



**Greenwich
Village
Society for
Historic
Preservation**

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November 25, 2008

Hon. Robert LiMandri
Commissioner, New York City Department of Buildings
280 Broadway
New York, NY 10007

Re: Signage Violations in Lower Manhattan

Dear Commissioner LiMandri:

As you know, instances of illegal signage in both the East and West Village have increased exponentially in recent years. Whether they are painted onto a building's exterior, affixed to roofs or facades, or projected onto an outer wall, illegal signs disrupt the character of our neighborhoods and, if mounted without proper permits, may present a danger. I urge the Department to take swift and decisive action against them.

Several instances of illegal signage reported to the Department by GVSHHP as long ago as December of 2007 have yet to be inspected, or were inspected but no violations were issued in spite of the illegal signs remaining in place. Please find descriptions of the complaints filed against these properties below:

59 Greenwich Avenue: This building, located in the Greenwich Village Historic District, has three open complaints (#1215743, #1195393, and #1194763) regarding illegal billboards, none of which have been resolved and all of which were reported prior to February 2008 (and the earliest of which dates to May 28, 2007). Of the three complaints, only the first (#1194763) was ever inspected, but the complaint was then assigned to a Special Operations Unit and no further action has been taken.

59 Fourth Avenue: On August 20, 2008, the illegal billboard on this building was reported to DOB (#1234227). Unlike other billboard violations reported at the same time, this one has been assigned to a Special Investigation Team but has not been inspected.

159 Avenue C: Reported to 311 twice in August 2007 (#1200793, #1200870), this illegal billboard posted on a residential building in a R7-2 zone has been inspected and assigned to a Special Operations Unit, but no further action has been taken and no violations have been issued.

DOB has issued violations for illegal billboards at the following locations. In each case, however, the billboards either remain in place without further action from DOB or were only temporarily removed and incorrectly determined by the Department to be “corrected:”

482 West Broadway: On January 7, 2008, a complaint was made to 311 (#1212950) about a large, illuminated billboard posted on the side of this building located in the SoHo Historic District. Incidental calls to 311 reported the billboard again in May 2008 (#1225736) and in October 2008 (#1240466). The owner not only did not receive required approvals from the Landmarks Preservation Commission, but the illuminated billboard directly faces the nearby R7-2 district at less than 100 feet, thus making it illegal under Section 42-561. Additionally, the owner’s permits for such a sign have not been renewed since they expired in June 2008. While this case was inspected and violations were prepared in response to the May and October 2008 complaints, no additional action has been taken as of the writing of this letter, and the January 2008 complaint remains open and no action has been taken.

85 Tenth Avenue: While the owner does have a permit for an illuminated non-advertising sign, this sign is within view of the arterial highway nearby as well as a public park. This situation was reported to the DOB on February 6, 2008 (complaint #1223722) and the area was inspected on August 20, 2008. The investigation reported that “Building violations prepared and attempt to serve will be made,” but the sign remains.

Just in the past weeks, GVSHP has made complaints to 311 (#1240049) against a relatively new billboard, erected at 45 Bleeker Street in the NoHo Historic District without the required permits. I strongly encourage the Department to inspect this site and emphasize to building owners that flagrant non-compliance with building and signage codes will not be tolerated.

Additionally, the increasingly common practice of illegally posting signs on construction fences has recently been brought to my attention. At 145 Charles Street in the Greenwich Village Historic District, illegal signs have been posted continuously since at least June 2008, when they were reported to 311 (#1228720). The complaint was assigned to a Special Operations Unit but no further action has been taken. While I recognize that there is no formal structure in these cases as there is with billboards, RCNY 27.03(a) prohibits “information pictorial, representations, or any business or advertising messages” to be posted on construction fences. The DOB has maintained its stance that it is illegal to post signs of any kind on construction fences in keeping with RCNY 27.03(a), yet nothing has been done to discourage this kind of advertising or remove it. It is

extremely important the DOB take swift action in these cases to send a clear message that they intend to abide by their policies.

I thank you for your attention to these matters and look forward to following up with your office in the future.

Sincerely,



Andrew Berman
Executive Director

cc: Municipal Art Society
Dept. of Buildings Manhattan Borough Commissioner Christopher Santulli
East Village Community Coalition
SoHo Alliance
NoHo Neighborhood Association
West Eleventh Street Block Association
West Houston Street Block Association