

PRESERVATION ALERT

from the **Greenwich Village Society for Historic Preservation**

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GVSHP Finds Designated Landmarks Not Marked As Such in Buildings Department Records

Flaw in system has potential to allow inappropriate alteration, construction, and demolition permits to be issued for buildings in spite of landmark protections

City Records Drop Landmark Status for Buildings: GVSHP has found that as many as 17% of the buildings in designated historic districts in Greenwich Village were NOT marked as such in Department of Buildings records, leaving these buildings vulnerable to receiving City approval for inappropriate alteration, construction, or even demolition that should never be permitted for landmarked buildings. GVSHP has reported this disturbing problem to city agencies, but in light of the seemingly broad and systemic problem, we have also asked the City Council to investigate and conduct oversight hearings on the matter.

When sites or buildings are given landmark protections, they are supposed to be listed as such in the Department of Buildings' (DOB) Buildings Information System. This ensures that if someone applies for permits to make any change to a landmarked building, rather than receiving permits to do so from DOB, the applicant is sent to the Landmarks Preservation Commission (LPC), which will then hold public hearings on any proposed major changes to the building(s), and decide whether or not to allow them. Demolition of or major alterations to landmarked properties are rarely allowed by the LPC.

However, if buildings are not noted as landmarks in DOB's system, permits can be issued without ever going to the LPC for review.

Alteration and demolition permits can be quickly issued for non-landmarked buildings as long as other paperwork is in order. This is exactly what GVSHP discovered happened to buildings in our neighborhood – because they were not marked as landmarks in DOB’s systems, the agency issued permits for landmarked buildings without LPC approval that should never have been issued, allowing inappropriate alterations to historic buildings.

In response to this problem, over the past several months GVSHP has surveyed DOB records to see if other buildings were not appropriately listed as landmarks. We were shocked to find that in the Gansevoort Market Historic District, approx. 10% of all buildings were not listed as landmarks in the DOB system. In the Greenwich Village Historic District, which was designated in 1969 and which remains the City’s largest historic district, 337 out of 2,035 buildings, or approx. 17%, were not listed as landmarks. This included iconic structures such as those on Washington Square North and Washington Mews. When GVSHP reported these “unmarked” addresses to the City, we were told all had been fixed; we found, however, that 79 remained un-“fixed,” and 29 buildings which had previously been correctly marked as landmarks were “unmarked” as such in DOB records as part of the “fixing” process!

This shows a disturbing pattern of problems with this system, which is so essential to ensuring the protection of our landmarks. And while GVSHP has been able to check and seek corrections for any erroneously unmarked buildings in Greenwich Village, we are concerned about how pervasive this problem may be citywide, where other communities may not have the resources or expertise to check on this information. Therefore GVSHP has asked the relevant committees of the City Council to investigate this matter and hold oversight hearings ([CLICK HERE](#) for letter).

To see the New York Times story on this issue, [CLICK HERE](#).

GVSHP will be raising this issue at tonight’s City Council forum on the Department of Buildings (7:30-9:30 pm at 110 East 14th Street), and we encourage you to as well. For more information on that forum, [CLICK HERE](#) and [HERE](#).