



THE COUNCIL OF  
THE CITY OF NEW YORK

**MARGARET S. CHIN**

COUNCIL MEMBER, 1<sup>ST</sup> DISTRICT, MANHATTAN

101 LAFAYETTE ST, 9TH FLOOR  
NEW YORK, NY 10013  
212-587-3159 PHONE

250 BROADWAY, SUITE 1762  
NEW YORK, NY 10007  
212-788-7259 PHONE

CHIN@COUNCIL.NYC.GOV



OFFICE OF THE PRESIDENT  
BOROUGH OF MANHATTAN  
THE CITY OF NEW YORK

1 Centre Street, 19th floor, New York, NY 10007  
(212) 669-8300 p (212) 669-4306 f

431 West 125th Street, New York, NY 10027  
(212) 531-1609 p (212) 531-4615 f

[www.manhattanbp.nyc.gov](http://www.manhattanbp.nyc.gov)

**Gale A. Brewer, Borough President**

**April 6, 2021**

**Joint Testimony from the Office of Council Member Margaret S. Chin and the Office of the Manhattan Borough President Gale A. Brewer**

**Comments on the Landmarks Preservation Commission (LPC) Certificate of Appropriateness Applications:**

- **89 South Street (175 John Street): Block 74, Lot 1 (LPC-21-04480)**
- **250 Water Street: Block 98, Lot 1 (LPC-21-03235)**

We write this letter in support of the two revised applications in the South Street Seaport Historic District (the “Historic District”). The first is for a new building addition to the South Street Seaport Museum (the “Museum”) on an existing parking lot located at 89 South Street (175 John Street), and for alterations to the Museum’s existing buildings on Block 74. The second application is for a new residential building to be constructed on the parking lot at 250 Water Street on Block 98.

These two applications were originally presented to the Landmarks Preservation Commission (LPC) on January 12, 2021. We believe that the two revised applications are appropriate, and offer a critical opportunity to develop the remaining two vacant lots within the South Street Seaport Historic District and preserve the South Street Seaport Museum.

### **South Street Seaport Historic District**

As we noted in our prior submission, our offices began engaging the Seaport community in 2014 with the formation of the Seaport Working Group, which was re-established in 2018 as the Seaport Advisory Group. This group, which includes elected officials, members of City agencies, Community Board 1, Save Our Seaport, and other stakeholders, has tackled important issues for the Seaport area such as historic preservation, economic development, and environmental resiliency.

It is undeniable that the Historic District contains a number of architecturally significant buildings that form the legacy of the neighborhood as a leading port and commercial center of New York City. It is also undeniable that the South Street Seaport Museum, founded in 1967, has been the leading force in preserving the culture, history and architecture of the area and was pivotal to the creation of the Historic District in 1977 and its expansion in 1989.

These two applications, with its redesigned elements, will preserve the South Street Seaport Museum, enhance the area and thoughtfully complement the historically significant buildings around them. For the reasons detailed below, we recommend that the Commission find that their redesign is appropriate for the Historic District.

### **89 South Street (175 John Street) Application (LPC-21-04480)**

The South Street Seaport Museum is seeking to restore its buildings on Schermerhorn Row and construct an additional new building on the parking lot located behind the Museum on John Street. As stated in our prior submission, we believe the Museum's application is appropriate. The proposal will create a cohesive Museum campus foreseen in the 1974 Museum's Master Plan, preserve and restore the battered historic buildings along Fulton and South Streets, improve accessibility, and incorporate sustainability in its design.

The proposed new building with its redesigned bulkhead, proposed façade, fenestration and arches on the ground floor will harmonize well with the Museum's existing buildings and complement the cobblestone streets and textured facades throughout the Historic District. The redesigned bulkhead includes a new configuration, material and color that are more appropriate as a compliment to the façade of the new building and its historical surroundings.

Plans to shift the current entrance to the corner of South Street and Fulton Street will make the Museum more identifiable to visitors and create an inviting entrance into its new gallery spaces from its historic frontage. The glass bridge proposed as a transition between the old and the new buildings is an attractive design feature and will provide a good vantage point for visitors to view the waterfront and the Museum's collection of ships. The Museum's plans to use wood as its primary architectural material for the new gallery space, is appropriately inspired by the use of wood in the historical buildings and will provide a warm inviting atmosphere for visitors. Wood construction will also create a more sustainable, carbon neutral building.

We still find that the use of copper for the exterior of the building, inspired by copper plated timber ships, is an appropriate salute to the Museum's maritime focus and complements other metal buildings on the waterfront, such as the nearby Tin Building. Finally, the plans to allow the copper to patina over time to a rich and deep green will make the Museum an even more striking and exciting addition to the Historic District.

### **250 Water Street Application (LPC-21-03235)**

The site at 250 Water Street, which sits on a full city block at the edge of the Historic District, is the largest vacant, non-contributing site within a historic district in New York City. It was included in the Historic District in 1977 even though it was a parking lot and has remained a parking lot since. We find that the redesign of the building is not only responsive to feedback from the Commission and other stakeholders, but also more appropriate for the Historic District. The redesign includes a new building typology, a significant reduction in bulk, changes to its street wall and a shift in bulk away from the Historic District that would be in line with the 1969 Museum Master Plan, which predicted a building with more density that would serve as a transition towards the low masonry buildings closer to the waterfront.

The revised new building has a reduced overall height of 345 feet, and the bulk and height of the podium alongside Water Street is now a variation of 64 and 79 feet. In addition, the low contextual street wall is more responsive to the street wall heights of adjacent buildings to the lot, such as the Peck Slip School. The building also better specifies and repurposes the historical materiality of adjacent buildings, including brick exteriors, fenestrations, window patterns and post and lintel designs at the street level. The new coloration and aesthetic of the masonry and its hand-pressed brick, expression of the posts and lintels, metalwork for detailing, smaller vertical windows, divided lights and the cornice lines of the buildings are amongst some of the appropriate historical features that were carefully considered for the updated building's design.

Furthermore, design elements that have been revised to give a more appropriate texture and scale at the base of the building and an enhanced pedestrian experience include the reduced height of the storefront and refined storefront materials, and revised door widths, window dimensions, lights, and painted panels at the street level storefronts. Finally, we believe the new design and the shift in bulk to Pearl Street strikes a better balance of complementing the modern buildings to the north and west of the site while blending appropriately with the historic buildings to the south and east of the site.

### **Conclusion**

We are committed to supporting these two applications, as they are essential to the future of the South Street Seaport Historic District and the South Street Seaport Museum, both of which have made vital contributions to our city's history. The Commission should carefully consider the amendments to the applications and the contributions that these two applications will bring to the Historic District in contrast to the currently non-contributing vacant sites.

These two applications would be a welcome addition to the Historic District and will preserve the legacy of the neighborhood. We look forward to hearing your comments.