



CITY OF NEW YORK

MANHATTAN COMMUNITY BOARD FOUR

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JEAN-DANIEL NOLAND
Chair

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

April 2, 2009

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

Re: Con Ed Powerhouse at 59th Street

Dear Chair Tierney,

Manhattan Community Board 4 is writing to express its serious concern about the series of events that appear to be culminating in the destruction of the sole remaining historic chimney on the former IRT Powerhouse, now owned by Consolidated Edison, at the west end of 59th Street in Community District 4. The original stacks added considerably to the effect of the building, and the very tall modern stack at the east end is quite different in character. The gradual loss of the original stacks has changed the visual character of the building and blurred its significant original function.

Recently we wrote to you reconfirming our longstanding support for the designation of this impressive building, which is important not only for the design of its exterior by Stanford White but also as a monument of the history of transportation and technology in New York City. We remember that at the last hearing on designation of the building in 1990 the then Chair of the Commission accepted as an alternative to designation the agreement to make no significant change of the building without giving sufficient notice to the Commission for it to take action.

It is clear that this "standstill agreement" has not worked. There have been some changes over time, whether before or after calendaring the powerhouse, including the removal of the cornice; but above all most of the historic stacks have been lost. The Board has quite recently learned from Landmark West that the Commission recently signed off on the demolition of "Stack 5," which materials from several sources indicate was the last remaining original stack, even if it appeared to have lost some of its top. The justification alleged for this action is reported to have been a claim that the stack had become dangerous. Demolition is currently underway.

The process that leads to a "Notice of Review" as permission to proceed instead of a permit after landmark designation has clearly been a failure in this case, and not here alone. The historic character of the powerhouse has been diminished by the gradual loss of its original chimneys, at least in part due to lack of maintenance. The Board is concerned that the cumulative effect of seemingly minor changes as well as lack of adequate maintenance of the exterior threatens the character of this major structure. The process for Notice of Review is far less intensive that that

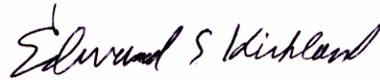
for a Certificate of Appropriateness, and there is no room for public participation, even awareness. There seems to be no legal means to compel exterior maintenance or considered review of minor changes for a building that has not been designated. We believe the Commission should, if it is still possible, take immediate action to stop the demolition of this last stack, and must in any case proceed to prompt designation of the powerhouse and full review of all changes and issues of maintenance.

The example of the slow decay of New Brighton Village Hall warns us that even designation will not in itself save a building in the absence of the will to take action, while on the other hand the recent laudable action to save the Windermere from deliberate neglect shows that appropriate and effective action can be taken against an owner much farther away than Con Ed.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'Jd' with a stylized flourish.

Jean-Daniel Noland
Chair, Manhattan Community Board 4

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'Edward S Kirkland' in a cursive script.

Edward Kirkland
Chair, Landmarks Committee

c.c.
Council Member Gale Brewer
Community Board 7
Landmark West
Powerhouse Group