



CITY OF NEW YORK

MANHATTAN COMMUNITY BOARD FOUR

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JEAN-DANIEL NOLAND
Chair

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District Manager

July 24, 2008

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

**Re: 48-50 Ninth Avenue storefronts
Gansevoort Market Historic District**

Dear Chair Tierney:

Manhattan Community Board No. 4 is writing about the application for new storefronts at 48-50 Ninth Avenue in the early nineteenth-century row-house group at the northeast corner of 14th Street in the Gansevoort Market Historic District. The Board believes that the general concept of the application and the configuration of the storefronts is excellent but has concerns about the appropriateness of some details and their cumulative effect.

This large, conspicuous grouping of late Federal and early Greek Revival row houses establishes a distinctive presence and character at the northeast corner of the Gansevoort Market Historic District, and the Commission has historically supported preservation of this character and among other aspects encouraged storefronts of traditional type. The general configuration of the storefronts proposed in this application is laudably traditional: large show windows with transoms located between cast-iron piers above a bulkhead and below a shallow cornice with signband, and with recessed doors at the store entrances.

The Board believes the concept and configuration of the storefronts to be generally appropriate, but has concerns about some of the details. In the signband below the traditionally shaped cornice are pin-mounted steel letters located in front of down-lighting, described as soft, that is to be housed in the cornice above. While the letters above the right-hand store are of a fine classic font, the name identifying the left-hand store, in a less crisp modern font, has a kind of logo as its central letter. A small sign of a type without historic precedent projects from the signband at the left side of each store. The bulkhead is quite low and of polished black granite. The ensemble is carefully thought through, but creates an elegant modern effect that is somewhat incongruous in the more relaxed traditional context appropriate to the largely industrial and historically

working-class Gansevoort Market Historic District. After all, the Ninth Avenue Elevated once curved around these buildings. .

The small projecting signs are completely unhistorical and inconsistent with Commission policy for blade signs. The lettering is so small as to be of doubtful usefulness for anyone looking for the stores. If projecting signs should actually be found necessary to identify the stores in this now bright, open context, we note that old bracket signs of traditional form are in place at other locations on the group, although the applicants stated that current signage regulations for the C6-2A zoning of these mixed-use buildings forbid installation of such signs at historically appropriate heights.

The lettering on the signband is proposed to be pin-mounted and effectively back-lighted, a treatment the Commission has usually found inappropriate in similar historic contexts. Although painted lettering is most common on the signbands of traditional storefronts, metal letters might be appropriate in this design if they were flat or in low relief on the signband: the contrast of dark metal lettering with a light background would make such letters stand out in most lighting conditions.

The polished-granite bulkhead is too low and modern in its effect: considerably higher bulkheads have been historically used for stores in areas like this one. Typically these have been of painted wood, although other materials have been used over the years. The bulkhead should be approximately of the traditional height that is much more appropriate to the context; and, if stone is to be used, some type of matt surface would be less conspicuous and contemporary in feeling in a location like this than the highly polished black granite proposed.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Jd', with a long horizontal stroke extending to the left.

Jean-Daniel Noland
Chair
Manhattan Community Board 4

c.c.: Applicant