



CITY OF NEW YORK

**MANHATTAN COMMUNITY BOARD No. 4**

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**J. LEE COMPTON**  
Chair

**ROBERT J. BENFATTO, JR., ESQ.**  
District Manager

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

**Re: 462 West 23<sup>rd</sup> Street**  
**Chelsea Historic District**

Dear Chair Tierney:

Manhattan Community Board No. 4 thanks you for the opportunity to comment on the application for alterations and additions to 462 West 23<sup>rd</sup> Street in the Chelsea Historic District. After a full presentation by the applicant's architect to the Landmarks Task Force of the Board on September 5, 2006, the full Board ratified the following letter at its full Board meeting on September 6.

The Board, although recognizing the care and thought put both into this proposal and into the presentation to the Landmarks Task Force, and thanking the architect for his responsiveness to part of its concerns by eliminating upward extensions of some openings in the rear wall, cannot support major portions of this application, in particular the extensive modifications of the back of the building, because they are inconsistent with the character of the handsome brownstone row on this portion of 23<sup>rd</sup> Street in the Chelsea Historic District.

The thrust of this application is to install behind the principal façade at 462 West 23<sup>rd</sup> a full modern residence that would not only destroy such significant interior features, of course unregulated by this Commission, as the historic parlor floor, but that would be expressed in a heavily altered rear façade that would bear only a minimal relation to the historic façade. This proposed façade would be incompatible with the character of the enclosed interior space of the block, the so-called "doughnut," and would have an assertively modern upper story clearly visible in the leafless season from the public way on Tenth Avenue.

On 23<sup>rd</sup> Street the Board regrets the decision not to recreate the front stoop, but has no objection in principle to the proposal only to restore the moldings above the windows and to replicate the shallow railing shown in a picture on this building in Lockwood's book on row houses. Nevertheless, the historic remnants of the entrance above the stoop should not be replaced by moldings like those on the historic windows. This piece of historic fabric, still in relatively good condition, recalls the history of this extensive row, in which all but a few stoops have been removed. We also believe that the picture does not offer conclusive evidence that the windows were casements, uncommon at this period; the windows next door appear to be double-hung.

As part of the reconstruction of the building, a large rooftop addition is planned. The mockup shows that the higher chimney required by the proximity of this addition will be significantly more visible from the west side of Tenth Avenue near 24<sup>th</sup> Street than the partially visible existing chimneys on the row. While the increased prominence of the chimney has no major effect in itself because of the irregularity of the existing chimneys and changes in the mockups around the time of Board consideration have left it unclear to us if the rooftop addition itself will be visible from the public way, these issues of visibility must be evaluated as part of the review of the appropriateness of the major addition and the changes in the rear façade associated with it.

The principal concern of the Board is the inappropriate impacts of the proposed alterations on the rear of the building. It is proposed to extend the space on the ground floor and the basement below it seven and a half feet back from the historic rear wall, which is to be completely removed at this point, and to create a new glass wall for the full height and width of the resulting double-height space between the extended party walls. On the original parlor floor above there is to be a terrace overhanging this glass base that will be entered by three doorways created by widening and extending downwards the three windows in the original rear wall. On the next floor up are to be three bedroom windows resembling the original windows but somewhat widened to match the openings above and below. One story farther up the original top floor is to have a balcony with French doors again created by widening and extending downwards the historic windows. The rooftop addition above the historic top floor would create a new, clearly modern penthouse set back behind a partial wrap-around terrace that would be framed by the side walls of the building. Although thick trees hide much of the two upper stories in this season, it is clear from what can currently be seen that in the leafless season they would be fully visible from Tenth Avenue to the south near 22<sup>nd</sup> Street over the low north wing of the Empire Diner.

No level of the original rear façade would remain unchanged, and little historic character would remain. Not only would the inappropriate modern upper penthouse be visible from the public way to the southwest and clearly be seen as part of the rear of the historic row, the new façade as whole would also have a major impact on the enclosed interior space of this row house block. Various types of additions and balconies have historically been constructed in the rear of row houses on this block and in the interiors of other blocks in the District, mostly at the lower levels, but a heavily altered replacement wall with two full stories of glass at the bottom, a modern penthouse at the top, and terraces in between would form an unprecedented and inappropriate intrusion that would endanger the basic character of the block interior. The Board urges the Commission to exercise its explicit jurisdiction over all exterior surfaces to prevent loss of historic character in the interior of this important block, in which Clement Clarke Moore had his original home.

Sincerely,



Edward Kirkland  
Chair  
Landmark Task Force  
Manhattan Community Board 4



J. Lee Compton  
Chair  
Manhattan Community Board 4