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June 4, 2019

Chair Sarah Carroll,
New York City Landmarks Preservation Commission
David N. Dinkins Municipal Building
1 Centre Street, 9th Floor North
New York, NY 10007

Dear Chair Carroll:

On behalf of the board of Save Chelsea, I write to express that we are encouraged by the Commission's interest in six sites that embody LGBT cultural history, which has only recently received the attention it merits.

Five of the six proposed sites fall within historic districts but, as you have noted, individual designation would add "an extra layer of protection" from future owners who might seek permission for inappropriate changes. In Chelsea, we know all too well that buildings covered only by historic district designation are not always as safe as should be expected, and we certainly support individual designation for all six of the sites.

One proposed building, 243 West 20th Street, lacks any protection at all and is left particularly at risk. A city-owned property in our Chelsea neighborhood, it has cultural, historic, and architectural merit. The 1866 building, originally a firehouse, was designed by Charles E. Hartshorn. From 1972-87, it housed a number of feminist and lesbian organizations, and was an epicenter of women's engagement in the LGBT civil rights movement. It was home to the Women's Liberation Center, a volunteer collective where activists in the lesbian and feminist movements found common cause, providing community social services, and promoting radical political action on behalf of all women. The Center's Lesbian Switchboard, a call-in service, provided peer counseling, referrals, and information about local events. At a time when the LGBT community was stigmatized and forced into the shadows, it provided critical mental health support and a much-needed sense of solidarity among the city's lesbians. An offshoot of the Women's Liberation Center, the group Lesbian Feminist Liberation, was founded in 1972 by Jean O'Leary and was spun off from the Gay Activists Alliance, an important political group born in the aftermath of the Stonewall riots. It began holding meetings in the building in 1973, calling attention to the discrimination and legal injustices faced by lesbians, protesting bigoted media representations, raising visibility for women at LGBT political rallies and pride marches, and advocating in particular for lesbian mothers.

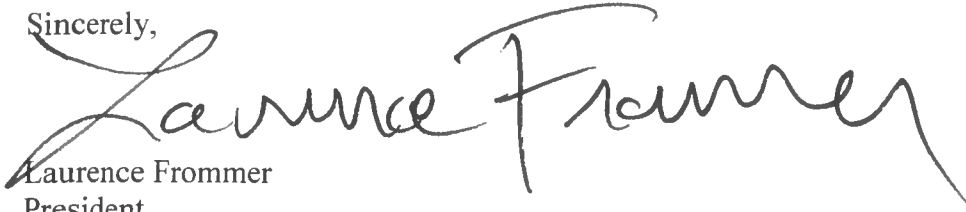
Other groups that used the building included the Lesbian Lifespace Project, the Radicalesbians Health Collective, the Radical Feminists, and Older Women's Liberation. The ground floor of the Women's Liberation Center housed a wholesale food-buying cooperative

known for a time as the Lesbian Food Conspiracy. The Center disbanded in 1987 and many of its organizations moved to the LGBT Community Center in Greenwich Village.

After a sensitive facade restoration and interior renovation, 243 West 20th Street has since the 1980s continued in its feminist tradition as home of Non-Traditional Employment for Women, a skilled-trades workforce-development program.

In addition to the five other sites that are today being considered in light of their importance to LGBT history, we strongly encourage landmark protection for this building, embodying as it does a unique and under-recognized chapter in the cultural history of our famously inclusive city.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Laurence Frommer". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style with a large initial "L".

Laurence Frommer
President
Save Chelsea

Cc: Mayor Bill de Blasio
City Council Speaker Corey Johnson
Manhattan Borough President Gale Brewer
Public Advocate Jumaane Williams
Assembly Member Richard N. Gottfried
New York State Senator Brad Hoylman