

## **2017 Annual Report**

### **Executive Director Andrew Berman**

Good evening everyone, and welcome to one of my favorite nights of the year: GVSHP's Annual Meeting and Village Awards.

First I'd like to thank The New School, our co-host this evening, and our wonderful Awards Committee, especially Co-Chairs Katherine Schoonover and Tom Birchard, for their terrific work in selecting this year's honorees from hundreds of worthy nominations. I'd also like to thank and acknowledge GVSHP's incredibly hard-working staff – Sam Moskowitz, Lannyl Stephens, Sarah Bean Apmann, Harry Bubbins, Chelsea Dowell, and Matthew Morowitz – and all of the GVSHP Trustees here tonight, for all of their hard work throughout the year.

So before we get to our amazing awardees, it's my honor to provide you with a review of GVSHP's activities and accomplishments over the past year.

This has been a real banner year for GVSHP in many ways – accomplishing goals in some cases fifteen years in the making, and surpassing many prior high water marks for the organization. But in light of everything going on in our city and country, it's also been a year in which our work has never seemed quite so urgent and necessary.

First, some of the very good news. Our Benefit House Tour this past May was far and away our most successful ever, and even a little rain couldn't dampen it.

As always, proud and welcoming homeowners came together with generously supportive businesses and individuals, an incredibly hard-working benefit committee, and over 130 volunteers to put on an event showcasing one-of-a-kind spaces opened for one day to a few hundred of our best friends.

This year's house tour raised about 25% more than any prior year and about 20% of our annual budget.

Thank you to everyone who participated in or supported that herculean effort in any way.

Membership support for GVSHP also grew healthily, with a record 1,573 paying members at the end of our most recent fiscal year, up 10% from the prior year, totaling \$723,000 in giving from individuals.

So far this year our membership numbers are already up over 10% over last year, while our membership income is up over 45%. We are hopeful that positive giving trend will continue throughout the year.

Support came in many other forms as well. This year the Estate of famed Village Voice photographer Fred W. McDarrah allowed us to sell prints of several of his iconic images to raise funds for the Society. Local stores like Exit9 Gift Emporium donated a portion of their sales on Tuesdays to GVSHP, while a supportive property owner gave us a space in his building on 13<sup>th</sup> Street to turn into a pop-up GVSHP storefront in support of our preservation efforts. This is just the tip of the iceberg of the generosity we experienced this year, from graphic designers and illustrators to photographers and caterers, and we are truly thankful for all these wonderful and very generous contributions.

Speaking of wonderful businesses, GVSHP continued to support and celebrate our

many small and independent businesses with our Business of the Month program, now in its 3<sup>rd</sup> year. This has been a terrific way for GVSHP and our neighbors to connect with and support these local entrepreneurs and institutions that contribute so much to the character of our neighborhoods. Our 12 businesses this past year ranged from a West Village clock and watch repair shop , to a NoHo photography bookstore; from an East Village Indian wares purveyor, to a South Village hat seller -- with an independent pharmacy, a chess shop, and a family-run barbershop thrown in for good measure.

Many of these businesses have partnered with GVSHP on both advocacy efforts and our programming to highlight and celebrate our neighborhood's history. In the past year, GVSHP conducted over 60 such programs, 8 of which were members-only programs, but the remainder of which were almost all free and open to the public. These ranged from lectures on political murals in the East Village, to walking tours of holiday storefronts in the West Village. They included panel discussions about zoning, and about the role of women in preservation; and discussions of building types as diverse *but as typical of our neighborhoods* as townhouses and squats.

This past year we also continued to grow our highly popular historic plaque program, done in partnership with the Two Boots Foundation.

We added markers to the studios of Jean-Michel Basquiat in NoHo, and of sculptor and art collector Chaim Gross on LaGuardia Place.

We will be adding our tenth plaque two weeks from tonight at 6pm at 27 Cooper Square, so please join us for that wonderful unveiling as well.

Education efforts such as these remain at the core of GVSHP's mission.

This includes our children's education program, which again served over 1,000 young people in city schools this past year, regardless of need, and our continuing education program for brokers, conducted with the help of the GVSHP broker's partnership, which helps ensure that those involved with the sale of properties in our neighborhoods are also aware of their rich histories and the value of preservation.

This past year we added two new oral histories to our already-existing online collection of nearly forty preservation pioneers, artists, architects, and community leaders. The subjects were Peter Ruta, the wonderful Westbeth artist who passed

away in late 2016, and Otis Kidwell Burger, who rented a room in her home to Jane Jacobs while she wrote “Death and Life of Great American Cities.” Burger threw parties in the Village in the 1950’s attended by the likes of Norman Mailer, and is the great-granddaughter of Villager and noted abolitionist Sidney Howard Gay. Over the last year we also completed about ten other oral histories, which are excited to roll out in the coming months.

GVSHP has sought to reach and educate the public with all the tools available to us. Over the past year we joined Instagram, and grew our facebook and twitter following by about 40% each . We added 36 new videos to our YouTube page in the last year, which garnered nearly 10,000 views. And for the second year in a row, our programs got an even larger viewing via video on YouTube than they did in person, further broadening the reach of our educational efforts. We also expanded our online historic image archive with scores of new images, including collections focused on the Meatpacking District and Far West Village, Sheridan Square, lost buildings of the East Village, and neighborhood mainstay Veselka.

At the beginning of this year, GVSHP took on a new educational project by

launching our ever-growing Civil Rights and Social Justice Map, charting more than a hundred locations throughout the Village, East Village, and NoHo where significant contributions to the struggles for equality for African-Americans, women, the LGBT community, immigrants, and Latinos took place.

Now more than ever we found there was an incredible thirst for information about and appreciation of these historic movements, and a recognition of how important and precious they truly are. Fortunately there are few places on earth with as rich a civil rights or social justice legacy as the Village, and at GVSHP we consider it a sacred part of our mission to highlight and celebrate our neighborhoods' role in embracing and nurturing immigrants, innovators, and outsiders, and breaking new ground in the arts, civil rights, and social justice movements. In that tradition, GVSHP has always sought to broaden the scope of historic preservation. This year we released a report entitled "Expanding Boundaries, Preserving History, Celebrating All," which highlighted our successful efforts to secure landmark designation for the city's first and so far only historic districts based upon immigrant history; our city and country's first landmarks based upon LGBT history; New York's first historic districts based upon counter-cultural history; some of the city's only landmarked affordable housing

developments; and our first historic districts to honor and recognize the history of one of New York's first and once its largest African-American community, right here in Greenwich Village.

At GVSHP, pushing boundaries is not merely something we remember, but something we continue to do every day. Nowhere is this more apparent than in our advocacy efforts, and this past year was full of some incredible triumphs, and some bitter frustrations.

We capped a 15-year effort to secure landmark protections for the entire South Village in December when we got the third and final phase of our proposed South Village Historic District landmarked as the new "Sullivan Thompson Historic District." This 10-block, 160-building district protects a rich but vulnerable collection of rowhouses, tenements, and institutions connected to our city's immigrant history, some of which had recently been purchased by developers including Jared Kushner, and might not have been much longer for this world. The designation came after years of resistance by the City, and was approved even over the opposition of no less than the Real Estate Board of NY and the NY Archdiocese.

This designation brings to over 1,250 the number of buildings GVSHP has helped get landmarked in our neighborhoods, including 11 new historic districts or historic district extensions, and more than 40 individual landmarks.

But this was only one piece of larger package of victories we fought for and won. When the City proposed authorizing the first Hudson River Park air rights transfer to a development on the St. John's Terminal site on West and Houston Streets, we insisted that the traffic-generating big-box and destination retail stores planned there must be eliminated, and that the entire rest of the Greenwich Village waterfront must be granted protections from ever receiving any air rights transfers from the park. I'm happy to report that we got them both. This not only protected the surrounding South and West Village from the deluge of traffic the development might have otherwise generated, but ensured that the Greenwich Village waterfront would be safe from the flood of development which could have been generated by the 1.5 million square feet of air rights from the Hudson River Park which the State legislature allowed to be transferred into our neighborhoods in 2013.

I want to thank and acknowledge everyone who was a part of that incredibly important and successful effort, including and most especially City Councilmember Corey Johnson.

There were other important victories too. We fought off an attempt to secure approvals from the Landmarks Preservation Commission to add a ludicrously oversized addition to 85-89 Jane Street, including two 80-90 ft. tall glass and concrete towers, as part of the conversion of this pair of modest low-rise commercial buildings into a single-family mansion.

Instead, a renovation and restoration of the buildings with much more modest additions was approved, which we believe will blend in respectfully with their West Village surroundings.

We had victories at the Board of Standards and Appeals as well. On West 14<sup>th</sup> Street and 8<sup>th</sup> Avenue, we defeated an attempt to secure a zoning variance to 'super-size' a new development planned on that corner, which would have allowed it to grow about 20% taller than zoning restrictions allow.

On East 14<sup>th</sup> Street we also defeated a zoning variance that would have allowed a planned development on a former Post Office site between 1<sup>st</sup> Avenue and Avenue A to grow 50% larger and 25% taller than zoning allows. Following these victories, GVSHP held a forum on the BSA and the zoning variance process, and supported legislation, subsequently passed by the City Council and signed into law, to make the BSA more transparent and more responsive to the public, and to hold developers more accountable for the information they provide as part of zoning variance applications.

We spent much of the past year also keeping at bay the latest attempts by a developer to get around a deed restriction and turn the former PS 64/Charas-El Bohio Cultural Center in the East Village into a “fake dorm.” After we held a rally on the steps of City Hall and pointed out the similarity of what was being planned there to the shameful and scandalous undoing of the deed restriction nearby at Rivington House, the city appeared to back away from approving the plans, thus keeping the building safe, for now.

A little further west we celebrated this winter when the iconic mosaic lampposts were restored and returned to their rightful home on Astor Place as part of the renovation and expansion of public space around that intersection and Cooper Square. GVSHP worked hard to help see the beloved folk-art pieces given a permanent home as part of the new Astor Place, after their fate had been in doubt for a considerable period of time.

On the subject of new spaces, GVSHP spoke up in support of a proposal to name the new Greenwich Village Middle School at 75 Morton Street for Jane Jacobs. Who better, we argued, to serve as an inspiration for young minds than the woman who taught us to challenge conventional thought, fight for the future of your community, rely upon observation rather than blindly following authority, and that the free flow of ideas and interactions between different kinds of people made for safer, healthier, and more successful societies?

And speaking of speaking up, GVSHP led the charge to get the Landmarks Preservation Commission to undo a new rule which would have given the public mere hours to find revised applications for changes to buildings being heard by

the Commission and submit comments before a decision was made.

Thanks to our efforts, that window is now days, not hours, allowing a real opportunity for public participation in the landmarks review process.

Providing the public with the information and knowledge to participate in the decision-making process about the future of our neighborhoods is in fact one of GVSHP's top priorities, and our most important duties. Toward that end, every day GVSHP monitors more than 6,500 building lots in our neighborhood for construction or demolition plans, and more than 3,500 landmarked properties for applications for changes to historic buildings. We notify the public of important applications, and how they can get involved. In the last year, we reviewed and shared with the public 79 applications for major changes to landmarked properties in our neighborhood, weighed in when appropriate, and urged the public to do the same.

Of course having the opportunity to weigh in through a public process does not guarantee satisfaction with the outcome, and this year we had more than our share of unsatisfying decisions handed down by the City.

At 11 Jane Street, we were able to get the size of the proposed development on a landmarked block reduced and the design changed. But we were shocked when the Landmarks Preservation Commission approved a revised version of the proposal which we thought was still too large, and which looked more like a Motel 6 than an appropriate addition to a historic West Village block.

And at 145 Perry Street we were stunned when the Commission approved, over our strenuous objections, a proposed marble-clad mega-mansion that looked like it had been dropped on the West Village straight from Rodeo Drive.

These were not the only disappointments to come out of City Hall this past year. The Landmarks Preservation Commission went back on 2008 determinations of “landmark-eligibility” for the 1890 Beaux Arts tenements at 112-120 East 11<sup>th</sup> Street, and the 1842 rowhouse at 264 East 7<sup>th</sup> Street, and refused to protect these buildings when demolition plans were filed.

Sadly, over our protests the five 11<sup>th</sup> Street buildings have now been demolished,

to be replaced by a 120 room hotel being built by a political ally of and campaign contributor to the Mayor. On East 7<sup>th</sup> Street, however, there may still be a happy ending.

Following the negative publicity around protests against the planned demolition of the building, the owner was convinced to sell it to a new owner who, they say, intends to preserve the historic house. GVSHP will continue to keep a watchful eye on this site.

The final outcome remains similarly to be determined in what may be GVSHP's largest and most urgent ongoing effort – seeking zoning or landmark protections for the heart of our neighborhood, between 5<sup>th</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> Avenues, Union Square and Astor Place, where 300 ft. tall towers and oversized hotel and office developments are sprouting up at an alarming rate. GVSHP has been fighting for several years to get the Mayor to adopt our proposed zoning changes for the area that would protect its residential character, prevent oversized development, and help protect and promote affordable housing.

But the Mayor has stubbornly refused to adopt it, allowing one after another planned tower to move ahead here, and permanent and in some cases affordable housing to be demolished to make way for hotels, office buildings, and high-rise condos.

Now the situation will either get a whole lot worse, or a whole lot better.

The Mayor is seeking to build a “Tech Hub” on a city-owned site on 14<sup>th</sup> Street.

That project would help start-ups and small businesses, but would also accelerate the movement of the tech Industry to this area between Union Square and Astor Place, which is in part fueling the overdevelopment wave we are facing.

BUT the Mayor’s Tech Hub plan also requires the approval of the City Council.

And GVSHP has asked for and gotten the commitment of our long-time ally and supporter Councilmember Rosie Mendez, who represents that area, that she and the City Council will NOT approve the Tech Hub UNLESS it is accompanied by these long-overdue protections for the surrounding neighborhood.

Rosie is term-limited out at the end of this year, so we have also reached out to

candidates for that City Council seat, asking for a pledge from all who participated in our Preservation Forum for City Council Candidates this spring that they would only support the Tech Hub if the neighborhood got the zoning protections it needed. I am happy to say that all the candidates who attended agreed to do so.

Through rallies, community meetings, and letter-writing campaigns we have built broad support for this position and for our proposal, which may be our last chance to save this area from irreversible and overwhelming outsized development. We intend to spend a great deal of time and resources over the next year working to bring this plan to fruition.

So as you can see, GVSHP continues to make incredible strides, preserving, documenting, and educating about more of what makes our neighborhoods so special. But we also have our work cut out for us like never before.

Our organization is growing and expanding, but so are the challenges we face. But I'm confident that with all of you in our corner, we'll continue to win, even against the most incredible of odds.

Thank you very much, and please enjoy the rest of the evening.