

January 9, 2004

Hon. Meenakshi Srinivasan
Chair
Board of Standards and Appeals
40 Rector Street
New York, NY 10007

Re: Variance for use at 406 West 31st Street

Dear Ms. Srinivasan,

Manhattan Community No. 4, at its regular meeting on January 7, 2004, voted 32 in favor, 0 against, 0 abstaining, 0 present but not eligible, that it had no objection to the proposed use variance at 406 West 31st Street.

The applicant, the Fashion Institute of Technology, seeks a variance permitting the conversion of a building in an M zone into a residence hall for FIT students. While the Board in general prefers to avoid the loss of manufacturing sites and “zoning by variance,” it appreciates the creative reuse of this building to help FIT better serve its students. The Board appreciates the applicant’s careful attention to environmental issues such as energy efficiency, and notes that the conversion will add no new automobile traffic to the community.

The Board appreciates the comprehensiveness of the applicant’s consideration of the conversion’s impacts on the community and on the future student residents of the hall, and appreciates the applicant’s receptivity to the Board’s suggestions during a series of discussions. The Board has had three areas of concern that have been discussed with the applicant.

i. Noise and air quality. Because of the building’s proximity to Lincoln Tunnel entrances, noise and exhaust fumes from heavy automobile traffic could have significant impact on the hall’s residents. The applicant and its architects have taken steps to address these issues, and we urge them to continue to explore further means of reducing their impact.

ii. Vacant lot. There is an irregularly shaped vacant lot owned by the Port Authority behind the building, on which the Board has advocated the creation of affordable housing. It would be a difficult building site, but were a building to be built on it, it could have a significant impact on light and air for the residents of the FIT building. The Board

reaffirms its support for affordable housing on this lot and urges the applicant and its architects to address the effects of such a building on the hall's residents.

iii. Increased pedestrian traffic. Both the Board and the applicant anticipate a significant increase in pedestrian traffic between the building and the main FIT campus. Some of the intersections along possible walking routes are dangerous, notably 30th Street on the west side of Ninth Avenue and 29th Street on the east side of Ninth Avenue. The applicant plans to advise students to choose a preferred route that avoids these intersections, but the Board believes that such recommendations are unlikely to have much influence on students hurrying to or from classes. In addition to the proposed remedy we recommend exploring other measures such as improved automobile signage before crosswalks and improved striping to indicate traffic patterns.

Sincerely,



Walter Mankoff
Chair
Manhattan Community Board No. 4



Lee Compton
Co-Chair
Chelsea Preservation & Planning Committee



Edward S. Kirkland
Co-Chair
Chelsea Preservation & Planning Committee

Cc: Local Elected Officials

Department of Business Services
Sharon Ullman, 23rd Street Association
Manhattan Office, Department of City Planning
Department of Buildings
Michael Weil, Zoning and Urban Design, Department of City Planning