine interior. Its strong presence at the end of the view of the interior as one enters diminishes considerably the striking impression of the plain marble wall with its central clock and impinges significantly on the space. The applicant's representative stated that the store would have preferred to locate the pharmacy within the later and undesignated northern wing for the commercial reason of bringing traffic through all sections of the store, but had found this infeasible. There clearly is room and more for locating the pharmacy within this later wing, even if existing stairs and other features make this difficult; but it seems likely that the problem is basically that of fitting a standard pre-designed and possibly prefabricated element into an awkward existing space. We believe that the applicant can surely find flexibility and ingenuity enough to devise a solution that would serve both commerce and preservation.

On the exterior the principal issue is that of signage, and we believe the grandfathered locations proposed are prominent and sufficient. We note that standard signage for CVS is large, heavy, and bright red; and we hope that some flexibility will be possible here and any conduits or penetrations minimal and well hidden. The flags on the avenue and the banner on 14th Street are grandfathered. We believe that internally or back-lighted signage can be appropriate in the existing signage locations in non-original elements of the design, the corner clock and the two low vertical elements flanking the front stairs, provided that the signage fits within the grandfathered framing. The historic lettering of the bank name in the street and avenue locations in the cornice frieze is formal and subdued; and so, while enclosing the original lettering under a channel is acceptable, new signage in these locations must be very carefully treated lest it unhistorically dominate the design. Finally we note that on the 14th Street side internal elements just behind two windows in the pedimented central section are proposed to carry lighted messages planned to be visible from 14th Street. These will significantly diminish this major and untouched element of the design. While technically these elements may be internal, we hope that this unfortunate impact on the design can be avoided.

Sincerely,



John Weis
Chair, Manhattan Community Board 4



Edward Kirkland
Chair, Landmarks Committee

c.c.
Applicant