



**Greenwich
Village Society
for Historic
Preservation**

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**TESTIMONY OF THE GREENWICH VILLAGE SOCIETY
FOR HISTORIC PRESERVATION
REGARDING PROPOSED "TECH HUB"
at 14TH STREET & IRVING PLACE
July 10, 2018**

I am the Executive Director of the Greenwich Village Society for Historic Preservation, the largest membership organization in Greenwich Village and the East Village. On behalf of our several thousand members, I am here today to strongly urge the Council NOT to approve the Mayor's proposed 14th Street Tech Hub, UNLESS it is accompanied by protections for the adjacent and directly affected Greenwich Village and East Village neighborhoods.

Without such protections, the Tech Hub will simply accelerate the destruction of these adjoining predominantly residential, low-to-mid-rise neighborhoods. Current inadequate zoning and increasing pressure from the expanding tech industry is turning them into an extension of Midtown South and Silicon Alley. We've been asking the City to address these issues for more than three years. We've made clear from the first announcement of the plans for the Tech Hub a year and a half ago that unless neighborhood protections were attached, it would greatly exacerbate already serious overdevelopment problems in the surrounding area. From the beginning we've called for neighborhood zoning or landmark protections to be part of the Tech Hub mitigation plan. But the City has consistently refused.

The relationship between overdevelopment in this area and the Tech Hub is not in our minds. The real estate press and several developers themselves have pointed to the announced plan for the 14th Street Tech Hub as spurring new, previously unheard of tech-related development in the predominantly residential neighborhoods to the south, along the University Place, Broadway, and 3rd and 4th Avenue corridors.

We are more than willing to accept a Tech Hub on 14th Street, even one larger and more commercial than current zoning allows. But not at the expense of our neighborhoods. And not when it is unnecessary to do so. We have proposed reasonable zoning measures that would protect neighborhood character and encourage or require the inclusion of affordable housing. But the City has consistently said no.

We have offered a win-win. The Mayor has said it's his way or the highway. Please stand with the residents of this neighborhood and vote NO on the Tech Hub UNLESS protections for the immediate impacted Greenwich Village and East Village neighborhoods are included.

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Along the University Place and Broadway corridors, current zoning allows 300 to 400 ft. tall office, hotel, or condo towers. Such a tower is nearing completion at University Place and 12th Street, sticking out like a sore thumb. An office tower of this scale was planned nearby on Broadway, and was only stopped by our successful efforts to get the site landmarked. Nearly a half dozen similar projects are planned or in motion in this predominantly residential area, where few buildings exceed 12 or so stories, and most are significantly less.

On 3rd and 4th Avenues, developers are encouraged to sidestep the area's existing affordable housing zoning incentives and predominantly residential character by zoning which allows commercial developments 10% larger than market-rate residential ones, since the affordable housing incentives only apply to residential, not commercial, developments. As a result, modest walk up apartments with rent stabilized units are being demolished to build 300-plus room hotels -- in one case, by a developer who is a campaign fundraiser for the Mayor, and the Mayor's appointee to the Economic Development Corporation, the agency behind the Tech Hub.

To address this, for University Place and Broadway we've proposed replacing the current zoning, which has no height limits and no incentives for affordable housing, with new zoning that would not only **not** reduce the allowable FAR, but increase it, albeit modestly, for developments which include affordable housing. We would limit the height of new construction to a maximum of 145 feet -- about the height of the tallest buildings in the area. Our proposed zoning is the contextual counterpart of the existing zoning, with affordable housing provisions added. Had this happened already, the luxury condo tower now rising at University Place and 12th Street could have included 30,000 square feet of affordable housing.

For 3rd and 4th Avenues, such affordable housing provisions and height limits already exist. There we're simply seeking to eliminate the loophole through which developers get around the affordable housing incentives and build out of character large-scale commercial developments. We propose lowering the maximum allowable commercial FAR to below that allowed for residential developments. This would ensure new development remains predominantly residential, and the main incentive for avoiding affordable housing provisions is removed.

It is these modest but necessary changes we have proposed as mitigation for the Tech Hub which the City has refused to consider or even seriously discuss.

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Thousands of New Yorkers have written city officials in support of the neighborhood protections we have called for, or have specifically said they must come along with any planned Tech Hub for the area. Additionally, every elected official who represents the area, including Congressmember Carolyn Maloney, Borough President Gale Brewer, State Senators Brad Hoylman and Liz Kruger, Assemblymember Deborah Glick, and of course past City Councilmember Rosie Mendez and current Councilmember Carlina Rivera, have all endorsed these neighborhood protections. Community Boards 2 and 3 have both passed resolutions in support of them, CB 3 including it in its ULURP recommendation on the Tech Hub, as did the Borough President.

Additionally, a vast array of affordable housing, planning, neighborhood, progressive, and good government groups have come out in support of the neighborhood protections for this area we have been calling for, including:

- The Cooper Square Committee, an affordable housing provider
- Fourth Arts Block, a cultural consortium
- Good Old Lower East Side, an advocate for low-income neighborhood residents
- The Metropolitan Council on Housing, a citywide advocate for tenants and affordable housing

- New York Communities for Change, a citywide advocate for underserved New Yorkers
- The Lower East Side Power Partnership, a non-profit seeking to empower individuals and families of the Lower East Side
- The East Village Community Coalition, which works to support and sustain the built and cultural character of the East Village.
- The East Village Independent Merchants Association, which works to create a strong and diverse business environment that sustains the unique character of the East Village
- Lower East Side Preservation Initiative
- Bowery Alliance of Neighbors
- The Historic Districts Council, the citywide advocate for historic neighborhoods
- The Municipal Art Society, the citywide advocate for sound planning principles
- Vision Urbana, a youth and senior services provider in Lower Manhattan
- Loisaida Inc., a non-profit established to address the serious economic and social disenfranchisement of poor and low income Latino residents of the Lower East Side
- Coalition for a District Alternative, the East Village's progressive Democratic Club
- Village Independent Democrats, Greenwich Village's original progressive Democratic Club

All have called for any Tech Hub approvals to be contingent upon neighborhood protections. We hope you will heed their call.

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This community has worked closely with our Councilmember, Carlina Rivera, in a good faith effort to balance neighborhood concerns with the city's desires and the potential good which could come from the proposed Tech Hub. As it regards neighborhood protections, it has thus far been a one-way conversation. The zoning plan we have offered is by no means our ideal, but a reasonable alternative designed specifically to address issues like affordable housing and not reduce allowable development at all, but merely ensure that the uses and the heights of new buildings are compatible with the surrounding neighborhood. Apparently, this is a bridge too far for our Mayor.

We have offered landmarking as an acceptable alternative, which would address some if not all of these issues. There too, we have seen no substantive progress.

We have been engaging in this conversation with the City for years, so the fact that we are here today with so little progress to show for it lies squarely on the shoulders of this administration. It is they who have refused to listen, refused to negotiate, refused to compromise. It has been their way or no way from the beginning, even when the plans we offer address their purported goals of creating affordable housing, which seem much less important to this administration than increasing the profits and development potential of real estate interests.

It is the role of the City Council, among other things, to balance the interests of the Mayor with that of local communities, especially on land use issues. We have tried to work with the Mayor, from early on, in the genuine hopes of achieving a win-win, as we have with other ULURP's. But this time this Mayor has shown no interest in anything other than serving his interests, and those of his campaign donors who are behind the proposed Tech Hub and many of the developments which would benefit from it.

Don't sign off on turning Greenwich Village and the East Village into an extension of Midtown South and Silicon Alley. Stand up to the Mayor. Stand up for New York City's neighborhoods. Vote NO on the proposed Tech Hub unless the Mayor agrees to necessary neighborhood protections.