



CITY OF NEW YORK

MANHATTAN COMMUNITY BOARD No. 4

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J. LEE COMPTON
Chair

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

March 8, 2007

Ms. Kathy Howe
New York State Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation
Historic Preservation Field Services Bureau
Peebles Island
PO Box 189
Waterford, NY 12188-0189

Dear Ms. Howe:

Manhattan Community Board No. 4 is writing to express its support for the listing of the Gansevoort Market Historic District on the State and National Registers of Historic Places. The portion of the proposed Historic District north of 14th Street is located within Manhattan Community District No. 4. The Board previously supported designation as a New York City Historic District of the area with wider boundaries than those eventually adopted for the New York City Gansevoort District and close to those now proposed for the State and National Register nomination, and we are glad now to support nomination of the full area extending north to 16th Street to both Historic Registers. Listing on the State and National Registers would contribute not only to preserving the historic character of the area but also to wider recognition of the extraordinary way in which it embodies many aspects of the history of New York.

This area has a remarkable sense of place resulting from a history centering on the market uses that have been long active there. This history is one of the longest in New York, starting with the Lenape Indian site in the area, a probable trading and farming site called by some version of the name "Sapohanikan." It was located on the original shallow cove at an especially short river crossing from New Jersey and was also at the end of a path connecting with the central island trail from lower Manhattan. This was succeeded by the first settlement in the then town of Greenwich, a farming community that eventually turned out to be the point where the Hudson River Railroad came down to the waterfront near the city after the extensive landfilling to the north had moved the waterfront there to the west.

These advantages of easy access by both water and rail led to its becoming a major market site that has survived various vicissitudes and only recently has begun to be threatened by the loss of its traditional uses and character. The historic High Line, the successor to the rail line that came down Tenth Avenue and spread its tracks widely nearby to serve the market, currently ends here. Now that this historic elevated structure is being readapted to form a park and walkway, the two historic resources can join synergetically in reinforcing and enriching the historic value of this part of New York.

Most stages of this long history have left structures and other physical traces that recall a series of layers of history and contribute to a remarkably individual sense of place. The central area, the location of the original market, is dominated by low brick buildings, many of which still retain the metal canopies and even the apparatus that transferred carcasses between vehicles, work areas, and coolers. As market uses grew in the area older buildings, often of architectural merit, were adapted to this use, and, in some cases—

a rarity in New York City—were even cut down in height, since only the lower floors were useful for the new purpose.

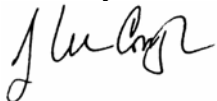
Some row houses from the early 19th Century remain, often occupying conspicuous sites on these intersections. Many of them reflect present or past market-related uses, like the famous Old Homestead Restaurant, which has long fed the workers in the market and sold its products. Refrigerating plants or warehouses later sprang up, sometimes of considerable scale but continuing the historic uses or ones related to them.

Almost all of the original stone-paved streets typical of waterfront and industrial areas remain both here and more widely in the area. These often show elaborate patterns, especially at the large, irregularly-shaped intersections where the street patterns of lower Manhattan meet the grid of 1811 and create striking spaces. Stone slabs used to ease the passage of market handtrucks still survive at a few street crossings like the anomalous Little West Twelfth Street. The earlier streets themselves represent several layers of development: first the Indian trail, and then the 18th Century waterside road directly connecting the city to the south with the small settlement and the estates that surrounded it. Maps of the Revolutionary period already reveal enough complexity as to require the local knowledge of Aaron Burr and others to guide the American forces escaping from lower Manhattan after the British landing on the East River. The northward expansion of the city after the Revolution is reflected in the rough oblique grid that forms the last element to appear before the 1811 grid.

As the market spread more widely over the years, meat-packing establishments occupied new and existing buildings beyond the original area. This is particularly true in the northern part of the district from 14th Street north and thus located within Community District 4. Here the National Biscuit Company converted or built several larger buildings, some of considerable architectural quality, connected them to the High Line, and produced its once-famous “sunshine biscuits.” Some of these buildings later held uses connected with meat-packing, and the market character of the area has been recently continued by the striking conversion of a group of buildings on the block between 15th and 16th Streets and Ninth and Tenth Avenues to the Chelsea Market. This has renewed the baking tradition of the area with several baking establishments.

A Gansevoort Market State and National Register Historic District would provide the area’s building owners with the opportunity to get tax credits for qualified rehabilitation work. Such credits would offer significant incentives to encourage the sensitive treatment of the historic fabric of the neighborhood when old uses are replaced with new ones and when changes are made to the existing buildings. It would help protect the area from insensitive change. It would also encourage the design of the Hudson River Park, located directly to the west and planned to occupy the site of the western part of the old market--that used for produce--and the surviving piers nearby, to harmonize with and reinforce the exceptional historic character of this area.

Sincerely,



J. Lee Compton
Chair
Manhattan Community Board 4

cc: Electeds
Interested parties