



CITY OF NEW YORK

MANHATTAN COMMUNITY BOARD FOUR

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May 1, 2013

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

Re: Designation for Old Chelsea Station – 217 W. 18th Street

Dear Chair Tierney,

Manhattan Community Board Four strongly urges the Landmarks Preservation Commission to designate the Old Chelsea Post Office at 217 West 18th Street in the heart of Chelsea as a New York City Landmark as soon as possible. The building is already included in the thematic designation of Post Offices in New York in the National Register, and the data cited in this letter are based largely on this nomination. (That the station is named “Old Chelsea” is due to the fact that at the time of its creation there already exists a post office by the name of “Chelsea” in a small community upstate.) .

The building is under imminent threat. The Postal Service has recently declared its intention to close the station and sell the property. It has already held a public hearing where a large number of community residents vigorously protested this decision but it was clear nevertheless that the Postal Service intends to go forward with the sale, The current development pressures in Chelsea mean almost certainly that closure and sale of the Old Chelsea Station will take place shortly and will be followed by demolition of the station and its replacement by as large a building as zoning will permit on the site.

The only effective protection for the Old Chelsea Post Office is prompt action by the Landmarks Commission to designate the building as a New York City Landmark, (The Commission is of course aware that several postal properties are already designated New York Landmarks.) At some point in the process of disposal to private ownership and construction of a certainly inappropriate replacement there will almost certainly be a window in time that would enable New York City Landmark designation on the basis of the detailed data included in the Register nomination, which as we all know offers no real protection in itself but whose data we believe can be a starting point for a New York City designation.

The Statement of Significance for the National Register includes the definitive statement that “The Old Chelsea Station is a handsome, well-proportioned Colonial Revival style building.” This is part of an elaborate discussion of post office architecture of this period the name “Federal style” is now more commonly used, formally so called because the somewhat lighter and more simplified character of the architecture was seen as reflecting the architecture of the early republic, but sometimes because the funding streams of the 1930’s and 1940’s were typically funded by the Federal government. This is of course especially true for the large number of post offices built in the period. Another influence that contributed to the simplification and stripping of forms was of course the early Modern movement

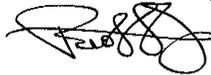
The Old Chelsea Post Office fits into the pattern of main New York City stations as largely filling the site with a relatively plain central two-story block between the large and strong arched truck bays to the west and a recessed terminal bay at the east end. This façade is largely organized by the arched windows, entrances, minimal signage, and reflection of the floor division. The rectangular lobby is a remarkable space that is described as “contain(ing) finely crafted detail in marble, plaster, wood, metal, and terrazzo.” The designation of the building should definitely include this interior.

The architect of the building was Eric Kebbon, who was to design several other post offices and later became architect to the Board of Education of the City of New York, where he designed over one hundred schools,. It is interesting that this “simple, yet elegant composition” is the plainest of the three post offices he designed in Manhattan.

Sincerely,



Corey Johnson
Chair



Pamela Wolff
Chair, Landmarks Committee