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GREENWICH VILLAGE SOCIETY FOR HISTORIC PRESERVATION

Fate of South Village Lies in Speaker Quinn's Hands

Without Landmarking, Proposed Rezoning Will Speed Destruction of Historic Area

The South Village, extending from Washington Square Park between Sixth Avenue and LaGuardia Place south to Watts Street, has faced increasing danger and destruction in recent months. New, larger buildings are planned to replace demolished, historic structures at 178 Bleecker Street, the former Children's Aid Society campus on Sullivan Street, 186 Spring Street (see story p.6), and 180 Sixth Avenue at VanDam Street. In spite of these dangers, and promises made four years ago, the NYC Landmarks Preservation Commission (LPC) refuses to move ahead with consideration of the area for landmark designation, though it enjoys support from the New York State Historic Preservation Office, the Preservation League of NY State, citywide preservation organizations, and nearly every local elected official and community group.

A rezoning plan under consideration by the City threatens to accelerate the danger to the South Village. The City is currently considering a proposal to rezone the Hudson

Square neighborhood, to the South Village's immediate south and west. The rezoning would significantly increase the growth potential in Hudson Square, allowing residential development for the first time, turning it into a "24-hour-a-day" neighborhood with the goal attracting new businesses and residents (see story p.5).

Unless landmarking moves ahead, it would also increase development pressure upon the South Village, accelerating its destruction. The City's own environmental review of the proposed rezoning found the South Village "landmark-eligible," but suffering a

"significant adverse impact" if the rezoning is approved. With the City refusing to landmark and poised to approve the rezoning, this leaves only one person who can save the South Village – City Council Speaker Christine Quinn.

The rezoning must also be approved by the City Council, so the Speaker has the ability to turn it down if South Village landmark protections aren't provided. Perhaps more importantly, the Mayor (who controls the LPC) is dependent upon the Council for approval of virtually any legislative initiative, and the LPC is dependent upon the Council for funding and approval of all its designations. Thus the Council also has immense leverage to compel City Hall and the LPC to keep their word and to finally move ahead with designation. The Council frequently extracts such concessions from City Hall as part of a rezoning deal, including landmark designations that came with the West Chelsea and Atlantic Yards rezonings.

We're confident that Speaker Quinn, who has in the past stated her support for South Village landmarking, can secure such commitments here too. However, she has not yet indicated whether she will use her power to do so. To urge Speaker Quinn to use her leverage to save the South Village, go to gvshp.org/svlet; for more info, see gvshp.org/sv.



GVSHP and supporters have long called for landmark protections for the South Village. This demonstration was in front of the demolished 1861 house at 178 Bleecker Street.

More inside ▶

East Village Landmarking Makes Historic Strides

Historic District Protections Increase Tenfold With First New Districts in Forty-Three Years

In October, the East Village/Lower East Side Historic District was designated, covering 325 buildings on 15 blocks between the Bowery and Avenue A, St. Mark's Place and 2nd Street. Earlier in the year, the East 10th Street Historic District was designated, covering all 26 buildings on the north side of Tompkins Square. These were the first new historic districts in the East Village since 1969, increasing the number of buildings protected by East Village historic districts tenfold, and quadrupling the number of blocks included.

GVSHP played an important role in helping secure these designations. We had long called upon the City to consider expanded landmark protections in the East Village, one of New York's most historic and least landmarked neighborhoods. When the City came out with an initial proposal for a historic district, working with neighborhood and preservation allies and Councilmember Rosie Mendez, we successfully pushed to get the district expanded to include key historic sites. And we rallied strong support for designation (against some noisy and determined opposition), winning a hard-fought battle for support from the local community board, and helping to rally residents, property owners, and merchants in favor of designation.



Some of the buildings GVSHP fought to preserve which were included in the East Village Historic District are (l. to r.) Mezritch Synagogue, the Russian Orthodox Cathedral, 101 Avenue A (photo: Barry Munger).

As always, GVSHP also played a key role in monitoring attempts to demolish or alter properties within the proposed historic district before landmark designations were approved. In one case, we discovered and alerted the Landmarks Preservation Commission to an application to build atop a building in the heart of the proposed East 10th Street Historic District, breaking the nearly uniform row of houses framing Tompkins Square North. As a result, the City held an emergency designation hearing, and the developer was ultimately prevented from adding a visible addition atop the structure.

Research conducted by GVSHP over the last several years (funded in part by Preserve NY, a grant program of the NY State Council on the Arts and the Preservation League of NY State) documenting the history of every building in the East Village was also shared with and utilized by the Landmarks Preservation Commission, helping to speed along the landmarking process and build the argument for designation of these districts.

The two new East Village historic districts included dozens of early 19th century houses, 19th century churches reflecting the waves of immigrants who transformed

this neighborhood, cultural landmarks like the former Fillmore East, and scores of well-preserved tenements, built between the mid-19th and turn of the last century. The district also included Congregation Mezritch Synagogue, the East Village's last operating tenement synagogue, and the Community Synagogue at 323 East 6th Street, built in 1847 and formerly the German Evangelical Lutheran Church, home of many of the more than 1,000 victims of the 1904 General Slocum ferry disaster. Buildings we were able to get included in the expanded district include one of the East Village's grandest edifices, the Russian Orthodox Cathedral at 59 East 2nd Street, the former Magistrate's Court at 32 2nd Avenue, now the Anthology Film Archives, and the intricately detailed 1876 tenement at 101 Avenue A which housed the historic Pyramid Club (see story p.6). GVSHP is now working with allied community and preservation groups to advance further proposals for landmark protections for other parts of the neighborhood.

We also issued a report demonstrating the positive impact the zoning changes we helped secure in the East Village in 2008 and 2010 have already had. Several new buildings developed under the new zoning are shorter

than would have previously been allowed and more in context with the neighborhood. And where dorms were previously encouraged by the zoning, the residential character of the neighborhood is now being reinforced in new development. See more at gvshp.org/ev.

Two Large Towers Approved for Construction Atop Chelsea Market

Plan Is Scaled Back By Opposition, But Will Still Mar Historic Complex

This fall, the City Planning Commission and the City Council approved a plan to change the zoning for Chelsea Market to allow two large towers to be erected atop the historic complex. GVSHP and a broad coalition strongly opposed the plan, which would not only mar a beloved landmark, but increase traffic and congestion in an already severely overdeveloped area. While opposition to the plan helped lead to several changes, we were still very disappointed with the final plan and its approval.

The Chelsea Market complex was built in stages between the 1890's and 1930's for the National Biscuit Company (Nabisco), and was the birthplace of the Oreo, among other iconic food products. The site lies within the Gansevoort Market (Meatpacking District) Historic District proposed by GVSHP in 2001. While our entire proposed district was approved for the State and National Register of Historic Places in 2007, when the City designated the district in 2003, they cut out Chelsea Market, among several other sites. State and federal designation offers financial incentives for preservation of historic buildings like Chelsea Market, but few outright restrictions. City landmark designation would likely have prevented these two large proposed towers, but was denied the complex in spite of its clear historic significance.

However, Chelsea Market's zoning did prohibit any new construction atop the complex. But after international developers acquired the

property, they proposed a zoning change to allow a large hotel to be constructed atop the 9th Avenue end and a large office tower atop the 10th Avenue end. GVSHP joined with community, preservation, affordable housing, and tenant groups to form the 'Save Chelsea Market Coalition' to oppose the zoning change. We collected thousands of petition signatures, rallied hundreds of neighbors for public hearings, and generated waves of letters to city officials in opposition to the plan.

As we pushed back against the plan through the public review and approval process, it was scaled back. The size of the 10th Avenue tower



Image of the approved addition atop the 10th Avenue end of Chelsea Market; there will be another large addition on the 9th Avenue end.

over the High Line park was reduced, and its design (compared by many to a spaceship) was made less outlandish. The particularly objectionable proposed hotel tower on 9th Avenue was changed to office space, resulting in a reduction in the height of the proposed structure and a less jarring design. But for us and our coalition partners, none of this justified a zoning change which was essentially

a gift to a well-heeled developer at the expense of the neighborhood.

Unfortunately, the City Council's approval did nothing to further scale back the size of the project. The Council did announce that they secured several givebacks as condition of their approval, but their merits and efficacy are questionable.

The Council proclaimed that while allowing these two large structures to be erected atop the complex (totaling more than 300,000 sq. ft., nearly doubling Chelsea Market's office space), they also imposed a requirement that the existing building

could not be torn down, claiming that demolition was a danger under current conditions. However, under the existing zoning, if the complex were torn down, it could only be replaced by a building at least 10% smaller. Given the extreme rarity of buildings in New York being demolished to be replaced by smaller ones, we felt this supposed 'danger' was highly exaggerated at best.

Additionally, Council Speaker Quinn announced that the approval of the project included a guarantee that 75% of the ground floor uses at Chelsea Market would be reserved for non-chain food uses, since we had pointed out that Chelsea Market's new owner/developers were gradually eliminating mom and pop

food shops from the market. However, upon closer examination we have been unable to find any requirement or enforcement mechanism for this promise; only a letter from the owners (who are free to sell the property to new owners) claiming they will do so. We are continuing to pursue this issue with Speaker Quinn's office, and hope that this promise ultimately proves to have some veracity and teeth. For more info, see gvsdp.org/chmkt.

A First: GVSHHP Sues to Overturn NYU Mega-Expansion Approvals

GVSHHP, NYU Faculty, Community Groups Join Together To Continue the Fight

In July, the City Council followed Borough President Stringer and the City Planning Commission to grant final approval to NYU's massive Village expansion plan. NYU asked for and got broad zoning changes, the elimination of open-space preservation requirements, voiding of the terms under which they had been given public land, and new public land currently used as parks and playgrounds turned over to them. This huge package of approvals will allow NYU to construct about 2 million sq. ft. of new space in four buildings and a huge underground complex between Bleecker, Mercer, and Houston Streets and LaGuardia Place.

GVSHHP fought vociferously against approval of the plan, citing both the negative impact it would have on the Village and the much better alternative locations, such as the Financial District, where such development was wanted,

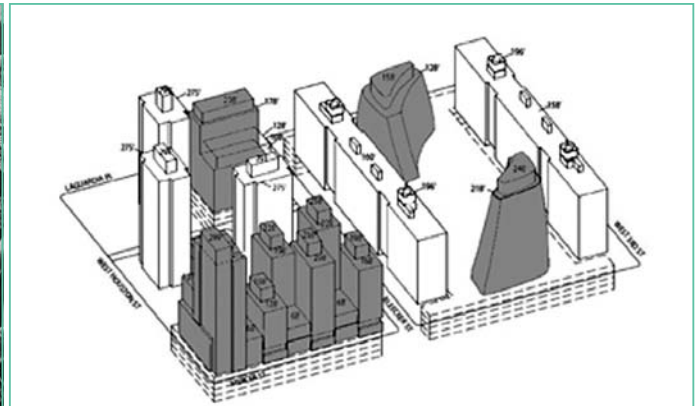
needed, and welcomed by community leaders. This pushback against the plan did help lead to a 20% reduction in its size and elimination of one of its most offensive elements, a 400 ft. tall hotel which would have been the Village's tallest structure. But both the City and the university refused to consider these vastly preferable alternative locations suggested by GVSHHP, even when NYU's own faculty, staff, and students urged them to as well.

This refusal to consider alternatives became one of many weapons in a lawsuit filed by GVSHHP, NYU faculty, Assemblymember Deborah Glick, and more than two dozen groups and individuals from across New York City seeking to overturn the multiple approvals this plan received. With the assistance of renowned international law firm Gibson Dunn and Crutcher, we have filed an Article 78 challenge of the City Council and City Planning Commission's approval of the plan. We expect hearings on the suit to begin early this year.

GVSHHP is also opposing a zoning variance being sought by NYU to allow them to expand into the 730 Broadway building at Waverly Place. When NYU went through the public

review and approval process for their massive expansion plan, they claimed they were being entirely transparent, placing all their plans on the table. Yet literally within a week of their City Council approval, they announced this additional project which requires both a zoning variance and a 4-story addition atop the building in the NoHo Historic District, neither of which had been previously revealed by the university. Worse, NoHo and SoHo's special zoning strictly limit the type of university facilities which can be located within their boundaries, which this project would violate. If NYU receives this variance, it opens the door to their rapid and far-reaching expansion in these neighborhoods. The local Community Board agreed with our contention that the variance should be denied, but we are yet to hear from our elected officials who approved the NYU expansion based upon the claim that it was complete in revealing NYU's plans. A decision by the Board of Standards and Appeals on whether or not to approve the zoning variance should come some time in the first half of this year.

For more information, see gvshp.org/nyu.



(l) GVSHHP, NYU staff and faculty, and community groups rallied at City Hall for the rejection of the NYU expansion plan. (r.) Image of the original NYU expansion plan, with new buildings in grey; the plan was reduced by about 20%.

Hudson Square Rezoning To Transform Neighborhood's Scale and Character

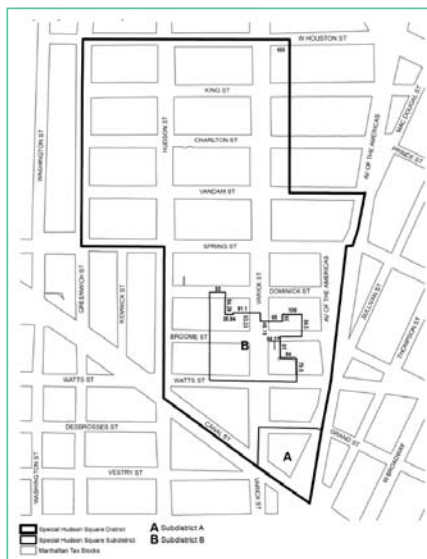
*Developer's Proposal Requires City Council,
Planning Commission Approval*

Trinity Realty, the real estate arm of Trinity Church which owns about 40% of the property in Hudson Square, has filed an application to change the zoning for the neighborhood. GVSHP and other community groups have been clamoring for a zoning change for this area for some time, as the zoning allows new development of the size and scale of the Trump SoHo. But Trinity's proposed zoning change not only does not address all the problems of the current zoning for the area, it might actually make some problems worse.

Trinity would like to see Hudson Square turned into a 24-hour-a-day neighborhood, with new residential construction and a larger variety of shops and ground floor uses. To achieve this, they are seeking to change the zoning to make residential development legally allowable, which it currently is not.

GVSHP does not have a fundamental objection to allowing residential development in the area. However, we do have strong concerns about the manner in which Trinity proposes to do so.

When residential development is allowed in Manhattan, the rate of development increases markedly because there is such a strong desire for residential development and it is extremely profitable—much more profitable in many cases than the commercial and manufacturing development currently only allowed in the Hudson Square rezoning area. So if residential development is allowed, we



Boundaries of the proposed Hudson Square Rezoning (I.); The Trump SoHo, which sparked calls for a rezoning, but which the current proposal would not do enough to prevent.

can expect to see a significant increase in new construction. The question then becomes: what will this development look like, what will the community get in return for this extremely profitable windfall given to developers, and what effect will it have on the surrounding area?

Trinity proposes to allow new residential development as high as 430 feet on one site – roughly the height of the Trump SoHo – and 320 feet on all avenues, taller than all

buildings in the area but the Trump SoHo. Plus they propose development at a density which is more typical of Midtown, which many are concerned would overburden the limited infrastructure in the area.

Thus GVSHP has called for the maximum allowable height limits to be significantly reduced—by about one-third—and the

maximum allowable density (i.e. the number of square feet that can be built on any site) to be reduced by about one-quarter. This will help keep and reinforce the character of the area, which is characterized by handsome early 20th century loft buildings, and ensure that there is not too great a burden on the neighborhood by the level of new development.

Additionally, we know the increased development in

Hudson Square and its increased desirability will also increase development pressure upon the neighboring endangered proposed South Village Historic District (see story p.1). Thus we are calling upon the City Planning Commission and Speaker Quinn not to approve the rezoning unless it is accompanied by the long-overdue and promised designation of the proposed South Village Historic District.

For more info, see gvshp.org/hudsq.

40-56 10th Avenue

A developer has applied for a variance to build a 34% larger than normally allowable, 199 ft. tall glass tower on this site between 13th and 14th Streets in the Meatpacking District. The owner argues that because the High Line covers a small portion of the property, and because the site is located on unsteady landfill, this creates a “hardship,” meeting the legal criteria to be freed from the site’s zoning restrictions. GVSHP disputes this argument, as we have with some success for other proposed developments in the Meatpacking District. We believe the presence of the High Line makes the property uniquely valuable and profitable, and the subsurface conditions are the same as those on several other similar sites developed successfully under the existing zoning restrictions. The Community Board agreed with our contention and opposed the variance, and we hope Speaker Quinn, in whose district it lies, will too. The application will be heard and decided by the Board of Standards and Appeals early this year. See gvshp.org/40-56tenth.

Marking LGBT Civil Rights History

Greenwich Village is perhaps the most important place in the world for the LGBT (lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender) civil rights movement. Yet unfortunately all too few sites in our neighborhood connected to this movement are recognized for their significance. The NYC Landmarks Preservation Commission has never designated a single site based upon LGBT history (though we have proposed several

locations). And only one site in the entire neighborhood is listed on the State and National Registers of Historic Places for LGBT history -- the Stonewall Inn and District, the site of the 1969 Stonewall Riots, considered the birthplace of the modern gay rights movement (which GVSHP co-nominated in 1999, and remains one of only two such sites listed for LGBT history in the country).

GVSHP is working closely with the NY State Historic Preservation Office to change this. We have gotten three LGBT-history sites determined eligible for the State and National Registers. Julius’ Bar on Waverly place was the site of one of the very first LGBT civil disobedience actions in 1966, when several men successfully challenged the State’s ban on serving alcohol to admitted homosexuals



(l. to r.) Proposed 40-56 10th Ave. tower; 186 Spring Street; John Leguizamo.

by demanding to be served in spite of their disclosure of their sexual orientation, and then sitting- (or “sipping”) in when refused service. For more than 30 years, 101 Avenue A has housed the Pyramid Club, considered the birthplace of politically conscious drag performance art (and the Wigstock Festival) in the early 1980’s. And 186 Spring Street was a nearly 200 year old house which GVSHP’s research revealed housed several of the

most important figures of the post-Stonewall LGBT civil rights movement, including the first openly gay candidate for public office in NYC, the proponents on the nation’s first gay rights bills, and the man who brokered the first meeting of LGBT rights activists with the White House in 1977. The State agreed with GVSHP that all three merited recognition, but the City refused to act to save 186 Spring Street, which was demolished just days after the State’s finding. See gvshp.org/lgbt.

South Village Video Campaign

To call attention to the value in preserving the South Village and the danger it faces, GVSHP has launched a video campaign, in which noted celebrities, prominent businesspeople, civic and religious leaders, and locals with deep family roots in the neighborhood talk about

why the South Village is so important to them and why the City should act on its promise to landmark the entire neighborhood before it’s too late. Actor/performer/producer John Leguizamo kicked off the campaign, followed by local businesspeople Matt Umanov of Umanov Guitars and Rob Kaufelt of Murray’s Cheese, and Judson Memorial Church’s Rev. Donna Schaper. See all the videos at gvshp.org/svvideo.

From the Director

Fifty years ago, in 1963, Penn Station was demolished—a watershed event in New York’s history and the preservation movement. This tragedy spurred forward the implementation of the landmarks law in 1965, and reforms in our land use process to allow communities a greater say in their planning and an end to top-down, Robert Moses-style mega-developments. Were it not for such changes, Greenwich Village, the East Village, and SoHo as we know them would no longer exist.



In the past fifty years, the success of this preservation ethic has proven itself time and again, as neighborhoods like ours which were saved from the wrecking ball have flourished beyond imagination. But as we mark the 50th anniversary of Penn Station’s tragic loss, some of its lessons, and some of the reforms which came in its wake, are being forgotten or undermined.

Mega-projects by NYU, at Chelsea Market, and on the former St. Vincent’s campus are being approved over community objections; and historic landmarks and neighborhoods are being allowed to fall to the wrecking ball. We are making historic progress with new historic districts and contextual rezonings throughout our neighborhoods, but in too many places we are seeing irreversible losses and public commitments broken.

Through our educational programs, our research, and of course our advocacy, GVSHP will be re-doubling our efforts in this anniversary year to make sure the lessons of Penn Station are honored and never forgotten.

Acknowledgements

GVSHP gratefully acknowledges the following for generous grants in support of our work: The Kaplen Foundation; the NYC Department of Cultural Affairs; the NYS Council on the Arts; and the Irene Diamond Fund.

We also wish to acknowledge the support of City Councilmembers Rosie Mendez and Margaret Chin, and City Council Speaker Christine Quinn, through the NYC Department of Cultural Affairs and Manhattan Borough President Scott Stringer through the Department of Education.

GVSHP Bulletin Board

Save the Date—Our Annual Benefit House Tour is Sunday, May 5; see gvshp.org/benefit.

Help The Cause—Volunteer for GVSHP at gvshp.org/volunteer, or host a “friendraiser,” a free event introducing friends and neighbors to GVSHP—see gvshp.org/friendraiser.

Learn About Proposed Changes to Your Neighborhood—Visit our Landmarks Applications Webpage, the only of its kind in New York, containing every public hearing landmark application in the Village, East Village, NoHo, and Meatpacking District. See images of the proposal, and how you can weigh in with government agencies before decisions are made, at gvshp.org/lpc.

See Our Upcoming Program Schedule at gvshp.org/events.

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

Follow us on twitter, friend us on facebook, watch us on Flickr or YouTube, or join our e-mail list—links are at gvshp.org.

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