

**Greenwich Village Society for Historic Preservation**  
**32nd Annual Meeting & 22nd Annual Awards**  
**Andrew Berman, Executive Director**  
**June 7, 2012**

Welcome everyone to GVSHP's 32nd Annual Meeting and 22<sup>nd</sup> Annual Awards. It's wonderful to see so many old friends and new faces. I would like to thank the New School for hosting us tonight in the beautiful, landmarked Tishman Auditorium, our Awards Committee for their hard work in reviewing scores of nominations and selecting tonight's awardees, and our wonderful volunteers and staff for making tonight's event possible.

We have some business to attend to shortly, and of course some wonderful awards to give out to some brilliant and distinguished awardees. But right now I have the pleasure of recapping the last year in the life of the Society.

It's been a year of great accomplishments and challenges for GVSHP. In May, after a six year effort, we finally secured landmark designation for 128 East 13<sup>th</sup> Street. This was an especially gratifying victory given how close we came to losing this wonderful building. GVSHP's ongoing research on the history of every building in our neighborhood had uncovered that 128 East 13<sup>th</sup> Street was built in 1903 as the Van Tassel and Kearney Horse Auction mart, a place where the Vanderbilts and Delanos came to purchase polo ponies and show horses. This was likely the only surviving horse auction mart building left in NYC – a once-common building type in our city. But our research had also shown that during World War II the building housed an assembly-line training center for women, and from 1978 to 2005 was the studio of renowned artist Frank Stella.

Because GVSHP monitors every building and demolition application in our neighborhoods, in 2006 we were able to uncover a plan to demolish this building by a new owner just before it got approval. Armed with our research documenting the building's significance, we immediately called upon the city to hold an emergency

hearing on landmark designation, which they did. Inspired by the building's World War II history, we spawned a campaign to save 128 East 13<sup>th</sup> Street!

The Commission held the emergency hearing, and prevented demolition from taking place. But for six long years they hesitated to landmark the structure, even as GVSHP and others called on them to act. This spring they did, and 128 E. 13<sup>th</sup> Street, our city's newest landmark, should now be safe for generations to come.

There were many other preservation victories to celebrate. In October, the City finally landmarked Westbeth, a pioneering example of adaptive re-use of industrial buildings for artists' housing, which GVSHP had studied, documented, and proposed for landmark designation.

In January, the city designated the first new historic district in the East Village since 1969, along Tompkins Square North. Here too the emergency hearing and vote was sparked by GVSHP's discovery of a plan by a developer to compromise a building in the middle of this proposed district; that plan has now been stopped.

In March GVSHP got a boost in our effort to save the South Village when the Preservation League of NY State accepted our nomination of the neighborhood as one of its "Seven to Save," its bi-annual list of the seven most important and historically significant endangered sites in New York State. While the first third of our proposed South Village Historic District was designated in 2003 – the largest expansion of landmark protections in Greenwich Village since 1969 – the remaining two-thirds are still quite vulnerable, and we push the city to follow through on its promise to consider this area for landmark designation as well.

GVSHP was also able to help stop out of scale and inappropriate rooftop additions proposed for the Puck Building on Lafayette Street, one of New York's most beloved landmarks. While the city ultimately approved a vastly-scaled back version, we were able to get prior larger iterations rejected four times.

And we hope more victories are near on the horizon. On June 26<sup>th</sup> the city will hold a hearing on a proposed 300+ building East Village/Lower East Side Historic District, which includes many historic sites GVSHP has fought to protect. This includes Mezritch Synagogue, the East Village's last operating tenement synagogue, and was expanded to include many other sites for which GVSHP also sought landmark protection, including 101 Avenue A, the home of the Pyramid Club, and the Russian Orthodox Cathedral at 59 East 2<sup>nd</sup> Street.

But there were challenges as well. A developer is seeking to upzone Chelsea Market to allow the addition of two large office and hotel towers atop the historic complex. Over the objections of GVSHP and our Chelsea allies, last night the Community Board narrowly defeated a resolution rejecting the proposal, and instead passed one granting conditional approval for the development tied to some changes in the project scope and a contribution to an off-site affordable housing fund.

Earlier this year, over GVSHP's objections the City approved the Rudin rezoning and condo development plan for the former St. Vincent's Hospital. A bright note, however, was that while we were not able to stop the granting of zoning privileges originally intended for a hospital to a condo development, we were able to help scale down and redesign the condo development considerably, including the partial preservation of one additional building, the Reiss Building, bringing the total to five the number of buildings we helped ensure were saved on the former hospital's East Campus.

The final outcome still remains to be seen however with the 800 lb gorilla of them all, NYU's massive proposed Village expansion plan. GVSHP has led the charge against this plan, and the university has been forced to remove many particularly egregious elements. A proposed 4<sup>th</sup>, 400 ft tall tower in the Silver Towers complex has been removed, a hotel use on Mercer Street, a freshman dorm above a possible elementary school on Bleecker Street, several public park spaces NYU intended to take over, and a commercial overlay covering nine blocks east of Washington

Square have all been removed from the plan. Overall, the university has been forced to scale back its proposal by about 20%.

However, in approving the other 80% or so of the plan, the Manhattan Borough President and the City Planning Commission are still okaying the destruction of public parkland, letting NYU build on formerly-public land given to them fifty years ago under the condition that it remain open space in perpetuity, and allowing NYU to become an ever more overwhelming presence in the Village rather than find alternative outlets for its growth. The fight now goes to the City Council, where GVSHP will educate Councilmembers from across the boroughs about the flaws in the NYU plan and the alternatives they have ignored.

Of course, GVSHP's educational efforts are hardly limited to our public officials. Our Children's education program "History and Historic Preservation" entered its 21<sup>st</sup> year and continues to grow. The program, which uses the Village as a living classroom in which children learn how history can be found and preserved in their surroundings, is for the first time ever being taught in all five boroughs. In just the last year, the number of schools requesting scholarships from GVSHP to participate in the program has jumped from three to twenty-five; I'm proud to say that thanks to the generosity of our members and funders, we were able to accommodate every single request.

This year GVSHP launched several new educational programs for adults and the general public. We have begun a historic plaque program to recognize the many sites of special historic, architectural, and cultural significance in the Village, East Village, and NoHo. Our inaugural plaque unveiling, at the site of the former Justus Schwab Saloon on East 1<sup>st</sup> Street, a locus of radical of anarchist activity on the Lower East Side in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century frequented by Emma Goldman and Samuel Gompers, was a wonderful community celebration. We were joined by our co-sponsors Two Boots, the First Street Community Garden, and more than a hundred friends and neighbors. More unveilings are planned soon.

Through our Broker's Partnership, GVSHP launched our first ever continuing education program. Certified by the State, it allows brokers to earn credits toward their licenses while learning about historic preservation and the history of development in our downtown neighborhoods. Classes last fall and this spring filled to capacity almost immediately.

Our Broker's Partnership also put together one of the first programs in the city commemorating the centennial of the sinking of the Titanic. The event focused on the Village connections of this momentous event, taking place in the ballroom of the Jane Hotel, where Titanic Survivors were taken after docking at Pier 54 at Little West 12<sup>th</sup> Street.

Our ongoing programming continued to expand, serving more than 3,000 people last year. For the first time we instituted a limited number of "members-only" programs, to ensure that our strongest supporters could have access to these wonderful and free but increasingly "in demand" events, and began running "encore performances" of some of our most popular lectures and tours to accommodate sometimes overwhelming public demand.

And GVSHP continued to educate the public about the public review and approval process for proposed developments and other changes in our neighborhoods, both big and small. A Town Hall meeting on the proposed NYU expansion plan in January attracted an overflow crowd of more than 500, while a town hall in March with local block associations about a proposed Hudson Square rezoning attracted more than 100 residents to learn more about an important plan to rezone more than 20 blocks, the details of which neighborhood residents had previously been largely unaware of. As a result, a consensus formed among community groups and neighbors to push for lower height limits and landmark protections in conjunction with the possible rezoning of this area west of Sixth Avenue and south of Houston Street.

GVSHP's landmarks application webpage continued to serve as an invaluable tool to anyone interested in proposed changes to landmarked properties in the Village,

East Village, and NoHo. The only such webpage of its kind in the city, it provides images and details of every single application for changes to landmarked properties in our neighborhood that is significant enough to warrant a public hearing. With a few clicks now anyone can learn what changes are being proposed to buildings in our neighborhoods, when public hearings on the changes are being held, and how you can weigh in on the application before decisions are made. While decisions and changes in status of any application are posted on the website as soon as they have been made, you can also sign up to receive updates about any application, so you don't even need to check, but simply wait for an e-mail linking you to the updated page. With so much going on in our lives, there's no easier way to keep informed about what's going on in your neighborhood.

Engaging the public in the preservation and development of our neighborhoods – past, present, and future – remains the number one priority of GVSHP. Thanks to you, our friends and supporters, we are better equipped than ever do so in a constantly changing and challenging landscape. Today, more than ever, we at the Greenwich Village Society for Historic Preservation salute you, our members, for your support, your commitment, your participation, and your passion. It makes everything we do possible.

Thank you.