

2018 Annual Report

Executive Director Andrew Berman

Good evening everyone, and welcome to GVSHP's Annual Meeting and Village Awards.

I'd like to thank 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, Ariel Kates, Matthew Morowitz, and Harry Bubbins, who's elsewhere tonight at a meeting about protecting small businesses in our neighborhood.

Before we get to tonight's fantastic 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 watershed year for GVSHP, as we've taken on citywide and statewide preservation issues that will profoundly impact our neighborhoods, saved landmarks from the wrecking ball, fought off developers' lawsuits, and planned for our future.

Our Benefit House Tour this past May was a resounding success, showcasing an incredible array of houses and lofts while raising about 20% of GVSHP's budget in a single day. 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 homes opened for one day to a few hundred of our best friends. Thank you to everyone who participated in or supported that herculean effort in any way.

GVSHP membership – our single largest source of support -- grew healthily over the past year, as our number of members increased by 6%, while overall membership giving increased by 10%. And we were honored to receive a very generous gift bequeathed to us by a lifelong neighborhood resident, which as GVSHP faces some big challenges and decisions about our future, will make our planning and preparation that much easier.

Support came in other forms as well. The Estate of famed Village Voice photographer Fred W. McDarrah allowed us once again to sell prints of several of his iconic images to raise funds for the Society, this time classic

images of Greenwich Village and the East Village from the 1950s and 60s. Local independently-owned specialty store Gourmet Garage generously offered GVSHP members 25% off over the past year, giving us an incentive to gain new memberships, and a reward for old members -- all while supporting a local business.

GVSHP in turn continued to support and celebrate our many small and independent businesses with our Business of the Month program, now in its 4th year. Our 12 businesses this past year included an East Village South Asian specialty store, and a West Village family-owned flower shop; two beloved Central Village immigrant-owned food shops; our city's oldest Russian and Turkish bathhouse; a theater, a record store, an herbalist, and a purveyor of all things British.

We also made a variety of wonderful new resources available to the public via our website over the last year. GVSHP added fifteen new collections to our historic image archive, totaling more than one thousand new images, most of which were donated by the public. These images ranged from the 19th through the early 21st centuries. Some came from GVSHP's own photographic records; others were painstakingly culled from nine years' worth of landmarks applications GVSHP

has retained, creating a treasure trove of historic images of our neighborhoods.

GVSHIP also for the first time mapped all 700+ applications for significant changes to landmarked buildings in our neighborhood that we have tracked and shared with the public since 2009. This incredibly useful tool now allows you to search your block or immediate vicinity for past or present landmarks applications, and see what has been proposed, and what has been approved or denied. It's all part of our ongoing effort to help make the landmarks application process as accessible and transparent to the public as possible.

The past year was a particularly busy year for our educational programming as well. GVSHIP conducted a record-breaking 71 programs over the last 12 months, most of which were free and open to the general public, which more than 6,100 people attended. Our children's education program served nearly 1,300 students in 57 classes in more than 14 different schools in Manhattan, the Bronx and Brooklyn -- serving all regardless of need, or ability to pay. And our highly-praised continuing education program served more than sixty real estate professionals, imparting to them the value of historic preservation.

GVSHIP also celebrated and memorialized two great women over the past year with our historic plaque program. In October we unveiled our plaque marking the Waverly Place home of civil rights icon Lorraine Hansberry, the first African-American woman to have a play, *A Raisin in the Sun*, produced on Broadway.

And last month we unveiled a plaque marking Elizabeth Blackwell's NY Infirmary for Women and Children on Bleecker and Crosby Streets, the very first hospital run by and for women, founded by America's very first female doctor.

Over the last year GVSHIP also released a series of oral histories reflecting the diverse and inspiring stories which can be found throughout our neighborhoods. These included Chino Garcia, co-founder of the East Village's legendary CHARAS-El Bohio Community and Cultural Center; Beverly Moss Spatt, the first female chair of the Landmarks Preservation Commission; artist Paula Poons, who's lived for over 4 decades in a Greenwich Village loft building which was, in the mid-to-late 20th century, the center of the New York art world; activist, theater producer, and Fortune Society founder David Rothenberg; Dr. Victor Keyloun, former St. Vincent's

Hospital doctor who served during the height of the AIDS epidemic; and Rich Wandel, former archivist and historian for the LGBT community center. All are available to read or listen to on our website.

Of course GVSHP doesn't just document and celebrate our treasured history; we also fight to protect it. And this past year we waged some particularly tough and consequential battles.

Last October, after a year and a half campaign, GVSHP saved the beautiful 1866 lofts at 827-831 Broadway from the wrecking ball and planned replacement with a 300 ft tall office tower. We did so by highlighting their incomparable role as home to 20th century art world luminaries like Willem and Elaine de Kooning, Paul Jenkins, Jules Olitsky, Larry Poons, and William Rubin.

Of course we're fighting to protect not only these buildings, but the entire highly vulnerable area they sit within, between Union Square and Astor Place, from University Place to 3rd Avenue. This slice of Greenwich Village and the East Village is uniquely lacking in comprehensive zoning or landmark protections, and has been identified in real estate circles as the next

beachhead for 'Silicon Alley,' the Tech industry stronghold currently concentrated north of 14th Street.

The Mayor planned to accelerate this trend by locating a huge new "tech Hub" on the south side of 14th Street near 4th Avenue, that would help bring "Silicon Alley" south into the Village and East Village. At the same time he refused to support our proposed zoning or landmark protections for these areas to protect them from these impacts.

But we found the unintended silver lining in the Mayor's plans. His Tech Hub cannot happen without City Council approval. And while we cannot force the Mayor to approve our neighborhood protections, in last year's race for the City Council District 2 seat which covers this area, GVSHP was able to get every candidate for the position, including the eventual winner, Carlina Rivera, to pledge that their support for the Mayor's Tech Hub would ONLY come if accompanied by protections for the surrounding neighborhood. We are now working closely with Councilmember Rivera to get such protections before the City Council votes upon the Tech Hub in August.

But she's facing tremendous pressure from the City and others to abandon her pledge, so if you have not already, please contact her to urge her to stand firm.

This was only the tip of the iceberg of GVSHP's advocacy work over the last year. The Society took a leading role in the fight against a plan by the Landmarks Preservation Commission to strip the public of its ability to weigh in on or even know about certain proposed changes to landmarked buildings and buildings in historic districts. Facing a tremendous backlash, and over 4,000 letters generated by GVSHP members in opposition, the LPC rolled back the plan last week. In the wake of the PR disaster, the LPC Chair then announced her resignation. GVSHP has been leading a campaign to ensure that her permanent replacement has a true preservation background and credentials, unlike the last several LPC Chairs.

We didn't just have to worry about City Hall, but Albany as well. This year GVSHP also helped lead an effort to head off an attempt by big real estate and the Mayor to lift a half-century old State limit on the size of residential buildings in New York City. No matter that the incredibly generous current limit allows residential buildings of 1,000 ft in height or greater. Proponents of lifting the

cap want no limit whatsoever, so residential neighborhoods across New York City can be upzoned to allow “supersized” towers.

We were able to fight off an attempt to sneak this measure into the state budget in the spring, and as we speak are working to prevent its inclusion in the last minute rush of bills passed at the end of legislative session.

GVSHP has also been leading the charge to secure measures to help small businesses in our neighborhoods and end the blight of empty storefronts. GVSHP is working with a coalition of local small business owners in the East Village to pursue zoning changes that would limit the size and location of chain stores in the area to help protect independently-owned businesses. We are hopeful that success there can then be replicated throughout our neighborhoods.

And GVSHP has also been strongly advocating for the Small Business Jobs Survival Act, a City Council bill which would prevent small businesses from simply being denied lease renewals, and allow fairer terms for negotiating such lease renewals. All three of our local

City Councilmembers support this bill, and a hearing is expected later this summer.

This year we focused not just on preserving small businesses, but small cultural institutions too. GVSHP worked closely with the Merchant's House Museum to try to prevent a planned hotel next door which the museum believes would threaten their precious landmarked historic structure with irreversible and catastrophic damage.

While the plan was (unfortunately) approved by the Landmarks Preservation Commission, a zoning change is required for the hotel to be built. GVSHP is working with the museum to try to use that process to get the developer to rethink their plan and consider a different site which would not harm or impact this irreplaceable public educational resource.

We are also nearing conclusion on a nearly three year long process by which the IFC Film Center on Sixth Avenue has sought to expand. GVSHP supports independent cinemas in our neighborhood and the positive presence IFC has brought to Sixth Avenue. However, we were very concerned with their original plans which required a zoning variance to allow

commercial uses on tiny, residential Cornelia Street behind the theater.

Fortunately, through the public review process a compromise was brokered from which all sides benefitted – the theater added a residential component to their expansion plan along Cornelia Street, to maintain that special block’s character, while being allowed to add new space for theaters along Sixth Avenue and in the middle of the block. GVSHP is working with IFC and the Landmarks Preservation Commission to see the design of the proposed additions revised to match the residential character of the street, and we look forward to a successful and contextual expansion of the film center in the near future.

GVSHP was less welcoming toward plans leaked last year for a nearly 400 ft tall tower at 14 Fifth Avenue, between 8th and 9th Streets, in the Greenwich Village Historic District. Through public statement and press releases, we made clear that if such a plan was real, it would face a firestorm of opposition, and should expect anything but an easy time making its way through the landmarks public approval process. Since the initial leak last year and the intense pushback, there has been no further movement on these plans, though we remain watchful.

Years of watchfulness and persistent advocacy paid off last year when the Trump organization finally withdrew from the Trump SoHo condo hotel on Spring Street. GVSHP had opposed the development from the beginning based upon zoning violations, but the city allowed it to be built, claiming there would be a strict monitoring regime to ensure compliance with zoning. When GVSHP exposed that no such monitoring was taking place, we shamed the City into enforcing the terms of the agreement under which the eyesore was allowed to be built, resulting in hundreds of thousands of dollars in fines being collected, and the owners being prevented from profiting off of illegal uses. After several unprofitable years, the Trump organization finally picked up stakes and left Spring Street. We were not sorry to see them go.

Speaking of Mr. Trump, in January of this year GVSHP was sued by developer Gregg Singer for “illegally conspiring” to deprive him of his constitutional rights to develop his landmarked property, the former PS 64/Charas-El Bohio Cultural Center in the East Village. We did this, allegedly, by pointing out to city officials how we saw his plans violating the law, and asking that the law be properly enforced.

Mr. Singer reportedly hired Donald Trump's PR team to pay actors to pose as concerned neighbors supporting his development plans for the old P.S. 64 at a rally, and is clearly trying to intimidate us with this lawsuit. But we won't be intimidated. And neither will our members apparently. The day news of the lawsuit broke, GVSHP's received more online contributions than any day in the organization's entire history. Thanks to your support, we are vigorously fighting the suit in court, and don't intend to change our actions one bit.

Also thanks to our members' support, we are in a strong position to face another existential challenge – the approaching end of our 20 year lease arrangement with the Neighborhood Preservation Center, which has been our home since 1999. GVSHP has prospered in our beautiful, historic, landmarked space which we share with other preservation organizations, but that arrangement will soon end. However, our board and staff are actively pursuing other possibilities and arrangements which will allow GVSHP to continue to fulfill its mission, and to grow to meet the many challenges ahead our organization faces.

So as you can see, we have had a lot on our plate this year. In addition to the ongoing challenges I've outlined, we expect to have an even busier year in 2019, when we will be celebrating the 50th anniversaries of the designation of the Greenwich Village Historic District and the St. Mark's Historic District (the East Village's very first historic district), and the 50th anniversary of the Stonewall Riots.

We've got a lot to do, but with your continued help and support, I'm confident that GVSHP will be able to do more than ever, and better than ever.

Thank you, and enjoy the rest of the evening.