

October 21, 2021

Andrew Berman, Executive Director

Village Preservation
232 E 11th Street
New York, NY 10003

Dear Mr. Berman,

We are writing in response to your October 4, 2021 letter regarding the public safety and building stability concerns at 351-355 West 14th Street and 44-54 9th Avenue in the Gansevoort Market Historic District. Recently, the Landmarks Preservation Commission (“LPC”) and the Department of Buildings (“DOB”) were contacted by the owner’s engineer after interior demolition work that included the removal of interior partitions and plaster, revealed the front walls of the 14th Street and 9th Avenue buildings had pulled away from the brick party walls and original wood floors. It was also determined that the structural condition of the walls was deteriorated to which the brick layers (wythes) were severely separated and a potential collapse was imminent. Structural deficiencies of these early 19th Century buildings were primarily preceded by decades of weathering, wear and tear, lack of maintenance, and trauma from previous alterations. Extensive deterioration of this nature creates an extremely hazardous condition. There is no indication that these imminently dangerous conditions are the result of the recent work undertaken pursuant to LPC and DOB permits.

Following the aforementioned notification by the owner’s engineer, which is required by the New York City Construction Codes, an inspection was immediately conducted by DOB’s Forensic Engineers. At that time, the site conditions as reported by the owner’s engineer were confirmed by DOB. In the interest of public safety, an Emergency Work Order was issued to remove the parking and street façade walls. No additional work to address these safety concerns, beyond those front façades, has been authorized. On October 15, 2021, work commenced to disassemble brick walls along 9th Avenue that were overcoated with a thick sand cement stucco which concealed the old damaged brickwork. The salvaged brick is being evaluated for potential reconstruction of the buildings. This demolition project is governed by the 2014 NYC Building Code to ensure the work at the site is conducted in a safe and code compliant manner, as well as in accordance with the Emergency Work Order.

The conditions documented by the Registered Design Professional, and confirmed by visual inspection, that are resulting in the hand deconstruction of the front facades include the following: the street facades detaching from the demising walls, a condition that has most likely been worsening for decades; the absence of ties connecting the street facades to the floors; very erratic and ineffective brick toothing between the demising walls and the street facades; cracked floor beams; compromised mortar; and many large openings in the demising walls which compromised their structural integrity.



Sarah Carroll
Chair



Melanie E. La Rocca
Commissioner

As it relates to who authorized the demolition, under the Landmarks Law section 25-312, DOB's assessment that the facades must be immediately taken down in the interest of public safety understandably preempt LPC's review and approval authority. Nonetheless, DOB and LPC have been working closely together on this situation, which thankfully is an unusual occurrence.

Finally, the owners of the buildings quickly agreed to salvage as many of the street façade bricks as possible for potential reuse, creating thoroughly dimensioned facade drawings for façade reconstruction and reconstruction of the street facades to the extent possible compliant with the Construction Codes.

The preservation of our City's historic buildings is of critical importance; however, the safety of New Yorkers must take precedence and we cannot allow for such a significant issue to remain unaddressed. Unfortunately, in this case the front facades are not able to be restored in place and must be removed. As such, DOB will require the work to proceed until a safe condition is restored.

We trust this information has been helpful. Should you have further questions please don't hesitate to contact either of our offices.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Sarah Carroll".

Sarah Carroll
Chair

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Melanie E. La Rocca".

Melanie E. La Rocca
Commissioner