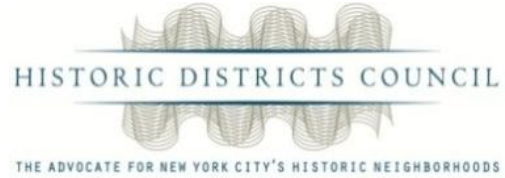




Greenwich Village
Society for Historic Preservation
232 East 11th Street
New York, New York 10003



June 4, 2012

Hon. Adrian Benepe
Department of Parks and Recreation
The Arsenal, Central Park
830 Fifth Avenue
New York, NY 10065

Commissioner Robert LiMandri
Department of Buildings
280 Broadway
New York, NY 10007

Hon. Robert Tierney, Chair
Landmarks Preservation Commission
1 Centre Street, 9th Floor North
New York, NY 10007

Re: Proposed Construction at 27 East 4th Street, Manhattan, adjacent to the Merchant's House Museum, Manhattan

Dear Commissioners Benepe, LiMandri, and Tierney:

We write to express the extreme concern of both the Greenwich Village Society for Historic Preservation and the Historic Districts Council regarding the proposed construction next door to the Merchant's House Museum. Such construction has the potential to do irreparable damage to the Museum, its contents, and its building interior and exterior. Given that this is a city-owned property, we believe it is imperative that your three agencies work together to ensure that no construction move ahead at 27 East 4th Street without adequate measures to ensure the safety of the Merchant's House Museum.

As you know, the Merchant's House is one of New York City's very few interior and exterior landmarks, and is New York City's only family home preserved intact inside and out from the 19th century. As a part of the cityscape, the building's exquisitely intact architectural detail is an irreplaceable presence in Lower Manhattan. As a place where the public can see the interior details, furnishings, and workings of a 19th century house, and as an instrument of education, its importance and contributions to New York's cultural landscape cannot be overstated.

All of this is potentially endangered by proposed construction next door at 27 East 4th Street. As we know, more recently-built structures with stronger foundations have been routinely undermined by adjacent construction. The Merchant's House's vulnerability has been vividly demonstrated by the damage done to it in recent years from boorings and digging which took place at the adjacent water tunnel construction site.

Construction of a nine-story building directly abutting the museum to its west has the potential for disastrous consequences. However, beyond the threat of collapse or immediate structural damage to the building, undermining, shifting, or shaking of the 180-year old structure could have devastating consequences as well, forcing the museum to close, or to make expensive and time consuming repairs that would curtail its ability to serve the public.

The City has a special responsibility to ensure this does not happen, not just because of the large number of city residents and nearby businesses which would be hurt by it, but because the Merchant's House is actually owned by the Parks Department. Millions of public dollars have gone into the Museum's operation and improvement over the years. The City should protect that investment, and take all reasonable steps to ensure that the museum is not harmed by demolition or construction work next door.

Your three agencies are in a unique position to be able to ensure that a potential tragic outcome does not take place here. We urge your three agencies to work together to ensure that no development moves ahead at 27 East 4th Street without adequate safety precautions in place, and that if it does, the City does everything within its power to ensure that the safety, integrity, and continued operation of the Merchant's House Museum is ensured.

Sincerely,



Andrew Berman
Executive Director
Greenwich Village Society
for Historic Preservation



Simeon Bankoff
Executive Director
Historic Districts Council

Cc: Councilmember Rosie Mendez

Sean Sweeney, Landmarks & Public Aesthetics Committee Chair, Community Board 2

Frances Eberhart, Historic House Trust

Margaret Gardiner, Merchant's House Museum