



GREENWICH VILLAGE SOCIETY FOR HISTORIC PRESERVATION

Stopping Illegal Billboards

Signs Spread Across Downtown

GVSHHP has been working to halt the spread of illegal billboards in our neighborhoods. Though we have faced lax enforcement, big money, and a few highly insensitive property owners, we have made substantial progress, even if we still have a long way to go.

GVSHHP has been going after illegal billboards reported to us by our members and the public, as well as surveying parts of the Village, East Village, NoHo, and Hudson Square to identify other offending signage and seek their removal. In the East Village, after getting the City to issue violations for twin 4-story high billboards facing Tompkins Square Park at 108 Avenue B, we did a survey of the neighborhood and identified at least eight other billboards which we believe violate zoning restrictions (advertising billboards are outright prohibited in most of the East Village). The City has begun to take action against several of these signs, and we will continue to pursue this until all are served violations by the City and removed.

In the West Village and Meatpacking District, we have also seen the rampant proliferation of billboards, though the zoning for parts of these neighborhoods allows some types of billboards, making enforcement more complicated. However, GVSHHP did determine

billboards at 30 Gansevoort, 675 Hudson, 350 West 14th Street, and 59 Greenwich Avenue to be illegal, and the City has responded by issuing violations, and in the case of 807 Washington Street the sign was removed. We continue to pursue the remaining signs.

Perhaps the greatest offender of all the billboards to appear recently in our neighborhoods were the two erected by the Hotel Gansevoort on Hudson Street. When GVSHHP first got wind that the hotel owner planned to erect these nearly eight story high billboards, we immediately contacted the City to argue that the signs violated zoning regulations. We also reached out to the owner to urge he drop his plans for erecting the giant billboards, and when he refused, we staged a large demonstration outside the hotel entrance attended by nearly 200 indignant neighbors. As the hotel owner continued to refuse to remove the signs, we staged further demonstrations during high-profile events at the hotel, and worked with a coalition of area businesses who engaged in a boycott of the hotel to pressure them to take down the signs.

Finally in late March the City ruled in our favor on one of three arguments we put forward regarding the signs violating zoning regulations. As we insisted, the sign was not at the requisite 90 degree or greater angle to Hudson Street. As a result, as we go to print, the owner has still not been able to erect one

of the two planned billboards, and in order to do so he would have to either remove all illumination or move the sign to face several feet closer to the hotel's windows. We have urged the owner not to erect the billboard rather than do that, but he has thus far refused. However, we continue to seek a ruling from the City on two other bases upon which we believe the billboard is illegal—bases which would be much more difficult to correct. We continue to plan protests and boycotts until the signs are removed. For more information or how to help, see www.gvshp.org/GansvBlbd.htm.



Residents rally at GVSHHP's anti-billboard demonstration

South Village Preservation Effort Grows

Endorsements Build, Kids Ed Program Begins



GVSHP Educator Jane Cowan highlighting South Village architecture for our children's education program

On April 24th more than 200 people turned out to a Community Board public hearing at Our Lady of Pompeii Church to show support for GVSHP's proposed South Village Historic District. The proposal was submitted to the City by GVSHP at the end of 2006, and support for preserving this area—once the cradle of the Italian-immigrant, beat, and folk communities in Greenwich Village—has grown rapidly.

In just the four months since the proposal was submitted, it has been endorsed by Borough President Stringer, Congressman Nadler, State Senators Duane and Connor, City Councilmember Gerson, Assemblymember Glick, the National Trust for Historic Preservation, the Preservation League of NY State, and nearly every community group and block association located in the proposed district as well as other preservation organizations.

Additionally, GVSHP has been building support for the proposal by expanding our Historic South Village Preservation Advisory Board. Consisting of local community and business leaders, property owners, and scholars of Italian-American history, the board has grown to over forty members committed to seeing the South Village designated a New York City historic district. Its membership includes Carling Community co-founder Lucy Cecere, the directors of local institutions such as the Film Forum and the Merchant's House Museum, and the heads of more than a dozen local community organizations (for complete list see www.gvshp.org/SVadvisorybd.htm).

GVSHP has also begun a new version of our children's education program that now focuses exclusively on the South Village and its immigrant history. In addition to our standard curriculum for the more than 1,500 students we teach each year, GVSHP will now also offer a program using the South Village as a living example of a turn-of-the-century immigrant neighborhood, which children can examine to understand how new Americans lived, created communities, and adjusted to life in their new homeland. The program will continue to focus on teaching students how to look at the built form around them and learn about history as well as design, drawing new inspirations from the South Village's

working-class architecture. See www.gvshp.org/educationinformation.htm.

GVSHP has also updated its South Village building list, providing information about the date of construction, architect, original use, and historic events or notable occupants of every building in the proposed South Village Historic District; see www.gvshp.org/documents/SouthVillageBuildingList.pdf.

The one disappointing (but not surprising) exception to this positive trend is NYU. The University was invited by the community to be part of the original planning process for the South Village Historic District, and explicitly pledged to support the designation of the historic district as proposed – the rare instance of agreement between NYU and its neighbors.

However, once the proposal was submitted, NYU not only refused to follow through on its pledge of support, but wrote to the City undercutting the proposal, claiming it did not hold together, and that any such district should be chopped up, with areas which NYU determined did not “merit incorporation within a historic district” excluded. GVSHP and a coalition of community groups to whom NYU made the original pledge of support demanded a retraction from NYU President John Sexton, who refused. We are disappointed but unfortunately not surprised that NYU would choose to not only break its word but work against the community in this way, as it has all too often in the past.

Letting the City know you support the proposed South Village Historic District is now more important than ever; go to www.gvshp.org/southvillagesupportlet.htm to help and see www.gvshp.org/southvillage.htm for the latest information on the effort.

Keeping the Pressure on the City and Trump

GVSHP Rallies Before A Final Decision is Issued

GVSHP continues to lead the fight against the ludicrously inappropriate and (we contend) illegal 45-story Trump SoHo Condo-Hotel planned for Spring and Varick Streets.

In March GVSHP and over 150 neighbors and allied community groups held a demonstration in front of the development site. GVSHP had caught Trump and his development partners yet again advertising illegal uses for their planned development, both on their website and in major publications. In spite of our bringing this to their attention, the City has still been unwilling to block the planned condo-hotel development on the basis of it violating the zoning. Instead, the City has indicated that it will continue to negotiate a voluntary “restrictive declaration” with Trump and partners to “ensure” they would not violate the zoning.

However, GVSHP has consulted with groups across the City who have had similar experiences with “restrictive declarations” and found them ineffective and almost impossible to enforce. Further, a condo-hotel is a place where individuals own their own units, and the City is considering allowing owners to live in them for 3-5 months per year (though we suspect many will disobey the restrictive declaration and stay there longer). Since the zoning for the site outright prohibits residential or residential hotel development, we believe that such an arrangement would still violate the law and should still not be allowed.

What’s at stake here is not just how long some of the super-rich owners at the Trump condo-hotel get to stay in their units, but whether or not the public will be cut out of its rightful place in land use decisions, whether zoning rules will be surreptitiously changed to allow high-rise residential development for the first time ever in

areas throughout the City where it is currently prohibited, and whether a ludicrously out-of-scale 45-story building will be developed at this site.

When a proposed development violates the zoning (as we believe Trump’s does), a zoning change must be obtained for it to move forward. Through the zoning change process, the public gets a say in what is or is not allowed, environmental impacts of the proposal must be analyzed, and ultimately the City Council and City Planning Commission decide if the project should be allowed, prohibited, or modified to address local concerns, such as height, scale, or traffic issues.

If the City agrees with Trump and partners and says their project does not violate the zoning, they get to entirely sidestep this public approval process and build exactly as they planned. And worse, from here on in, any developer in areas with similar zoning gets to do the same, since the decision applies citywide. Thus the Meatpacking

District, the southern part of the Far West Village, and much of Hudson Square, NoHo, SoHo, West Chelsea, northern Tribeca, and many other areas would have their doors swung open to similar high-rise residential development for the first time ever.

As we go to print, the City has still not approved the Trump project, which they appeared ready to do in late 2006—possibly a good sign. Regardless, GVSHP has been meeting with local groups who are considering all options—including legal ones—should the City allow this project to move forward.

GVSHP has also asked the City and Council Speaker Quinn to change the zoning for the area surrounding the Trump project so that 45-story buildings—whether they are residences or hotels—are no longer allowed. For the latest information and how to help, see www.gvshp.org/trump.htm and www.gvshp.org/trumplet.htm.



GVSHP Executive Director Andrew Berman leading protest against planned Trump development

Confronting NYU's Enormous Growth

Mega-Dorm and Further Expansion are Causes for Concern

GVSHP has been leading the charge to halt NYU's ongoing expansion in our neighborhoods and to hold the university accountable when it breaks promises to the community.

In April, GVSHP, neighbors, and elected officials demanded that the city overturn its decision to allow the transfer of air rights from a neighboring post office to a planned 700-bed NYU dorm on East 12th Street. The air rights make the planned mega-dorm 55% larger than normally allowed, bringing it to 26 stories and 262 feet tall – the tallest building in the East Village. GVSHP has been leading the fight against the sale of air rights by the Post Office throughout Manhattan, which has been done without going through required federal reviews meant to protect historic resources and the environment. In this case, GVSHP and others argued that the City should not allow the increased size of the dorm because it has no power to enforce the terms of the air rights transfer since the Post Office is a federal agency immune from city laws. The case is currently before the New York City Board of Standards and Appeals.

On other fronts, GVSHP was also greatly disturbed to hear that NYU was continuing to shut down facilities in the Financial District and relocate them to our neighborhood. It has recently come to light that, as a result, NYU plans to build yet another 600-800 bed dorm somewhere in our neighborhood, though they have refused to provide any information about sites under consideration. We have informed NYU and city officials that we find this unacceptable. Instead, we are calling for



NYU's dorm will rise to 262 feet above the former tower of St. Ann's church

NYU to remain within their existing footprint and envelope within our neighborhood and to look for sites outside of the Village for a secondary campus if they wish to expand in the future.

NYU is also planning a new theater and "Institute for Performing Arts" for its Tisch School of the Arts at the former Tower Video site and adjacent empty lot at Lafayette and West 4th Streets. Because this site falls within the NoHo Historic District, the design of any new development there will have to come under public review. However, there are also very important zoning issues involved, as most university-related uses are prohibited by the zoning at this location, and we want to ensure

that NYU's project does not allow prohibited uses without going through the appropriate public review process.

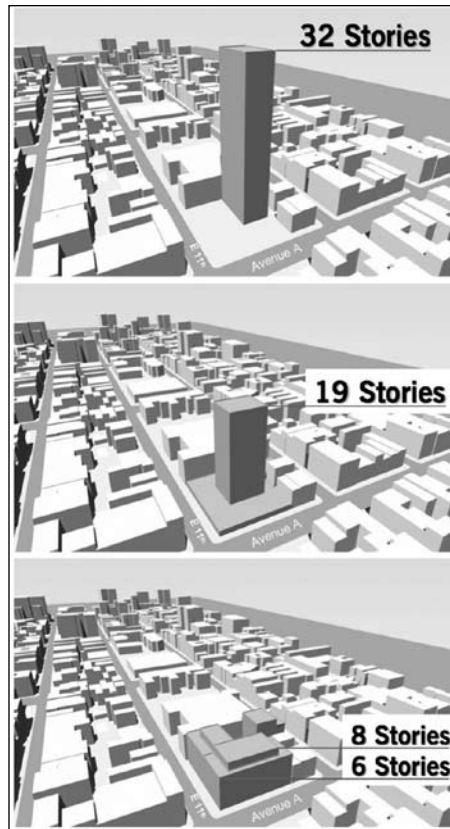
Finally, we continue to closely monitor any NYU plans for the supermarket site at Bleeker Street and LaGuardia Place adjacent to Silver Towers and 505 LaGuardia Place. Thus far there has been no indication of NYU's plans for this site; we have long raised concerns about what NYU may want to build here. GVSHP continues to advocate for landmark designation for the entire superblock, which contains I.M. Pei's famous pinwheel-plan towers and one of only two public outdoor Picasso sculptures in North America. See www.gvshp.org/silvertowerssuperblock.htm.

East Village Preservation Battles Heat Up

Landmarking and Rezoning Plans Come Down to the Wire

GVSHP has been working in coalition with the Community Board, other community groups, and local elected officials to advance a rezoning plan for the East Village. The current zoning for the neighborhood encourages out-of-scale development and the construction of dorms and hotels. GVSHP and the coalition pushed for a reduction in the size and height of allowable new development, limiting air rights transfers, and getting rid of the current incentive for dorm and hotel development. In response, in 2006 the City put forward a draft rezoning plan which addressed some but not all of these issues. Among other things, GVSHP was concerned that the proposed new zoning might actually increase the likelihood of teardowns and rooftop additions atop 100-150 year-old buildings on sidestreets. GVSHP and the coalition pushed for further restrictions on sidestreet development, and GVSHP conducted a survey of sidestreets in the area to show the concentration of older structures at lower densities that could be threatened by the new rezoning.

In March, the City responded by revising the rezoning plan with the changes we requested for sidestreets, putting especially tight restrictions on the blocks we identified. However, the coalition also asked for several other changes which the City has not committed to, including reducing the allowable size of development on Houston Street and Avenue D (which the City proposed to upzone slightly when developers include 20% affordable housing), spreading affordable housing incentives throughout the neighborhood, and enacting tighter restric-



Differences in development allowed under the current (top two) and proposed (bottom) zoning

tions to prevent the demolition of existing buildings and the harassment of tenants. One thing is clear, however: several large sites in the neighborhood are facing imminent development under the existing zoning, which would almost definitely result in huge new developments of luxury housing, dorms, or hotels. As we go to press, the fate of the rezoning plan is up in the air, but GVSHP is pushing for resolution as quickly as possible to prevent further out-of-character development.

GVSHP is also pushing for a rezoning of the 3rd and 4th Avenue corridors and the blocks in

between, which the City has refused to include in the rezoning plan. Working with Community Board 3, Borough President Stringer, and Councilmember Mendez, we have begun the initial stages of seeking a community-initiated rezoning plan for these blocks, which have some of the worst zoning in all of the East Village, as evidenced by the 13-26 story dorms NYU has built or is building in the area. Here too we are seeking to limit the size and height of new development and to get rid of the current incentive for dorm or hotel development and instead reinforce the predominantly residential character of the area. We have also begun to work with local community groups on examining the terribly inadequate zoning for the Bowery, where shockingly out-of-scale new developments like a 23-story hotel at 5th Street are going up. See www.gvshp.org/EV-corridor.htm.

Finally, we continue to push for landmark designation of 128 East 13th Street, the last surviving horse auction mart in New York City, which for many years served as the studio of artist Frank Stella. When we learned of plans to tear down the building, GVSHP called for the City to intervene and argued for its preservation by providing information about its association with prominent New York families such as the Belmonts and Vanderbilts and its service as an assembly-line training center for women during World War II. The City froze demolition plans by beginning the process of considering landmark designation in the summer of 2006, but has not yet acted to permanently landmark the building, pending the owner coming up with a viable plan for its re-use. However, as we go to press, we have learned that Peridance Studios has signed a long-term lease for the building, providing hope that the permanent preservation of the building may be near. See www.gvshp.org/stable.htm.

From the Director

Looking back over the last 5 ½ years as GVSHP's Executive Director, I am so proud of what the organization has been able to accomplish: The first new historic district in Greenwich Village since 1969 (the Gansevoort Market Historic District); the first expansion of the Greenwich Village Historic District ever; the first extension of historic district protections to the Far West Village; the first-ever “downzoning” of our neighborhood; new landmark designations around Washington Square, in the East Village, and Downtown. We have challenged rules that allow universities and other institutions to overdevelop our neighborhood; pushed for long-overdue historic district expansions in NoHo; caught unscrupulous developers advertising prohibited uses in planned developments; and proposed bold new landmarking plans for the South Village and zoning protections for the East Village. At the same time, our educational programming has expanded greatly in scope and depth, and our first-of-its-kind children's education program has quadrupled in size.

But with the ever-increasing pressure our neighborhoods face, resting on our laurels is the last thing we can do. The challenges we face are even greater and could undo much of what we have already accomplished. Fortunately, with your help, we can rise to the challenge. The incredible willingness of our members to support GVSHP—with their time, skills, and generosity—is the true key to our success in these David vs. Goliath battles. Looking ahead, I hope we can count on you for more of the same.



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7 Leroy Street, one of 13 federal houses proposed for landmark designation by GVSHP

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We also acknowledge those who have generously provided donations, services, and space in-kind: Balthazar Restaurant, The Caring Community, Frederick Wildman and Sons, Ltd., Gourmet Garage, Alexander Kaplen, Jefferson Market Library, Judson Memorial Church, Joseph Lovett & James E. Cottrell, M.D., Murray's Cheese, Paula Perlis, Salviati, the Stephan Weiss Foundation, and Wine & Food Associates.

More Federals Saved

GVSHP and the NY Landmarks Conservancy have made steady progress on our 2003 proposal for landmark designation of 13 federal-era (1790-1835) houses in Lower Manhattan, some of our neighborhoods' oldest surviving structures. 127, 129, and 131 MacDougal Street, near Washington Square Park, and 4 St. Marks Place were landmarked in 2004, and 67 Greenwich Street in the Financial District was landmarked in 2005. Earlier this year the City held hearings on landmarking 94, 94 ½, and 96 Greenwich Street (built in 1798), located just south of Ground Zero, and 496 and 498 Greenwich Street, located just south of Spring Street in Hudson Square. We are pushing the City to act swiftly on these and to consider the three remaining federal houses from the proposal. See www.gvshp.org/federalrowhouses.htm for more info and how to help.

Meatpacking District Goes National

In April GVSHP completed a 6-year project to get the entire Meatpacking District listed on the State and National Registers of Historic Places. Listing is not only a great honor, but also provides grants and tax breaks as incentives to property owners to restore or maintain their historic structures. These incentives are especially important because the city's Gansevoort Market Historic District—which mandates preservation of historic buildings but does not provide financial incentives—covers only about 2/3 of the neighborhood. GVSHP had proposed and fought for including the entire neighborhood in the city district, which was designated in 2003, but the City cut out some of the northern, western, and eastern blocks of the neighborhood. See www.gvshp.org/gansevoortnatreg.htm.

St. Vincent's and New School Plans

GVSHP is speaking with both St. Vincent's Hospital and the New School regarding early-stage plans for new development by both institutions. St. Vincent's is looking to consolidate its operations into one new large facility on the site of the O'Toole Building on the west side of 7th Avenue between 12th and 13th Streets, and possibly sell off its remaining buildings east of 7th Avenue, to be replaced, re-used, or both. GVSHP has been meeting with St. Vincent's as well as neighbors to discuss the plan and to try to ensure that any changes do not increase the overall density in the area, do not negatively impact historic buildings, and are consistent with the character of the Village. All such changes would require extensive public hearings and approvals. The New School is contemplating a larger new building on the site of their current facility at 5th Avenue and 14th Street. GVSHP has already been in touch with the New School about ensuring that any new development is in scale and in character with its surroundings. We will continue to closely monitor both plans, work with local elected officials, and talk to neighbors as plans progress.

Pier 40: Vegas-on-the-Hudson?

GVSHP has come out strongly against Related Companies' plan to develop an enormous 10,000 seat, multi-venue, mega-entertainment complex at Pier 40 at Clarkson Street. Though GVSHP traditionally does not get involved in Hudson River Park development issues, the enormous impact a huge development like this would have on our neighborhood prompted us to act. We are not only calling for rejection of the Related plan, but for comprehensive

planning for the adjacent Hudson Square/Far West Village neighborhood, which could face dramatic transformation if the Related plan and Trump's condo-hotel—and the development it would spawn—were approved. See www.gvshp.org/Pier40.htm.

*in
brief*

More Progress in the Far West Village

Early this year, the City finally began to follow through on its 2005 promise to landmark eight additional sites in the Far West Village, following the downzoning and the extension of historic district protections to the area we successfully secured. The old Keller Hotel at Barrow and West Streets and early 19th c. houses at 354 West 11th and 159 Charles Street were landmarked. The five remaining promised landmarks include the entire 13-building Westbeth complex and Charles Lane. With funding from the J.M. Kaplan Fund, GVSHP is also seeking to list Westbeth on the State and National Registers of Historic Places, which would provide additional grant and tax break opportunities for upkeep and restoration of the artists complex.

Threat to 13th Street Rep

GVSHP has been working with the owners of the 13th Street Repertory Theater at 50 W. 13th Street to help save this venerable institution, home to the longest-running Off-Off-Broadway play. A dispute with the property owner could result in the demolition of the buildings housing the theater, which lie just outside of the Greenwich Village Historic District. GVSHP has asked the City to consider landmarking the structures and has brought media attention to the theater's plight. GVSHP continues to work to seek help for threatened Village theaters.

Support Preservation: Join GVSHP

Your support makes GVSHP a more effective preservation leader. Contribute \$100 or more, and receive a set of Greenwich Village notecards. Contribute \$500 or more, and receive an invitation to a special event at a unique Village location.

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