

**Greenwich Village Society for Historic Preservation  
33rd Annual Meeting & 23rd Annual Awards  
Andrew Berman, Executive Director  
June 17, 2013**

Welcome everyone, it's always wonderful to see so many familiar faces and so many new ones for this, GVSHP's 33rd Annual Meeting. Thank you to our very generous hosts, The New School, and thank you in advance to our Awards Committee for their terrific work in selecting this year's honorees from scores and scores of worthy nominees. I'd also like to thank our staff and volunteers for making tonight's event possible, and of course, all of you for attending, and especially those of you who submitted so many great nominations this year.

Before we get to our Awards program, it's my distinct pleasure to provide you with a review of GVSHP's activities and accomplishments over the past year.

In May, GVSHP staged its major annual benefit, our eagerly-anticipated House tour. This year's, I'm glad to say, was a stunning success – our highest-grossing ever, enabling hundreds of tour-goers to access some of the most impressive and enticing private homes in the Village, while raising nearly a quarter of GVSHP's annual budget. A committee of more than 20 dedicated individuals, along with 6 generous homeowners and dozens of businesses, and more than 140 volunteers, made this incredible event possible.

Over the past year, membership support for GVSHP, which comprises about 75% of our annual income, rose by nearly 15%, in terms of both the numbers of individuals supporting the Society and total income raised. Over the past ten years, the number of our members have grown by nearly 200%, nearly triple, while membership support has grown by 600% to seven times what it was ten years ago.

New members come to GVSHP through a variety of means, one of which is our ever-changing and expanding programming. This past year GVSHP conducted 45 public programs, attended by nearly 2,000 people, almost all of which are free and, with the exception of our members-only events, open to the public. These ranged from widely-attended lectures about Keith Haring and Jean Michel Basquiat, to intimate guided tours of the NY Public Library Map room, East Village culinary hot spots and community gardens, and tracing the path of Minetta Stream.

Meanwhile, the dynamic GVSHP Broker Partnership continued to expand its continuing education program for the real estate community, helping to educate this incredibly important segment of our population about the value and history of preservation, while also staging fun programs which raised the profile of, and funds for, GVSHP.

Superstorm Sandy, which disrupted so many of our lives last year, also heavily impacted our children's education program, closing schools and upending classroom curricula at one of the most popular times of year for the program. Nevertheless, in the past twelve months, GVSHP has served more than 1,100 students in grades one thru seven from throughout the five boroughs, using in-class sessions and a tour of the Village to teach about immigrant history, urban development, and 19<sup>th</sup> century life in New York.

While our traditional educational programming has been steadily growing, our virtual presence has exploded. In the last year, our website has had more than 115,000 unique visitors and 260,000 pageviews, sharing everything from advocacy updates to oral histories with preservation pioneers, to virtual tours of historic sites in our neighborhoods. Our blog *Off the Grid*, launched in February 2011, has been especially popular, with nearly 90,000 visitors over the past year, and nearly 135,000 unique pageviews. Since its launch, *Off the Grid* has had more than 150,000 visitors and nearly 250,000 pageviews. The blog has been a great opportunity to reach a worldwide audience, and to connect our neighborhood's history with those interested in the fine arts or popular culture, trivia or trailblazers, researching or reminiscing.

Our on-line presence has also been a great tool for helping local residents learn about what's going on right now in our neighborhoods, and how they can get involved. Our Landmarks Application Webpage is the first and still only one of its kind in the city. It provides invaluable information on every single application for changes to landmarked buildings in our neighborhoods that require a public hearing. It lets you see the history of the building, the proposed changes, when and where the application will be heard by the Community Board and the Landmarks Preservation Commission, and tells you how you can provide in-person, e-mailed, or written testimony before a decision is made. It tracks the application – for months, or in some cases for years – from its first filing to its resolution, letting you know of any modifications to the application, new meetings that have been scheduled, or decisions rendered, and allows you to sign up for alerts to update you on all such developments. In just the last year, more than 6,200 people have used this webpage, and individual application pages have been viewed more than 18,000 times, making this an incredibly useful and widely-used tool.

Of course we don't just let the public know about these applications; GVSHP carefully reviews every single one of them ourselves, and when appropriate, issues alerts to our members and recommendations to the Community Board and Landmarks Preservation Commission, to ensure that the character of our neighborhoods are preserved. In the past year, our Preservation Committee has reviewed 84 such landmarks applications, ranging from storefront alterations to rooftop and rear yard additions, demolition and new construction, all while continuing to track an additional 30 applications from prior years still under consideration.

This is just the tip of the iceberg of GVSHP's advocacy work, and this past year was particularly eventful. In October, the city designated the East Village/Lower East Side Historic District, that neighborhood's first large-scale historic district covering 325 buildings on 15 blocks. Combined with the smaller East 10<sup>th</sup> Street historic district designated earlier that year, these were the first new historic districts in the East Village since 1969, and increased tenfold the number of buildings in the neighborhood with historic district protections.

In March, after a protracted and particularly heated campaign led by GVSHP, the City finally agreed to vote to landmark "phase II" of our proposed South Village Historic District, first proposed by GVSHP in 2006, and to complete a survey of the final segment, "phase III," south of Houston Street, both before the end of the year. But when the City came out with their proposed boundaries in April, while they included about 85% of what we proposed, they left out a row of ten 1840's houses on Houston Street, and two low-rise, contextual NYU buildings on Washington Square South. Without landmark protections, these buildings could easily be replaced by wildly out-of-scale construction – in the case of NYU's Vanderbilt Hall, the zoning would have allowed a 300 ft. tall building.

GVSHP rallied our members, allies, and elected officials to demand that these sites be added into the proposed district before the boundaries were finalized in late May. I am very gratified to say that, after significant pressure, including from many of you here today, all twelve of these buildings were in fact added back in to the officially calendared proposed South Village Historic District, now under consideration. We even scooped up an additional NYU building into the district, D'Agostino Hall, which was now entirely surrounded by the rest of the proposed district and therefore could no longer be excluded. While this building is of no particular historic significance and under existing zoning could not be replaced with a larger building, I'd still rather have more safeguards against potential future NYU expansions than less.

But our work in the South Village is far from over. There will be a public hearing next Tuesday June 25<sup>th</sup> that we will need all of you to attend (hopefully you all got your flyer), to demand the district be designated, to call for these additional sites to remain in the district, and to urge the City to finally move on the long-overdue "phase III," south of Houston Street.

Speaking of NYU, of course not all the news this year was good. In July, the City Council joined the City Planning Commission and the Borough President in giving final approval to NYU's massive Village expansion plan with only minor modifications. While we were able to get the outrageous project reduced in size by about 20%, and through public pressure got one of the most objectionable elements of the plan removed, a proposed 400 ft. tall fourth tower for the landmarked Silver Towers complex, the approved plan was still simply much too dense, too disruptive, too tall, and too lacking in consideration of reasonable alternatives.

As a result, GVSHP joined dozens of fellow community and preservation groups, including two of tonight's awardees, NYU Faculty Against the Sexton Plan and the Bowery Alliance of Neighbors, in a lawsuit challenging the City and the State's approvals of the plan. Our suit is now before a judge, and we have been joined not only by Assemblymember Deborah Glick as a plaintiff, but two former City Commissioners have submitted briefs supporting our claims about the flaws in the approval process. We are next scheduled to appear in court on July 18<sup>th</sup>, and I hope all of you will join us for that hearing, as that fight continues.

Fortunately, our advocacy successes over the last year have not been isolated cases. As this is the last GVSHP Annual Meeting of the Bloomberg Administration, we thought it appropriate to take a quick look back at what we have been able to accomplish over the last 10 years, against considerable odds and at times overwhelming pressure, to help preserve our neighborhoods.

Moving west to east, in 2003, GVSHP secured the first expansion of historic district protections in the Village since 1969, the Gansevoort Market Historic District. After we turned our attention to the Far West Village in 2004, this was followed in 2006 by the first extension of the Greenwich Village Historic District, and the new Weehawken Street Historic District. In 2007, GVSHP got the remainder of the Gansevoort Market Historic District listed upon the State and National Registers of Historic Places.

Moving to the South Village, the City designated the first phase of our proposed South Village Historic District in 2010, also as an extension of the Greenwich Village Historic District. As mentioned previously, the City has now agreed to vote before year's end on the second phase of our proposed South Village Historic District, while also agreeing to survey the area south of Houston Street for a third and final phase.

In NoHo, in 2003 GVSHP helped secure designation of the NoHo East Historic District, and in 2008, we strongly supported and celebrated the designation of the long-overdue NoHo Historic District Extension.

And in the East Village, 2012 saw the designation of the East 10<sup>th</sup> Street and East Village/Lower East Side Historic Districts, which we intend to ensure are the beginning, not the end, of the expansion of much-needed historic district protections in that neighborhood.

Our landmarking success has not been limited to historic districts. GVSHP has proposed and secured individual landmark designation of five sites in the Far West Village, including the 13-building, full block Westbeth complex; nine federal-era houses including three on MacDougal Street, two in Hudson Square, one on St. Mark's Place, and three in the Financial District; I.M Pei's Silver Tower complex, including its Picasso sculpture ; Webster Hall on East 11<sup>th</sup> Street; and 128 East 13<sup>th</sup> Street, the city's last surviving horse auction mart, the former studio of the artist Frank Stella, and a World War II women's assembly-line training center. GVSHP also supported the designation of more than a dozen other individual sites which were landmarked throughout the Village, East Village, and NoHo over this time.

Additionally, GVSHP fought for and helped secure four contextual rezonings to protect the character of our neighborhoods. These prohibit out of scale new construction, encourage the preservation of existing buildings, and eliminate the incentive for dorm and hotel construction which previously existed in many of our residential areas. This included the 2005 Far West Village rezoning, and the follow-up 2010 Washington and Greenwich Street rezoning, and the 2008 East Village rezoning, covering nearly that entire neighborhood, and the follow-up 2010 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> Avenue corridor rezonings.

In all, over the course of these last 10 years, GVSHP has helped secure landmark designation of over 1,000 buildings, and community-friendly, contextual rezonings of nearly 100 blocks of our neighborhoods – a virtual small city of preservation within our ever-changing metropolis.

Our next Annual Meeting will come within the first months of a new administration, which will no doubt present new challenges as well as new opportunities. But with your support and assistance, I am confident that GVSHP will be able to rise to those new challenges, and seize those new opportunities. How successful we are will have a lasting and irreversible impact on the Village, East Village, and NoHo for generations to come. I hope you'll remain by our side as we chart the road ahead.