



CITY OF NEW YORK

MANHATTAN COMMUNITY BOARD FOUR

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

JEAN-DANIEL NOLAND
Chair

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

Awards Committee
Preservation League of New York State
44 Central Avenue
Albany, NY 12206

Re: The Emerson, 554 West 53rd Street, New York, New York 10019

To Whom It May Concern:

Manhattan Community Board 4 is writing to affirm its support of the nomination of the Emerson at 554 West 53rd Street, Manhattan, for the Preservation League of New York State's "2009 Excellence in Preservation" Awards. We believe that the restoration of this former model tenement, locally known as "The Flats," by the Clinton Housing Development Company is a remarkable example of preservation and restoration of a significant historic building for its original social purpose.

This was no easy task. Clinton Housing Development Company (CHDC) was not the first entity that attempted to reuse the building. Successfully obtaining funding from the complex combination of sources that proved necessary to achieve this elaborate project and finding a way within this funding to produce a restoration of high quality testify to CHDC's skill and determination under the leadership of Joe Restuccia to reuse existing housing while maintaining the highest feasible level of preservation.

Working successfully with city agencies and with an activist group of tenants focused on staying in the homes they had long occupied was another feat. The community had become aroused and sensitized in its largely successful struggle to defeat the typical sweeping demolition and displacement planned for the Clinton Urban Renewal Area of the 1960's, which included the Emerson as well as more typical tenements. Over the long years of this struggle CHDC has played a major and increasing role in the effort to bind up the wounds of urban renewal and to upgrade viable existing housing, for the original tenants if possible, while maintaining the maximum possible of historic character. The restored Emerson is close to the last and surely the finest building block of the community thus recreated.

The high level of restoration can be gathered from the description of the project and is clear at the first sight of the exterior. The careful restoration of the brickwork and cornice and the replica wood windows are exemplary. On the interior the large glassed-in court with restored stairways is a minimally modernized version of the original and reflects the

doctrines of the original architect and builder. William Emerson—there were several architects of that name at the time—was a leading proponent of the “Open Stair Tenement,” in which the typical long dark halls of large buildings, seen as dangerous and unwholesome, were replaced by a series of staircases open to natural light and air and giving access to apartments and bathrooms. The communal uses on the ground floor also reflect those of the original project.

The Emerson is a strong presence at the west end of the Urban Renewal Area with its handsome long wall along Eleventh Avenue across from De Witt Clinton Park. The park occupies part of the historic grounds of a group of mansions that once overlooked the Hudson to the west, and the narrow courtyard at an angle to the avenue and separating the Emerson from a new and harmoniously designed subsidized residence just to the south is the last remnant of a lane that once connected one of the group to the predecessor of Broadway. The restored Emerson is thus closely linked to the development of Clinton from a country settlement to the present day. This fine project clearly merits recognition by the Preservation League.

Sincerely,

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

Jean-Daniel Noland
Chair

cc:
Joe Restuccia, Clinton Housing Development Company

July 20, 1997

After Killing, Hotel Is Called Bad Neighbor

By ANTHONY RAMIREZ

For many residents of 47th Street between Eighth and Ninth Avenues, the last straw in their relationship with John Sharma was a killing on July 3. Just after 12:30 P.M., the police found a 25-year-old woman, Jennifer Nicole Gaine, strangled and wrapped in a bedsheet in a room at the Sherman Hotel, a cash-only establishment owned by Mr. Sharma.

Neighborhood residents say the three-story, 55-room hotel, at the southwest corner of 47th Street and Eighth Avenue, is a magnet for prostitutes and drug users. The police say Ms. Gaine was both. Adding to the frustration is what some people describe as Mr. Sharma's unwillingness to help remove the last vestiges of drug dealing and prostitution on a block that residents and the police have worked to clean up substantially in the last decade.

Mr. Sharma has so far refused to join a program that would allow officers to patrol the Sherman Hotel, and the police say that Mr. Sharma and his employees did not help in the investigation of Ms. Gaine's killing.

Mr. Sharma, who bought the Sherman in early 1995, denies that he was uncooperative. He said that he does not encourage prostitution or drug use by renting rooms for brief periods, like an hour or two, that hotel workers keep an "unwanted list" of suspected prostitutes and drug dealers and that if a guest seems to be spending too much time on the street, "We will ask him, why do you keep going up and down?"

On Tuesday the commander of Midtown North, Bruce Smolka, answered questions from members of the West 47th/48th Streets Block Association about Ms. Gaine's death, the first killing in the area in 19 months. Paul R. Margulies, who lives in an apartment building on the block, was one of about a dozen residents who expressed frustration about the Sherman Hotel. "How long does this have to go on?" Mr. Margulies asked. "Do we need three murders, five murders?"

Deputy Inspector Smolka said that since the killing, officers have made more than two dozen arrests on the corner and recently placed two uniformed officers in front of the

hotel "just to make life miserable." But Det. Sgt. Victor Ramos said that during the Gaine investigation, which has not yielded any arrests, the Sherman's staff "gave us misinformation, such as how many rooms were occupied, who was in the hotel and wrong descriptions that helped to retard the investigation."

The block association and Community Board 4 have urged Mr. Sharma to join the Manhattan District Attorney's "trespass affidavit" program, in which property owners allow the police to question people in an apartment building or hotel to determine whether they are tenants or guests. "We have tried again and again and again to get Mr. Sharma to sign on," said the block association president, Jean-Daniel Noland.

Mr. Sharma said that until the recent slaying, the program seemed unnecessary because, "we thought we had everything under control." He said on Wednesday that he planned now to join the program, but by Friday he had not contacted the District Attorney's office.
ANTHONY RAMIREZ