LANDMARKS COMMITTEE **Item # 10**

February 20, 2012

Hon. Robert B Tierney
Chair
Landmarks Preservation Commission
Municipal Building, 9th floor
One Centre Street
New York, NY 10007

Re: Terminal Stores
220 Twelfth Avenue
West Chelsea Historic District

Dear Chair Tierney;

Manhattan Community Board 4 is writing about the application by the architects for the Terminal Stores building on the Hudson River in the West Chelsea Historic District for a master plan for replacing windows as becomes necessary. The proposal addresses all the windows in the building. The replacement windows are proposed to be insulated glass windows replicating the historic shapes and profiles in modern materials and with applied muntins instead of true divided lights.

The Board commends the applicant for a very thoughtful and clear presentation of a complex proposal to the Landmarks Committee. The Board believes, however, that the proposal, although ingenious, would reduce significantly the historic character of this important and very visible building by imposing a unity of appearance the building never had. In particular the proposal would over time excessively simplify and regularize the extraordinary number and variety of window types on the building and thus diminish the interest and realism that the current condition adds to the appearance of the building. Applied muntins are rarely truly convincing substitute show the strength of true divided lights.

The building occupies a full block between 11th and 12th Avenues from West 27th to 28th Street. It is probably best known for the nightclub called "the Tunnel" that occupied an extraordinary vaulted passageway originally constructed to accommodated the tracks of the New York Central Railroad that entered the two ends of the building through enormous arches originally open but now glazed in. The building was built as 26 separate parcels during the late nineteenth and early twentieth century; and has suffered a number of vicissitudes. Over time it has suffered a major fire and a resultant partial rebuilding, and has contained many uses, including one of the first refrigerated warehouses. It is hardly surprising that at the time of designation in 2008 70% of some 621 existing windows were replacements.

DRAFT

The application identifies 24 different types of window on the four elevations of the building; the actual number of windows within each type varies windows from one to 222. The major groupings by type of window head are A, full arch head, with 111 examples divided into 4 patterns of window divisions; B, segmented or shallow arch head, with 293 examples also divided into 4 patterns; and C, rectangular head, with 217 examples divided into 16 patterns, widely varying in size and nature. There are thus 24 different styles and sizes within the three major window types. At the ends of the blocks, the elevations facing 11th and 12th Avenues and wrapping around the corner, show predominantly full arch windows (type A); while the north and south elevations facing West 27th and 28th Streets have a mix of segmented arch and rectangular windows (types B and C)..

The application proposes to regularize this maze of 621 windows by providing exactly three pre-approved replacement types:

Type A; full arch, single-hung with divided lights—a type with only 14 current examples out of 111 full-arch examples;

: Type B; segmented arch, single-hung without divisions—a type with only 67 current examples out of 293 segmented-arch examples;

Type C, rectangular, fixed with divided lights—a type with only 52 current examples out of 217 rectangular examples, many of them varying widely in size and shape.

Clearly this severe limitation of the proposed replacement window types will establish an artificial unity that is inconsistent with the original character and the historic development of the building. This is shown in detail on the elaborate drawings of existing and proposed conditions. Thus the Board cannot support this application as it stands.

Examination of the options suggests that a possibly acceptable solution along the lines suggested by the applicant might be found if the number of proposed replacement window types were to be doubled by adding to the single replacement window type in each major category an alternative type chosen in such a way that each major category would offer alternatives with and without multiple lights. At least one of each pair of possible replacements would have to include at least one alternative that is currently among the most frequent existing types in that category. Further, not forcing compliance with the standard replacement in cases that involve major changes in window opening size and shape, as occurs in many the rectangular window variants of Type C, would also help preserve historical character and probably save money as well.

While the Board is willing to suggest exploration of this option, we remain doubtful if it would turn out to be acceptable, given the complex history of the building and the reductive nature of any scheme of this type.

Detailed comments:

Type A- the full arch window--most existing windows are divided into three sashes with a wide horizontal stile band separating the middle and upper sashes.

DRAFT

The proposed replacement omits this band creating a poorly proportioned window unit. The applicant explained that this band is an obstruction at eye level. If this proposal is to go forward without change, a section through the building should be drawn to check this condition and if possible find a solution that could perhaps improve historic appearance as well as well as the usefulness of the window.

Type B – the segmented arch window--the proposal is without any divided lights while the survey of the existing condition shows about 1/4th of the existing windows with the divided lights. Further, the proportions of the sashes is shown as different from the historic model. The horizontal stile band between the operable lower sash and the fixed upper sash should follow the dimensions of the existing window..

Type C – the rectangular window, the proposal is to have all the windows with divided lights. The existing survey shows a variety of sizes and sashes. Most of the rectangular windows are mid-block, many within later and taller segments of the building. They are also of many different sizes as well as types. For example there are a few smaller rectangular windows on the 12th Avenue elevation. We agree with the applicant that these could be single sash fixed window without divided lights. Indeed, to enforce the standard replacement in many of these anomalous cases would involve considerable brickwork that would impinge on historic character and, from a practical point of view, involve significant expense.

Sincerely,

DRAFT