



CITY OF NEW YORK

**MANHATTAN COMMUNITY BOARD No. 4**

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**J. LEE COMPTON**  
Chair

**ANTHONY M. BORELLI**  
District Manager

October 7, 2005

Hon. Robert Tierney  
Chair  
Landmarks Preservation Commission  
One Center Street, 9<sup>th</sup> Floor  
New York, NY 1007

**Re: 401 West 14<sup>th</sup> Street - Gansevoort Market Historic District**

Dear Mr. Tierney:

After a full presentation of this application by the Architect Richard Cook to the Landmarks Task Force of Manhattan Community Board No. 4 on September 29, 2005, the Task Force voted without opposition to approve this application conditionally. At the regular full Board meeting on October 6, the Community Board voted 28 in favor, 0 opposed, 0 abstaining, and 1 present but not eligible to vote, to approve the application with the exceptions and conditions listed below.

**Background**

401-403 West 14<sup>th</sup> Street is a three-story Arts-and-Crafts style structure built in 1923 and occupying a prominent position in the Gansevoort Historic District at the northwest corner of 14<sup>th</sup> Street and Ninth Avenue. Historically it formed part of the meat market that is the central defining characteristic of the district, with truck loading on 14<sup>th</sup> Street and storefronts along the Ninth Avenue frontage. The ground floor has been heavily altered in recent years and a large billboard was erected on the roof in 2000.

The Board whole-heartedly approves the restoration of this late Arts and Crafts building and commends the architect on the skill and care demonstrated in the proposal. We are pleased that the applicant recognizes that building to the full 5.0 FAR allowed by zoning would produce a building seriously out of scale and character with its surroundings. We are also pleased that the applicant is not seeking a zoning change to permit residential use.

**Recommendations**

The Board supports in concept the proposed treatment of the ground floor, but has concerns about the storefront design. Our initial concerns about the canopy have been resolved by the proposal to use corrugated glass. The proposed replication of the windows should address the operation of the windows as well as their appearance. Above all, the Board believes that the combined impact on the historic character of the building of the huge existing billboard and the proposed rooftop addition is inappropriate and unacceptable.

### **The billboard**

The large billboard topping the building appears to be grandfathered, since it was present at the time of designation. The 2000 date of the sign precedes the designation of the district only by a few years and is clearly later than the period of significance of the Historic District, which is that of a market area that goes back many years but reached its peak in the early 20<sup>th</sup> Century. Indeed the appearance of such billboards in the area actually marked the fading of the meat market, so that the current presence of billboards in the District diminishes its distinctive character.

Nevertheless it is argued in favor of this billboard that it marks this important District intersection, which it reflects in its placing and shape, and that it is high enough to form an element silhouetted against the sky and visually separate from the building below. These qualities are seriously diminished, however, by the proposal for a rooftop addition.

### **The rooftop addition**

An examination of the site with the mockup reveals that the proposed rooftop addition would be clearly visible from streets around the building and is close enough to the building line as to diminish somewhat the freestanding character of the upper portion of the handsome and distinctive corner pavilions. Although an attempt has been made to preserve much of the open character of the existing billboard, from many viewpoints nearby the addition together with the billboard will form a mass blocking this openness and visually linking the billboard to the building. The combination of the addition and the billboard would produce a totality of unhistoric objects on the roof that would have a major and inappropriate effect on the historic character of the building.

However, if the billboard were to be removed and the proposed addition could be approved, provided its design is clearly differentiated from the treatment of the ground floor. Although the addition would be more appropriate without a second floor, the Board believes a restudy without the billboard could produce an acceptable second floor by taking into careful account visibility of the allowable rooftop obstructions.

### **Recreating the ground floor**

The Board approves the concept of reflecting the historic open look of the section of the 14<sup>th</sup> Street façade formerly occupied by meat market loading by using large glass sheets in a minimal metal enframement, while reflecting the historic form of the early storefronts elsewhere with transoms and bulkheads largely defined by channeled metal elements. The storefront designs had not been fully developed at the time of the presentation to the committee, and the Board urges attention to the consistency of the final storefront design with the historic storefront pattern and the architectural character of the building.

### **The roofs of the canopy and the building**

The Board approves the concept of recreating a historic sidewalk canopy distinctive of the Gansevoort Meat Market by working from the remaining elements of the historic canopy largely hidden behind and within the existing exaggerated canopy over the entrance to the Western Beef location on 14<sup>th</sup> Street. The proposed design displayed to the Board's Landmarks Task Force, which had a transparent glass sheet roof over supporting members recreated from historic elements and photographs, has been significantly improved by the current proposal to use

**Hon. Robert Tierney**  
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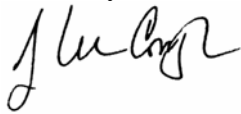
corrugated glass. This should sufficiently retain the feeling of enclosure and shelter created by the opaque roofs of historic canopies in the area. The Board believes the proposed green roof planting on the building is ecologically laudable and appropriately recalls the nearby self-sown current green condition of the High Line bed.

**The distinctive windows**

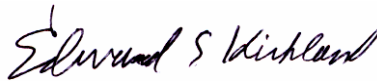
The Board is concerned about the proposed recreation of the present deteriorated large steel windows, each containing a central section that opens horizontally. The architect initially stated that replicating exactly the appearance of the windows with the historic thin muntins precludes under current technology replication of this very distinctive historical mode of operation. This is apparently due to a choice of aluminum with double panes instead of steel. We understand that a different course allowing operation while maintaining the muntins has been followed in similar windows of the Starrett Lehigh Building. Operation and materials are features of distinctive windows that contribute significantly to their character: alternatives that preserve them must be studied in this case to ensure the maximum retention of historic character. The applicant indicated at the Board meeting that it is now exploring restoration of the existing windows, which is a welcomed development

While the Board applauds many aspects of this application, it can approve it only if the issues discussed here are satisfactorily resolved.

Sincerely,



J. Lee Compton  
Chair  
Manhattan Community Board No. 4



Edward S. Kirkland  
Chair  
Landmarks Taskforce

Cc: Manhattan Borough President  
Local elected officials  
applicant