

October 27, 2003

Hon. Robert Tierney
Chair
Landmarks Preservation Commission
Ninth floor, Municipal Building
100 Center Street
New York, NY 10007

Re: Hugh O'Neill Building, 655 Sixth Avenue

Dear Chair Tierney,

Manhattan Community Board No. 4 thanks you for the opportunity to comment on the linked applications for the Hugh O'Neill Department Store on Sixth Avenue in the portion of the Ladies' Mile Historic District within the Board. Because of the hearing on October 28th this letter was adopted by the Executive Committee of the Board at its meeting on October 17th and is subject to ratification by the full Board at its regular meeting on November 5th.

The Board supports both applications: for a Certificate of Appropriateness, and for a report relating to a Modification of Bulk pursuant to Section 74-711 of the Zoning Resolution. We have a few concerns that will be noted below.

The full presentation by the applicant to the Chelsea Preservation and Planning Committee on October 20th showed that the proposed rooftop addition was all but invisible from the public way. Only a few low portions of the addition will be visible from a few points, and in the view across Sixth Avenue to the central façade and pediment it will not show at all. The corner towers will be restored to their full height and crowned by the golden domes that advertised Hugh O'Neill to both passengers on the Sixth Avenue El and pedestrians.

The only view of the building that will be significantly altered by the addition itself is the view over the Shearith Israel cemetery on 21st Street. Although this façade is utilitarian, the cumulative effect of the alterations will be to increase considerably the height of the building directly to the east and south of the cemetery. While the Board did not consider that the changes created a significant loss of appropriateness, we were concerned that the increased shadow from the raised rear walls might affect the environment and plantings in the historic cemetery. This impact should be reviewed in evaluating the special permit under 74-711.

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The Board also was concerned that the striking glass façade of the store on Sixth Avenue must be preserved. Where appropriate and feasible over time the much-altered storefronts should be returned to their historic character. The report on the 74-711 application for a modification of bulk should address these issues.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Walter Mankoff". The signature is written in a cursive, somewhat stylized script.

Walter Mankoff

Chair

cc: Applicant