



May 22, 2009

Ms. Amanda Burden
City Planning Commission
22 Reade Street
New York, NY 10007

Dear Ms. Burden,

I am writing on behalf of the Board, staff, and volunteers of the Merchant's House Museum, at 29 East Fourth Street -- just west of the Bowery -- to express our deep concern about the fate of the segment of that historic boulevard that has not received protection, either from the Special Little Italy District, the NoHo Historic District, or the East Village Lower East Side Rezoning Plan. Its 19th century character and scale are at tremendous risk -- and, sadly, are rapidly giving way to "as-of-right" high-rise development.

The 177-year-old Merchant's House, a rare and unique survivor of Old New York, has witnessed dramatic changes to the neighborhood, including the Bowery. In 1832, when the House was built, elegant Greek Revival row houses of red brick and white marble flanked the tree-lined streets of this fashionable residential enclave, known then as the Bond Street Area. The 18th century farms on the Bowery were parceled off to become shops and homes and the Bowery was a fashionable stretch in the first decades of the 19th century. At mid-century, cast iron construction made its first appearance with the founding of The Cooper Union. Commercial buildings and factories gradually began to dominate the area. By the 1880s wealthy residents moved uptown, completely abandoning the neighborhood. By century's end, Louis Sullivan's 12-story steel-framed office building was scraping the sky on Bleecker Street. (Until as recently as the turn of yet another century, the 21st, I believe the 10-story Salvation Army Chinatown Corps, near Rivington Street, was the tallest building on the Bowery; most remain three or four stories.)

We are daily aware of how much of our built history is always at risk in New York. And when it's gone, it's gone. I encourage you to extend protective low-rise zoning to the east side of the Bowery immediately. Protection is needed, and soon, if we are to retain the wealth of history that is our inheritance -- and our responsibility -- to pass on to future generations.

Sincerely,

Margaret Halsey Gardiner
Executive Director

MERCHANT'S HOUSE MUSEUM

29 EAST FOURTH STREET, NEW YORK, NY 10003-7003
nyc1832@merchantshouse.com www.merchantshouse.com

212.777.1089 FAX 212.777.1104