



CITY OF NEW YORK

MANHATTAN COMMUNITY BOARD FOUR

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JEAN-DANIEL NOLAND
Chair

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

October 4, 2007

Hon. Patricia Lancaster
Commissioner
Department of Buildings
220 Broadway, 7th floor
New York, NY 10007

Re: 339 West 29th Street

Dear Commissioner Lancaster:

Manhattan Community Board No. 4 is writing to express its concern that the remodeling of the historically significant building at 339 West 29th Street should be conducted according to accurate and conforming plans and that the construction should not damage the building or in any way compromise its structural integrity. We ask that the plans and construction methods be the subject of a thorough audit and careful monitoring.

Evidence has recently come to the attention of the Board through a neighbor, Ms. Fern Luskin, that the building was not only, as was previously known, the home of the prominent abolitionists James Sloan Gibbons and his wife Abigail Hopper Gibbons, but was also specifically targeted during the Draft Riots of 1863 and can further be established through a contemporary eyewitness as being a station on the Underground Railroad. These historic facts are confirmed by the attached documents from communications by Ms. Luskin to the Board. The federal statutes cited by Ms. Luskin in her first letter to you make it clear that it is an important matter of public policy that stations of the Underground Railroad should be preserved, and the rarity of documented stations makes preservation of 339 West 29th Street to the degree feasible particularly important.

The Buildings Information Service confirms that more than one violation has been issued for work on this site and that a stop-work order is still in effect. This history and the belief of the neighbors that the construction has been carried on unsafely and following plans inconsistent with the requirements of the protective zoning obtained by the Board through the Chelsea 197-a Plan are matters of serious concern. Although the plans filed dated 2/14/07 appear to be largely conforming and would have only a moderate impact on the appearance of the building, construction underway at the time of the stop work order appears to follow other plans and to have a significant impact on the façade. It raises issues about the height of the new construction above the datum line. The construction may well violate the sliver regulations under any

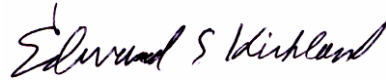
interpretation of this text. It is essential that all issues be cleared up before work can be allowed to resume on the building.

The Board believes that it is important to ensure the maximum feasible preservation of this important historic resource. The precautions we have requested are a necessary step to following up with other agencies such as the State Historic Preservation Office and the Landmarks Preservation Commission.

Sincerely,



Jean-Daniel Noland
Chair, Manhattan Community Board 4



Edward Kirkland
Chair, Landmarks Task Force

Cc: Electeds

Landmarks Preservation Commission
State Historic Preservation Office
Municipal Art Society
Historic Districts Council
Ms. Fern Luskin
Mr. Curtis Jewell