



CITY OF NEW YORK

MANHATTAN COMMUNITY BOARD FOUR

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District Manager

May 5, 2010

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

**Re: 347 West 21st Street
Chelsea Historic District**

Dear Chair Tierney:

Community Board 4 Manhattan is writing about the complex application to remove dormers and alter the roof of the house at 347 West 21st Street in the Chelsea Historic District and to enlarge and alter the rear yard addition. The Board considers the majority of the proposed changes to be inappropriate and of a nature to diminish the historic character of the house and of this portion of the Chelsea Historic District.

In front it is proposed to remove the existing dormers and replace them with a tall slate mansard with elaborate dormers that will be quite visible from the street. Raising the roof here is apparently to serve the purpose of hiding from the public way on 21st Street a proposed tall “garret-style penthouse” behind and above it with access to a roof terrace. Replacing the dormers appropriate to an early Italianate-style house built in 1859 by such a mansard, a feature typical of buildings and styles dating significantly later in the century, is clearly inappropriate. The application materials cite two full mansards in the whole of the Chelsea Historic District (326 and 424 West 22nd Street): these are clearly late and unfortunate changes to earlier Greek Revival buildings.

The early designation report, which like most of this date rarely goes into details of buildings, nevertheless remarks favorably of the existing roof alteration in the front of 347, “The addition of a skylight between the dormers and behind the elaborate cornice has been so successfully inserted that it is all but invisible from the street.” An invisible change is very different from a full mansard, which is intended to make an impression.

The rear of the building is exceptional in that it is fully visible above the lowest floors from the public way of 22nd Street to the north through a gap between buildings created by the entrance to a garage in the cellar at the east end of 360 West 22nd Street, a large white-brick apartment building at the southeast corner of Ninth Avenue dating from a time a little before the creation of the historic district, to the creation of which it was doubtless a stimulus. The view through the gap shows on the right (the west) of the building a rear addition of white-painted brick rising covering about three-fifths of the total building width and completely windowless above the second floor. On the left (the east) a narrow portion of what appears to be the original rear wall is visible but with

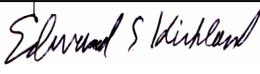
paired windows of a length almost certainly too great to represent the original fenestration. On top of the whole is the rear of the fourth floor of the building dating from the earlier alteration favorably cited in the designation report and that inserted an almost invisible skylight in the front and created in the rear a new roof with two dormer openings like those in front, of which one is a true window, the other a door providing access to the roof of the extension. The rear façade is mostly in poor condition,

It is proposed to widen the rear extension to cover the full width and height of the building. The basement and parlor floors will be all but completely of glass, pairs of doubled long windows will almost fill the second and third floors, and the two stories of the “garret-like glass penthouse” top the design, here partly covering a stair that leads to a roof terrace. This design is excessive and very visible.

In its review of rear extensions to rowhouses the Commission has usually followed the principle that at least part of the historic rear wall should be preserved even if not visible from the street, and in this case much of the historic wall is even visible in the narrow eastern portion. It was stated that there are indications that this portion was once filled in to the second floor, and it seems appropriate to permit allowing widening the extension up to this point to full width while leaving in place the historic wall above. The existence of the “garret-style penthouse”, much of which actually encloses a stairway, depends completely on the mansard proposed in the front to act as a screen to hide it from the public way on 21st Street. With its absence of any material but glass it reflects present architectural modes rather than those of any earlier period. It is clearly inappropriate.

The existing rooftop addition is an excellent design, and is a reminder of past periods of prosperity in Chelsea. It is handsome, and should be preserved and restored. For the stories below it the basic concept of the proposal is acceptable if modified by the preservation of the upper portion of the historic rear wall where it exists and by restudy of the multiple windows proposed in order to balance glass with masonry and not be completely inconsistent with historic fenestration. Breaking up the large blank rear wall of the existing extension with appropriate windows would clearly improve the rear view of the building.

Sincerely,

		
John Weiss <i>Chair</i> Manhattan Community Board 4	Edward S. Kirkland Co-Chair Landmarks Committee	John D. Lamb Co-Chair Landmarks Committee

CC: applicant