



CITY OF NEW YORK

MANHATTAN COMMUNITY BOARD No. 4

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

J. LEE COMPTON
Chair

MICHELLE SOLOMON
Acting District Manager

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

Re: 415 West 21st Street, Chelsea Historic District

Dear Chair Tierney:

Manhattan Community Board No. 4 thanks you for the opportunity to review the proposed legalization of the recent rear-façade alterations to the rowhouse at 415 West 21st Street in the heart of the Chelsea Historic District. After a presentation by the applicant's architect to the Landmarks Taskforce of the Board on February 21, 2006, the full Board adopted the recommendation of the Taskforce to approve the application with the exception of the third floor alterations at its regular meeting on March 1, 2006, by a vote of 27 in favor, 6 opposed, 0 abstaining, and 0 present but not eligible to vote.

The Board is deeply concerned that these alterations were deliberately performed by the owner without obtaining Landmarks Preservation Commission approval. The excuse given was that the owner needed to move in immediately and did not want construction to be taking place while in occupancy. We are particularly concerned by the fact that the construction altered almost the only surviving historic features on the rear wall, two of the window openings on the third floor, and thus prejudiced any true review of the desirability of preserving these features. The Board regrets that there seems no effective penalty to deter such actions, which diminish, often far more seriously than in this case, the historic integrity and character theoretically protected by Landmarks regulations.

The rear alterations are partially visible from West 22nd Street over a long-existing parking lot, and are thus considerably more significant than most alterations to rear façades in rowhouse blocks. The lower portion of the previous rear façade represents early-to-mid twentieth century alterations, and the relatively minor changes with no effect on historic features raise no issues of appropriateness. There is no significant effect on the rear garden. For these reasons, the Board's only concern is the lengthening downwards of the two hitherto surviving historic window openings on the third floor and their conversion into French doors. Although some of the value of these features has been destroyed by this conversion, the upper portions of the openings retain their historic character; and the illegal change should not be rewarded by legalizing the destruction of a historic feature that should have been properly evaluated. The Board urges denial of this portion of the application and the restoration of the historic window openings with an appropriate window configuration on this floor.

Sincerely,

J. Lee Compton
Chair
Manhattan Community Board No. 4

Edward S. Kirkland
Chair
Landmarks Taskforce

cc: Elected Officials, Applicant, Chelsea West 400 Block Association