

Greenwich Village Block Associations

20 Bank Street, New York, NY 10014

Bedford, Barrow & Commerce
Bedford Downing
Bleecker Area Merchants & Residents
Carmine Street
Central Village
Charlton Street
Christopher Street Block & Merchants
Christopher Street East
East 8th/9th Street
East 10th Street
East 11th Street
East 12th/13th Street
Far West Bank Street
Far West 10th Street
Grove Street
Horatio Street
Jane Street
MacDougal Alley Assoc.
MacDougal Street North
Mercer Street
Minetta
Morton Street
Mulry Angle/W. 11th Street
Perry Street
St. Luke's Place
Upper West 13th Street
Washington Place
Waverly
Waverly-Bank 11 Neighbors
West Houston Street
West Eighth Street
West 9th Street
West 10th Street
West 12th Street
West 13th Street -100 Block

July 16, 2009
Adrienne Taub
MTA New York City Transit
2 Broadway
New York, NY 10004
via e-mail to adrienne.taub@nyct.com
Re: Proposed Emergency Ventilation Structure at Mulry Square
Dear Ms. Taub:

The Greenwich Village Block Associations (GVBA) is a community wide coalition dedicated to preserving and improving the "quality of life" for residents of our historic neighborhood. After reviewing the MTA/NYC Transit's materials illustrating the three options proposed for an emergency ventilation plant at Mulry Square, GVBA has serious objections to the aboveground solution. Apart from cost and construction ease, no clear rationale has been presented as to why this structure must be built at this site, which is not only surrounded by sensitive historic resources, but is also adjacent to the massive planned St. Vincent Hospital/Rudin development. If the ventilation plant construction moves forward as planned and at this time, it will overlap with this huge project. Demolition and construction for the plant will exacerbate the "construction hell" that nearby blocks are already steeled to endure.

In terms of timing, location and its potential negative effect, we doubt that the MTA could have made poorer choices. Initially, the construction possibilities for a ventilation plant included options that would put the structure entirely underground. The MTA's newest design reiteration, however, includes only three aboveground possibilities. We fail to understand why the belowground possibilities have been eliminated, other than, perhaps, the MTA's convenience. At least, if the structure were below ground, the years of construction would end without a visible bricks-and-mortar blight.

The current proposed designs for the emergency ventilation plant are remarkable only in their lack of inspiration, especially as they relate to integration of the 9-11 Memorial Tiles. The MTA could do here what it has done elsewhere — engage an outside design consultant. Perhaps, outside expertise would help the MTA to develop a fresh approach to the design concerns with regard to the structure, the Tiles, the site and its context. Surely, this site deserves special consideration.

Finally, the negligible amount of open space left should any of these plans come to fruition is extremely disappointing. The public understood that as mitigation for the disruption caused by this project, the MTA would create a usable public open space on the site. The space proposed to be dedicated to public use is merely perfunctory.

GVBA urges the MTA to consider and respond to these issues before making any final decisions regarding the location and design for the emergency ventilation plant. If, despite our concerns, the MTA moves ahead with an aboveground option at this location, we offer a few suggestions to make an unacceptable result marginally more palatable.

Mulry Square is where the rectilinear street grid of Manhattan yields to the irregular street pattern for which Greenwich Village is known. Three GVBA members, the Mulry Angle/W. 11th Street Block Association, the Waverly Bank 11 Neighbors (of which I am the President), and the Perry Street Block Association will be negatively impacted by the construction period and will be negatively and permanently affected by the resulting structure, if the MTA does not become responsive to neighborhood concerns, including possible damage to historic buildings caused by construction vibrations. Indeed, this corner is at the intersection of two broad avenues and several small streets. Thus, whatever is built here will be extremely prominent and significant within our historic New York neighborhood. Using a standard design for this location is a mistake. Instead, one should be created to respond to the site's particular conditions and context.

Finally, GVBA believes that the relationship between the building and the “public” space at the corner, as modest as it is, is extremely important. This will, in many ways, be the face of the building as seen by the public and as it presents itself to the surrounding streetscape. None of the proposed designs currently emphasize this view or this relationship.

We believe the MTA’s decisions have been flawed and that it has failed the community both in its design process and in its proposed options for the design of the emergency ventilation plant. We hope that the MTA’s new chair will succeed in “taming Albany,” but we also hope that this change at the top may encourage the MTA to deal more creatively and with more sensitivity to the needs of the community that must live with the results of the MTA’s projects and decisions.

Thank you.

Sincerely yours,

Marilyn Dorato
Executive Director

Cc: New York State Historic Preservation Office
NYC Landmarks Preservation Commission
NYC Design Review Commission
Borough President Scott Stringer
Congressman Jerrold Nadler
City Council Speaker Christine Quinn
State Senator Tom Duane
Assemblymember Deborah Glick
Community Board#2
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