



Greenwich Village

SOCIETY FOR HISTORIC PRESERVATION

THE ANTHEMION
SPRING/SUMMER
2017
NEWSLETTER

Fight for University Place, Broadway, 3rd & 4th Avenues Reaches Boiling Point

GVSHP Leads Charge to Condition Approvals for Mayor's 'Tech Hub' on Overdue Neighborhood Protections

The area between 5th and 3rd Avenues, Union Square and Astor Place, is facing an unprecedented overdevelopment threat. Right now, multiple plans for towers up to 300 ft. tall or greater are underway in the area, and many are for office buildings or hotels. The Mayor has not only opposed efforts to curtail such development here, but has actually proposed a new project which would accelerate the rate of overdevelopment. Ironically, however, the Mayor's plan may unintentionally present us with our last and best opportunity to protect this area.

GVSHP has long been aware of the threat of potential overdevelopment in this part of the Village and East Village, and nearly three years ago proposed zoning changes that would limit the height of new developments, reinforce the residential character of the area, and provide incentives for preserving or creating affordable housing, which the Mayor claims is his top priority. Yet the Mayor has adamantly opposed our rezoning plan, in spite of broad support from the local community and elected officials.

Worse, he has dishonestly claimed that

there are no real development sites in the neighborhood, that new developments of 300 ft. in height or more fit in with the neighborhood, and that our rezoning plan would create no affordable housing. The Mayor has espoused these falsehoods to avoid admitting that he opposes rezoning plans that go against developers' wishes to limit height on new developments, even at the expense of forgoing the creation or preservation of affordable housing.

Case in point: when we met with the Mayor's City Planning staff to discuss our rezoning plan, we provided them with a map showing over a dozen potential development sites in the area. They claimed virtually none of these sites could ever be developed. Just two years later, nearly half are being developed.

Further, our rezoning proposal was in response to plans for the nearly 300 ft. tall tower now rising on University Place and 12th Street, where Bowlmor Lanes once stood. That tower will be more than double the height of nearly every adjacent building, and will only contain luxury condos. Under our rezoning plan, the new

development would only have been about half that height, and could have contained over 20,000 sq. ft. of affordable housing. In fact, we estimate our rezoning plan could create or preserve more than 200,000 sq. ft. of affordable housing in the area.

A block away, at 827-31 Broadway/47 East 12th Street, three beautiful 1866 cast-iron buildings which the Mayor refused to landmark are slated to be replaced by a nearly 300 ft. tall office tower. At 799 Broadway/80 East 12th Street, the former St. Denis Hotel was bought for \$101 million, with plans being considered for developing a giant Tech/office tower on the site. And further east at 112-120 East 11th Street,

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Hundreds turned out despite the rain for a rally with GVSHP and City Councilmember Rosie Mendez.

West Village Bears Brunt of Lax Landmarks Oversight

Previously Unimaginable Plans Approved in Historic Districts

In recent months, the West Village has seen some shocking plans approved by the Landmarks Preservation Commission (LPC) in its historic districts, as the current administration's disinclination towards preservation, combined with an increasingly hot real estate market, has allowed totally out of character developments to move ahead.

11 Jane Street — In February, the LPC approved plans for a new 6-story building replacing the 2-story garage on this quintessential Village block between Greenwich and 8th Avenues. GVSHP and many neighbors pushed back hard on the proposed building's height and design. The LPC did bring down the height slightly, but certainly not to that of the site's 4-story neighbors, as GVSHP called for. The design started off looking like an office block, but then under pressure from the Commission to make changes, morphed into something more akin to a Motel 6. To our shock and surprise, the LPC then accepted this design with only minor adjustments, sparking an outraged response from the Society and neighbors.

145 Perry Street — Also in February, the LPC approved plans for a large single-family mansion and connected 6-story apartment building for the owner's children. Here the size of the proposed buildings was not an issue, as they were actually slightly smaller than previously-approved plans for a different development on the site. But the mega-mansion, occupying most of the site, looked like a marble-clad fortress that would be

more at home on Rodeo Drive or an upscale Miami shopping street than in the West Village. In spite of vociferous objections from GVSHP and many others, the LPC approved this proposal as presented at the first hearing.

Keller Hotel, 150 Barrow Street — We were more optimistic when the LPC told an applicant seeking to add a rather large and visible rooftop addition to this individual landmark on West Street that no such addition, other than for a modest amount of necessary mechanical space, would be allowed at this highly-visible location for this unique historic structure. But to our shock, when the applicant returned in April with a proposal for a slightly reduced but still highly-visible rooftop addition, the LPC went back on their prior statements and approved it.

These approvals, along with other recent ones by the LPC on Gansevoort Street, among other locations, represent a disturbing trend by the Commission under the current administration to greenlight proposed changes in landmarked districts and to individually landmarked buildings that seem to fly in the face of the purpose of landmark designations. In response, GVSHP wrote an op-ed, "*What's Wrong With the Landmarks Preservation Commission?*" looking at the LPC's history in regulating our neighborhood and the disturbing trend of their increasingly lax oversight.

As we go to press, an application has been filed with the LPC for approval for a new 7-story building on a lot which formerly contained a gas station at 538 Hudson Street (at Charles Street) in the Greenwich Village Historic District. Design plans have not yet been made public, but GVSHP will be closely monitoring the application and informing the public as soon as plans and hearing times

are available.



11 Jane Street



145 Perry Street



Keller Hotel

East Village Preservation Progress

*Variance Defeated, 'Fake Dorm'
Dormant, 19th c. House Safe For Now*

432 E. 14th/435 E. 13th Street Zoning Variance Defeated — GVSHP was proud to spearhead the successful campaign to defeat a baseless zoning variance for a new development on this site between 1st Avenue and Avenue A. It would have skirted contextual zoning limits for the area and allowed a new development to climb 50% higher and be 25% larger than local zoning allowed.

In this case, a developer claimed that due to underground water and unstable soil conditions, he could not make a reasonable return developing this property under the terms of the existing zoning, and thus qualified under the law for a zoning variance. But as GVSHP pointed out, neighboring sites had the exact same underground conditions, and yet were developed under the existing zoning restrictions without requiring a variance. The developer further tried to

justify their request by claiming that the taller towers of Stuyvesant Town across 14th Street were appropriate “context” within which to view any development here, rather than the adjacent East Village buildings. GVSHP pushed back strongly on these claims.

With the support of neighbors, elected officials, and unions who opposed the developer’s labor practices, we made a powerful case before the Board of Standards and Appeals. To avoid embarrassment, in March the developer suddenly withdrew their application once it became clear they would lose. More at gvshp.org/432e14.

'Fake Dorm' Still on Hold at Old P.S. 64

— Plans to turn the former P.S. 64/CHARAS-El Bohio Cultural Center at 605 E. 9th Street into a ‘fake dorm’ remain on hold in the face of staunch opposition from GVSHP, community groups, elected officials and neighbors. For more than 20 years, the developer/owner of the now-landmarked building has sought to demolish it, stripped it of architectural ornament, allowed it to decay, left it open to the elements, let the sidewalk shed around the building become dark and

dangerous, and tried to fill it with what he calls “dormitories.” An actual dorm would fit the definition of a ‘community facility,’ to which use of this site is limited by deed restriction.

But his version of a ‘dorm’ has consistently skirted the legal requirements for such facilities. His latest scheme called for renting out 80% of the beds to someone other than the ‘school’ named in the lease, violating clear requirements. Meanwhile the school listed on the lease actually claimed not to be a school in city paperwork filed for a different building.

GVSHP and coalition partners held a rally and press conference on City Hall steps, pointing out the similarity of this case to the recent scandalous lifting of ‘community facility’ deed restrictions at nearby Rivington House. GVSHP also circulated a petition calling for the City not to approve the fake dorm plans, and to work with the community to see the building returned to a true community use. Not long after, the City appeared to back away from its prior willingness to grant approvals. See gvshp.org/charas for more info.

264 E. 7th Street Appears Safe, For Now —

GVSHP and allies slammed the City last year for refusing to landmark this 1842 house which it called “landmark eligible” in 2008. A new owner filed plans to demolish the lovely structure, part of a row of similar merchant’s houses that improbably survived on this block between Avenues C and D.

While the City refused to honor its 2008 commitment and protect the historic property, the owner was persuaded to sell the house to a new owner who they say has stated their intention to preserve and maintain the property. GVSHP will continue to closely monitor the site.



Proposed building with variance at 432 E. 14th Street



Former P.S. 64, left open to the elements for years.



264 E. 7th Street. Credit: EV Grieve.

Securing Real Public Input at the LPC

This spring the Landmarks Preservation Commission announced a new system for accepting public comments on revisions to major applications under their review. But in many cases, the new system only gave the public about four business hours to find, review, formulate, and submit comments on the new proposed plans, including those for new buildings or major alterations.

GVSHP immediately responded by letting the Commission know that this was an unacceptably short window to allow any meaningful opportunity for public input, and reached out to fellow preservation organizations and elected officials such as Councilmembers Corey Johnson and Rosie Mendez to join in calling for changes.

We're pleased to report that after hearing from GVSHP and our allies, the Commission did in fact change their system, making the necessary information for public input available earlier and the deadline for submitting comments later. This turned a "public comment period" in name only into one that actually allows the public to participate.



*in
brief*

Naming A School For Jane Jacobs

We can think of almost no other figure more deserving of becoming the namesake for a new community-initiated public school in Greenwich

Village than Jane Jacobs. Thus GVSHP is joining with parents, educators and community leaders to call for the new soon-to-open Greenwich Village Middle School at 75 Morton Street to be named for the woman many refer to as the 'Patron Saint of Greenwich Village.'

The potential naming provides a tremendous opportunity for Jane Jacobs to serve as inspiration and example for students as they come to learn about and engage the world.



Jane Jacobs

The new school at 75 Morton St. resulted from considerable grassroots community organizing.

She taught us to challenge conventional thought; always assume you had something valuable to contribute to conversations about your surroundings and your future; that 'average people' who carefully observe what is going on around them often know as much as if not more than so-called 'experts;' and that the free flow of ideas and interactions between different kinds of people made for safer, healthier, and more successful communities and societies.

No final decision has been made about the school name. But we are confident that the broad support for and undeniable merit of honoring Jane Jacob's legacy in the neighborhood she called home will ultimately carry the day.

City Council Candidate Outreach

GVSHP is reaching out to candidates for the two contested City Council races in our area taking place this fall – District 1, which includes Washington Square, parts of the South Village, and the Lower East Side, and District 2 which includes Greenwich Village east of 5th Avenue, the East Village, and NoHo (the race for the 3rd Council District, covering Greenwich Village west of 5th Avenue, is uncontested). While as a 501 C-3 organization GVSHP cannot endorse or recommend candidates, we can ask them their positions and discuss their records on key issues, share that publicly, and encourage the public to consider such information when they vote.

In April, GVSHP and allied groups held a forum for District 1 & 2 candidates about preservation issues, and asked District 2 candidates to commit to condition support for the Mayor's proposed Tech Hub on zoning protections for the surrounding neighborhood (see p.1). All those in attendance did. All candidates were also questioned on a range of other preservation and development issues. Video of the forum is available on our website. GVSHP will also be sending candidates a questionnaire on such issues to get their positions in writing, and will share that with the public too. See gvshp.org/candidates2017.

New Oral Histories



Peter Ruta

Otis Kidwell Burger

GVSHP just added two exciting new oral histories to our online collection, with renowned Westbeth artist Peter Ruta (1918-2016), and Otis Kidwell Burger, great-granddaughter of noted abolitionist Sidney Howard Gay and former landlady to Jane Jacobs.

Ruta discusses fleeing Nazi-occupied Europe, joining the U.S. army, meeting Stella Adler, becoming and establishing a successful career as an artist, and life in Westbeth since its opening in 1970. Burger discusses her nearly 60 years living on Bethune Street, Jacobs writing 'Death and Life of Great American Cities' while renting a room in her house, throwing parties that Norman Mailer and other cultural luminaries of the era attended, and how life in the Village has changed over six decades.

GVSHP's oral history collection now includes nearly forty interviews with preservation pioneers, architects, artists, philanthropists, businesses people, and neighborhood leaders who impacted our communities, including Jane Jacobs, Jonas Mekas, Marlis Momber, Margot Gayle, Matt Umanov, David Amram, and Merce Cunningham. Several more are set for release later this year. Access them all at gvshp.org/oralhistory.

Historic Image Archive Grows

GVSHP has added scores of new images to our online historic image archive, with the most recent additions focused on the Meatpacking District and Greenwich Village waterfront. Most were taken by GVSHP over the last three decades as part of our ongoing survey and documentation work, but now serve as testament to both dramatic change and hard-fought preservation victories. You can see meatpackers, after-hours clubs, and grit that are long gone, as well as layers of history and architectural detail that have in many cases not only been saved but restored. These pictures are worth more than a thousand words!



Image of the Meatpacking District in the 1980's from GVSHP's Historic Image Archive.

GVSHP's entire online archive of several hundred images spans more than two centuries and includes everything from street scenes to etchings, portraits, and colored postcards – of buildings long gone and those thankfully still here. And stay tuned as we will soon be more than doubling the size of our archive thanks to some incredible donations of photographs by longtime area residents who have shared a lifetime of personal neighborhood documentation. See them all at archive.gvshp.org.

Business of the Month

Each month, GVSHP chooses a local independently-owned business to highlight via our website and e-newsletter to celebrate and encourage patronage of the unique stores that help make our neighborhoods what they are. We accept nominations throughout the year and have loved having an excuse to explore the incredible array of innovative merchants that call the Village, East Village, and NoHo home.



Recent businesses have included *Whitney Chemists*, *Walter's Clock, Watch, & Jewelry Repair*, and *Chess Forum* in the Village; *Dashwood Books* in NoHo; Mexican emporium *La Sirena* and Indian wares-purveyor *Kantinka* in the East Village; and *the Hat Shop* in the South Village. You can read about them all, and the unique services and products they offer, or submit a nomination, at gvshp.org/bom.



continued from page 1

between 3rd and 4th Avenues, a row of 1890 Beaux Arts tenements which provided over one hundred units of permanent housing (in many cases in affordable rent-regulated apartments) were demolished over our protests to make way for a 120-room 'Moxy' Hotel geared towards party-hopping millennials.

This is particularly egregious because in 2008 the City found these buildings "landmark-eligible," but Mayor de Blasio refused to honor this finding. Why? We can't know for sure, but the only thing that changed about the buildings is the new owner, a major campaign donor to and political ally of the Mayor. Under our rezoning plan, 14,000 sq. ft. of affordable housing could have been included here; the hotel will have none.

The reasons for this out-of-control wave of development in the area are many. First, unlike most of Greenwich Village and a significant chunk of the East Village, the area is almost entirely lacking in landmark protections. Second, the zoning for much of the area is outdated and encourages or allows out-of-scale development, and in some areas encourages hotel, office, or dorm development.

Finally, the development boom in this area is being fueled by its increasing popularity as a location for the tech industry. Tech firms have migrated to Union Square, 770 Broadway at

8th Street (which now houses Facebook), and the large new office building at 51 Astor Place, where IBM and other tech firms have offices. Thus the area between Union Square and Astor Place has become the new frontier for this booming sector.

Now the Mayor actually wants to accelerate this trend by allowing a piece of city-owned land on 14th Street east of 4th Avenue, currently occupied by a P.C. Richard store, to be developed as a new "Tech Hub" that would serve as both an incubator for small start-up firms and anchor for the expansion of "Silicon Alley" into the blocks between Union Square and Astor Place. If the Tech Hub is approved on 14th Street without the protections we are seeking for the blocks to the south, the overdevelopment trend we are seeing now will only multiply in force.

But believe it or not, the Mayor's plan presents a unique opportunity to save our neighborhood and secure the protections we need. The Mayor has made clear he will not rezone or landmark this area to preserve its character or protect it from overdevelopment. But in order to build the Tech Hub he desperately wants, the Mayor would need the approval of the City Council. And for a local land use matter like this, the Council will almost always defer to the local City Councilmember. And that gives us the leverage to get the protections we need.

GVSHP has reached out to Councilmember Rosie Mendez, who represents the area and who has long been a supporter of this and other vital preservation efforts. We have asked her, and she has more than willingly agreed, not to support any approvals for the Mayor's Tech Hub in the City Council until and unless the Mayor agrees to zoning or other protections for the residential neighborhood between Union Square and Astor Place that we have long called for. We have asked Borough President Brewer, who also supports both our proposed rezoning and the Tech Hub, and who would also have to vote on the Tech Hub, to support this stance as well.

But Councilmember Mendez's term expires at the end of this year, and term limits prevent her from running again. Since it now appears the Mayor's Tech Hub plan would likely not come before the City Council until 2018, GVSHP is also reaching out to the candidates to replace her to seek their pledge that they, too, would not support City Council approval of the Tech Hub without the necessary zoning protections for our neighborhood. In part because of Councilmember Mendez's pledge, we have already had tremendous success (see p.4 "City Council Candidate Outreach").

So we will continue to fight for zoning protections and against inappropriate developments in the area right now. But we are working hard to ensure that we have the

leverage we need, from the need for City Council approval of the Tech Hub, to force the Mayor's hand to protect our neighborhood if necessary. For more info, see gvshp.org/tech.



Due to inadequate zoning, 112-120 E. 11th Street (l.) has been demolished to make way for this 120-room 'Moxy' hotel (m.); 827-31 Broadway/47 E 12th St. (r.) are set to be replaced by a 300 ft. tall office tower.

From the Director

GVSHP and the neighborhoods we represent are characterized by many things: a respect for history; charming architecture, human scale, and a distinct sense of place; small independent businesses and arts organizations; a tradition of embracing immigrants, artists, innovators and free-thinkers; leading civil rights and social justice movements; and resistance to authoritarian figures and reckless real estate development.

Needless to say, all of these characteristics are under attack right now in many different ways. But GVSHP works hard to bolster and celebrate the principles we stand for, from our recently-released Civil Rights and Social Justice Map, to our Annual Village Awards (this year recognizing affordable housing advocates, educators, the Village AIDS Memorial, groundbreaking cultural institutions, and vibrant small businesses, among others), and of course our ongoing advocacy for zoning and landmark protections that help preserve the precious landscape we hold so dear.

So much of what we treasure, whether our small businesses, unique sense of place, or welcoming and forward-thinking ethos, are fragile, and once lost, not easily regained. That's why GVSHP is constantly on guard to document, celebrate, and protect all, whether it's fighting a woefully out of place new development, honoring a trailblazing cultural pioneer, or remembering our immigrant forebears. In 2017, this work may be needed more than ever.



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Bulletin Board

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Visit GVSHP's blog *Off the Grid* for fun and fascinating glimpses into our neighborhoods' hidden history, eye-catching architecture, and colorful characters—see gvshp.org/blog.

Explore Historic Images of our neighborhood at GVSHP's Historic Image Archive – gvshp.org/archive.

Get with the Program! Upcoming lectures, book talks, walking tours, and panel discussions are listed at gvshp.org/programs; past program videos are at gvshp.org/pastprograms.

For the Children Our Kids Ed program serves over 1,000 kids in city schools each year regardless of need, using the Village as a living lab to show how history can be understood from the built environment around them. Find out more at gvshp.org/kidsed.

Did you know? Every day GVSHP monitors all 6,500 buildings in our neighborhoods for new building, alteration, or demolition permits, and all 3,500 landmarked structures for any major proposed changes. We've helped get more than 1,250 buildings landmarked, and nearly one hundred blocks of our neighborhoods rezoned.

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