

NEWS **VILLAGE** **PRESERVATION**

**GREENWICH
VILLAGE SOCIETY
FOR HISTORIC
PRESERVATION**
SUMMER 2021

CITY APPROVES DEMO OF HISTORIC, LANDMARKED 14-16 FIFTH AVENUE

NEW TOWER APPROVED, HEIGHT REDUCED BY 42%

In an incredibly disappointing move, this May the Landmarks Preservation Commission, in a split vote decided by the Chair, approved an application to demolish the 170-year-old former townhouses at 14-16 Fifth Avenue, and replace it with a 213-ft-tall tower. Village Preservation had led the charge against this plan for four years, uncovering and documenting the historic significance of these altered buildings connected to some of the most important figures in New York and American history over the past two centuries, and securing opposition to demolition from elected officials, leading scholars and writers, and thousands of New Yorkers.

The developer put forward, and a bare majority of the Commissioners accepted, specious arguments about the lack of historic significance of these buildings, which great industrialists, writers, politicians,

inventors, actors, military leaders, and philanthropists called home. While five of the eleven commissioners argued passionately in favor of preservation, the other five and the Chair (all appointed by the Mayor) regurgitated the developer's arguments that "nothing important happened here" and the buildings were too highly altered to matter. While demolition is allowed for buildings deemed lacking architectural or historic significance within historic districts, these buildings were anything but insignificant.

On the positive side of the ledger, our efforts led to a 42% reduction in the proposed size of the replacement tower, which we nevertheless felt was still too tall. On the other hand, the existing five-story building contained 20 housing units, half affordable rent-regulated, all housing long-term residents. The new building, though four times



**14-16 FIFTH AVENUE AS IT STANDS TODAY (LEFT)
AND THE REDUCED REPLACEMENT TOWER
THAT REMAINS TOO TALL.**

the height, will have fewer units of housing, all super-luxury and undoubtedly third or fourth homes for their owners, who are likely to spend little time here. The developer, Madison Realty Capital, has a checkered track record of treatment of tenants in buildings they own. Nevertheless (and not surprisingly), this is who the Mayor's Commission sided with.

For more information, see villagepreservation.org/14-16fifth.

CITY PUSHES AHEAD WITH SOHO/NOHO UPZONING

UNDER SOCIAL JUSTICE AND EQUITY GUISE, PLAN WOULD DESTROY AFFORDABLE HOUSING, SMALL BUSINESS, NEIGHBORHOOD CHARACTER



In May the City formally filed its proposed plan to upzone SoHo, NoHo, and parts of Chinatown. The final version of the plan had very few changes from what had been presented in the fall. It would allow an increase of between 20 and 140% in the allowable size of new development (with requirements for inclusion of 25–30% affordable housing for residential developments of over 25,000 sq ft), and big-box chain stores and bars and restaurants of unlimited size.

The City projects hundreds of units of affordable housing being built, making the neighborhood more diverse and equitable, and very little new big box chain store proliferation. However, the City's projections for rezonings are notoriously inaccurate, and our analysis, contained in two reports we issued, found the plan would actually:

- Result in the creation of very little affordable housing, due to the multiple loopholes in the plan allowing developers to build

with little or no affordable housing

- Endanger and potentially result in the demolition of hundreds of units of rent-regulated affordable housing, pushing out longtime residents of lower- and moderate-income (disproportionately Asian American residents)
- Allow development that is grossly out of scale for the neighborhood
- Allow residential developments that, even if they did include affordable housing, would on the whole be more expensive, less diverse, and house wealthier residents than the current neighborhood overall
- Encourage the demolition of historic buildings and the proliferation of vertical enlargements of existing buildings
- Result in the proliferation of big box chain stores, pushing out small businesses and arts-related entities

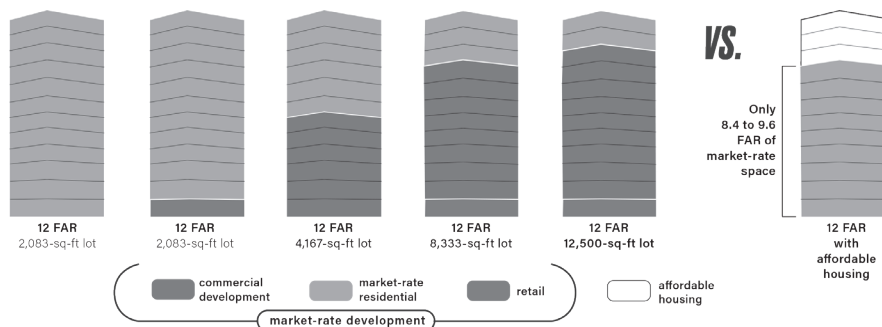
Additionally, the plan would allow NYU and the full range of “community facilities” under NYC zoning rules to expand into SoHo and

NoHo, where they are currently prohibited, in spite of prior agreements by the City Council and City Planning Commission that further expansion by the university would not be allowed beyond what was approved in the NYU 2031 plan.

Village Preservation and more than a dozen groups have proposed an alternative rezoning plan that would allow for deeper and broader affordability in new development without threatening existing affordable housing, historic buildings, small businesses, building scale, and the neighborhood's arts groups and entities. We've also forged alliances with citywide tenant and affordable housing groups, as well as groups in Chinatown (which would be heavily impacted by the plan), who have come out strongly against the City's plan.

The plan now must go through a seven-month public review and approval process. The Mayor is firmly behind the plan; the ultimate outcome will largely depend upon the votes of local Councilmembers Margaret Chin and Carlina Rivera, as well as Speaker Corey Johnson, and Manhattan Borough President Gale Brewer. We're organizing opposition to the plan, which is critical to stop not just to save these two historic neighborhoods but also because the Mayor and other city leaders say they want to repeat this type of zoning change in other historic neighborhoods.

Find out more and help at villagepreservation.org/sohonohoupzoning.



OUR LATEST REPORT SHOWS WHAT CAN BE BUILT UNDER THE MAYOR'S PLAN — FIVE VASTLY MORE PROFITABLE BUILDING COMBINATIONS WITHOUT AFFORDABLE HOUSING IN 'HOUSING OPPORTUNITY ZONES' — VS. JUST ONE WITH IT.

FIGHTING TO SAVE 50 WEST 13TH STREET

**1846 HOUSE CONTAINS HISTORIC THEATER,
RICH AFRICAN-AMERICAN HISTORY**

Village Preservation is leading the charge to landmark and preserve 50 West 13th Street. The 175-year-old house was saved from demolition years ago by a legal agreement between the minority owner, Edith O'Hara, and the majority owners. That agreement prohibited any change to the structure for the course of Edith's life; she passed away at 103 late last year.

The three-and-a-half-story structure is distinguished not only by charming 19th century detail and ironwork. Since 1972, it has been home to the 13th Street Repertory Company, one of New York's oldest and most important Off-Off Broadway theaters, founded and run by O'Hara. The theater is home to Israel Horowitz's *Line*, the longest running show in Off-Off Broadway history, as well as many other groundbreaking productions over the years. It helped launch the careers of Bette Midler, Barry Manilow, Chazz Palminteri, Richard Dreyfus, and Christopher Meloni.

Additionally, our research has uncovered that the house belonged to and was the home for decades of one of New York's most prominent 19th-century African American citizens, Jacob Day. Day was one of the city's most successful African

American businessmen, and a vocal civil rights advocate, fighting to end restrictions on voting rights imposed upon African American New Yorkers. Day was also involved with efforts to prevent the forced movement of freed blacks back to Africa, and was closely connected to prominent supporters of the Underground Railroad, and may well have been a furtive supporter of that clandestine network himself. Day's family business remained in the house for a decade after his death near the end of the 19th century, and his presence coincided with Greenwich Village containing the city's largest African American community in the 19th century.

Village Preservation has presented all of this information to the City and called for landmark designation of the endangere



**50 WEST 13TH STREET CONTAINS ONE OF NEW YORK'S OLDEST
AND MOST IMPORTANT OFF-OFF BROADWAY THEATERS**

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site. In spite of the Mayor and the Landmarks Preservation Commission's claim to give greater attention to African American and other underrepresented histories in the landmarks process, they have so far refused to move to protect this building. We have gathered strong support for the landmarking effort from elected officials, African American scholars, preservationists, and theater-lovers, and continue to rally to preserve the building.

More information at
villagepreservation.org/50w13.

VICTORY! 70 FIFTH AVENUE IS LANDMARKED

RICH HISTORY HONORED AND SUPERTALL PREVENTED, BUT SOUTH OF UNION SQUARE FIGHT CONTINUES

After a three-year campaign led by Village Preservation, the City in May landmarked 70 Fifth Avenue/2–6 West 13th Street, a 1912 Beaux Arts–style loft building in the endangered area south of Union Square for which we are campaigning for landmark designation.

The building has a remarkably rich history — it was headquarters of the NAACP, the nation's oldest and largest civil rights organization, from which the group waged critical early battles against racial discrimination and violence, as well as *The Crisis* magazine, the first African American magazine, a prominent voice in the civil rights movement for over a century, and launching pad during its time at 70 Fifth for leading Harlem Renaissance figures including Langston Hughes, Zora Neale Hurston, and Countee Cullen. But it was also home to an incredible array of progressive organizations and publishers, from the ACLU to the American Federation of Teachers, the League for Industrial Democracy, the Women's Peace Party, the Near East Foundation (formed to prevent the Armenian Genocide), and the National Board of Review of Motion Pictures.

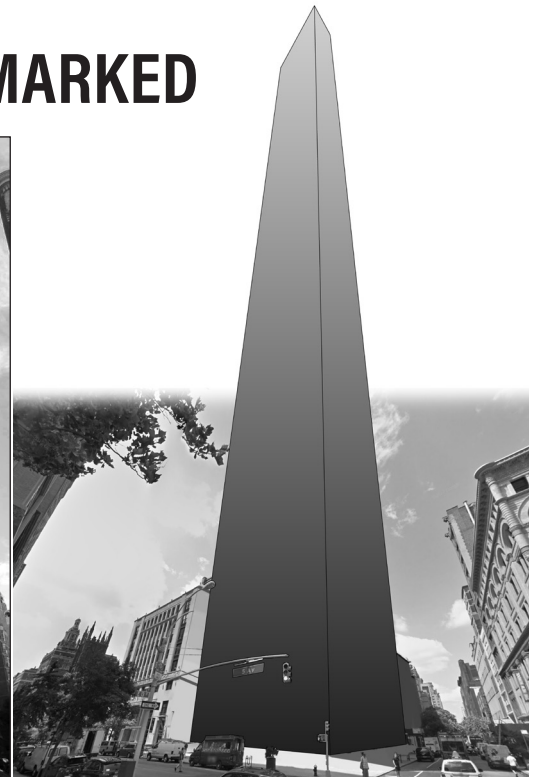
Landmark designation not only protects and honors this history; without landmark designation, a supertall tower could be built here, one of the only sites in our neighborhoods (until now) lacking in landmark protections with the type of zoning that allows such a structure to be built.

We're heartened by this victory, but the fight continues. The area of Greenwich Village and the East Village south of Union Square (Fourteenth to Ninth Streets, Fifth to Third Avenues) in which 70 Fifth lies



is almost entirely lacking in landmark or zoning protections, and is experiencing a wave of demolitions and out of character new development. But it also contains many buildings with beautiful architecture and rich history like 70 Fifth Avenue, which is why we have proposed and are fighting for landmark designation of the entire vulnerable area.

Find out more at villagepreservation.org/southofunionsquare.



**THE NEWLY LANDMARKED 70 FIFTH AVENUE (LEFT),
AND THE SUPERTALL BUILDING THAT COULD
HAVE BEEN CONSTRUCTED THERE WITHOUT THAT
LANDMARK DESIGNATION**

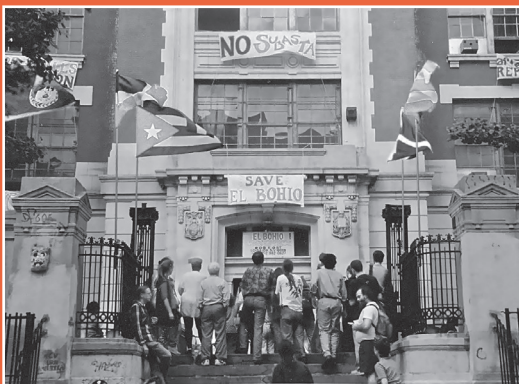


**FROM 1914 TO 1925, 70 FIFTH AVENUE HOUSED THE HEADQUARTERS OF THE NAACP
(WHERE THE BANNER AT TOP IS BELIEVED TO HAVE FIRST FLOWN) AND
ITS GROUNDBREAKING MAGAZINE *THE CRISIS***

EAST VILLAGE ROUNDUP:

SEEKING NEW LANDMARK DESIGNATIONS, PROTECTING CURRENT LANDMARKS, PRESERVING HISTORIC SITES AND BUSINESSES

FORMER P.S. 64/CHARAS-EL BOHIO, 605 EAST 9TH STREET Village Preservation is working with community partners to prevent the owner of this historic landmarked 1904 former public school from



destroying it, as he has sought to do for more than 20 years. In recent weeks the owner has left the empty building open to the elements and vandals, who have lit fires, scrawled anti-Semitic graffiti, and used axes and other tools to damage the building and access neighboring ones. We've submitted photo documentation to the City and demanded they take action: seal the building, fine the owner, and ultimately return the building to community use.

285 AND 287 EAST 3RD STREET We've asked the Landmarks Preservation Commission to landmark these twin 1837 Greek Revival townhouses, which not only are a remarkably intact piece of early 19th-century New York, but also served for decades as the home of great downtown African American artist Steve Cannon and his "Gathering of the Tribes" organization. We've challenged the Commission to live up

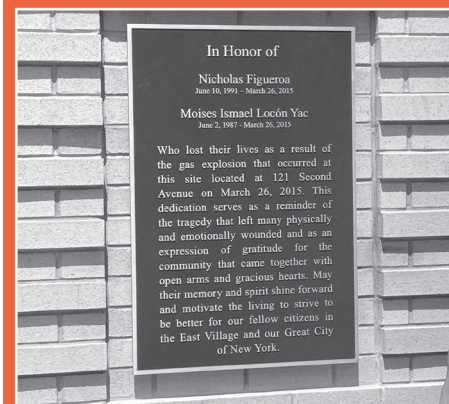
to its new "Equity Framework" for designations and protect this and other sites of great significance to African American, women's, LGBTQ, and immigrant history throughout our neighborhoods.

SAVING SMALL BUSINESSES Earlier this year, we rallied with the Save Our Storefront (SOS) coalition in the East Village to call for state legislation to save rent-burdened COVID-19-affected businesses throughout our neighborhoods. These efforts have helped lead to significant outlays in the State budget to aid such businesses, and we continue to push for legislation which would cover the rent small businesses were unable to pay during the shutdown, helping both the businesses and property owners. We and our partners also continue to push for measures in the East Village that would limit chain store proliferation, and are continuing to push for support for the measure from Councilmember Carlina Rivera and Community Board 2.



MEMORIALIZING VICTIMS OF THE 2015 GAS EXPLOSION

We were honored to be invited to participate in the unveiling of the permanent plaque on the new building that replaced the one destroyed on Second Avenue and Seventh Street by this horrible event, which took the lives of two young men. We worked with the family of one of the victims to advocate to include a permanent memorial to the victims on the building, which was unveiled in May. We can never forget this terrible, preventable tragedy, nor the lives it forever changed or ended.



YIDDISH WALK OF FAME We're helping to lead a coalition seeking to preserve this sidewalk memorial to the great figures of the Yiddish Rialto found in front of what was once the 2nd Avenue Deli at Ninth Street, created by the deli's former owner Abe Lebewohl. With the deli closed and Abe no longer with us, the Walk has no caretaker and has decayed to the point where its markers are cracked and barely legible. We're seeking a new permanent public home for the Walk in the vicinity, working with community and Jewish groups and elected officials. We recently co-staged an event on site to raise awareness and support during Lower East Side History Month.

Read more about all at villagepreservation.org/eastvillage.

IN BRIEF

2021 ELECTIONS

Village Preservation is a 501(c)3, so we can't endorse candidates. But we do educate the public about their positions and records on issues of importance to us, and share that information with the public. We held well-attended virtual forums with candidates for the three City Council districts that overlap with our area, which were recorded and widely circulated. We also distributed questionnaires to all the same candidates and shared their responses with over 20,000 on our email list. Additionally, we shared information about the position of various Mayoral candidates on issues of concern to us, and with our partners circulated a citywide petition to those same candidates urging them to support preservation in their platforms. Learn more at villagepreservation.org/2021vote.

BICENTENNIAL CELEBRATION OF OUR GREEK REVIVAL HERITAGE

This spring marked the 200th anniversary of the start of the Greek War of Independence, which helped inspire the Greek Revival style of architecture in this country that profoundly shaped the development of our neighborhoods in the 1830s and '40s, as they underwent tremendous growth. Iconic landmarks like "The Row" on Washington Square North, NoHo's "Colonnade Row," and the East Village's Sixth Street Community Synagogue, as well as countless

rowhouses, houses of worship, and other buildings, are sterling examples. To celebrate, educate, and engage, we created our Greek Revival Bicentennial StoryMap, showcasing scores of examples (present and past) in our neighborhood, telling the story of the style's evolution, and showing its defining features, which are everywhere you look, if you know how to recognize them. Explore the map at villagepreservation.org/greekrevival.



NEW HISTORIC IMAGES

We've added three amazing new collections from the 1930s through the 1960s to our online archive. One contains more than 120 images of cast iron structures in SoHo, Tribeca, and throughout New York in the late 1960s, as many were being demolished for the Washington Street Urban Renewal Project, while others had just been saved from destruction from Robert Moses' planned Lower Manhattan Expressway, and were being slowly, furtively taken over by artists as live-work spaces.

Another, from the mid-1930s, shows the grand interior of the West 9th Street townhouse of the great muralist William de Leftwich Dodge. The third, taken in the mid-60s by Dodge's grandson, shows amazing slices of life in Washington Square, on the Bowery, and throughout the neighborhood during this heady period. View them all at villagepreservation.org/imagearchive. Prints are available for sale to support our work.

CAST IRON BUILDINGS ON GREENE STREET BETWEEN BROOME AND SPRING (1969), LEFT; AND BLUEGRASS MUSICIAN ROGER SPRUNG IN WASHINGTON SQUARE PARK, (1967) FROM THE NEW ADDITIONS TO OUR HISTORIC IMAGE ARCHIVE.



Charlton-King-Vandam Historic District

9-43 and 20-42 Charlton Street; 1-49 and 16-54 King Street; 9-29 Vandam Street; and 43-51 MacDougal Street

The Charlton-King-Vandam Historic District was one of the earliest historic districts designated in New York City. Designated in 1966 shortly after the passage of the New York City Landmarks Law, the district contains the highest concentration of Greek Revival and Federal style houses



FROM THE DIRECTOR

ANDREW BERMAN



These are certainly trying times for preserving our neighborhoods and city. Small businesses face unprecedented challenges and not enough support from state and local government. The City is seeking to, for the first time ever, upzone one of our neighborhoods, allowing develop-

ment nearly two-and-a-half times the current allowable size, and says they want to replicate this formula in similar neighborhoods throughout New York. While wrapped in a false veneer of social justice and equity, the plan is a giant giveaway to the Mayor's developer-donors and corporate interests.

By contrast, we have been aggressively pursuing an agenda combining historic preservation with real social justice — putting forward alternative rezoning plans with true affordable housing that doesn't destroy neighborhood scale, character, or history; creating a new African American History curriculum for our Children's Education program which has proved extremely popular; and advancing landmarking proposals that honor the rich civil rights history of our neighborhoods. On the latter front, we've been largely stymied by an administration which consistently talks one way and acts another. But the battle continues!

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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We also gratefully acknowledge in-kind support from Prior Dodge, Doyle Partners, the Estate of Fred W. McDarragh, Peter Grisafi, Penny Hardy/PSNY, Edward LaGrassa, MADE Architecture, Eliza Paley, SergeAudio, Carole Teller, and Veselka.

BULLETIN BOARD

SAVE THE DATE! Join us for a very special Annual Benefit this year — Village Voices. An outdoor multisite public exhibit open from August 15 to September 30, it celebrates the incredibly rich history of our neighborhoods with outdoor performances and a gala reception on Sunday, September 12. More info including ticket purchase and sponsorships at villagepreservation.org/benefit.

OUR NEW WEBSITE villagepreservation.org contains a bounty of fun and useful resources. See thousands of historic images, explore dozens of maps and tours, read reports and histories of our neighborhoods, learn about the latest preservation battles, choose from thousands of neighborhood history entries on our blog, listen to oral histories or watch hundreds of past programs (and sign up for new ones!), and find out about every current application for changes to landmarked properties in our neighborhood or over the last decade. You can also sign up for our email list.

PLANNED GIVING: Make a legacy gift to Village Preservation: info@gvshp.org or 212/475-9585 x39.

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