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GREENWICH VILLAGE SOCIETY FOR HISTORIC PRESERVATION

City Takes First Steps to Landmark the South Village

*But Will Neighborhood Be Endangered in
the Process?*

At the end of 2006, GVSHP submitted a proposal for a 38-block South Village Historic District—far and away the largest expansion of landmark protections anywhere downtown since 1969.

The proposal stressed the unique social and immigrant history, working-class architecture, and cultural innovations which characterize the South Village, and received broad support from neighborhood leaders, preservationists, scholars, and elected officials. In early 2008, the Landmarks Preservation Commission (LPC) committed to GVSHP to review the first third of our proposed district west of 6th Avenue for potential landmark designation. GVSHP worked hard to ensure that the LPC included as many of the buildings we proposed for landmark designation as possible. Unfortunately, during this time several key historic sites in the remaining 2/3 of the South Village which GVSHP urged the LPC to save were demolished or compromised without intervention by the LPC, including 19th century houses on Bleeker Street, Leroy Street, and 6th Avenue, and two key historic cafes on Bleeker Street.

After a concerted campaign by GVSHP and its members to get the LPC to act, in April the LPC announced that they would release a formal proposal for landmark designation of that first third of the South Village. This was of course extremely welcome news, and needed as soon as possible. However, in a joint announcement with local elected officials



The City is considering acting upon the western third of GVSHP's proposed South Village Historic District (l.); 178 Bleeker Street, an 1861 house, is one of many historic properties recently threatened or lost on the South Village (r.).

and the Community Board, the LPC also stated that they would first hold an “owner’s meeting” and notify all owners in the proposed new district—including developers—of their intention to landmark their properties, but would not take any action to landmark them for at least several months. GVSHP had strongly argued against this, noting that it gives those

who are opposed the opportunity to avoid landmark designation by securing demolition and construction permits in advance of landmarking, as has happened with other districts the LPC has designated. Also, rather than consider this area as a “South Village Historic District Part I” as originally indicated, the LPC announced they were considering the

area as an extension of the Greenwich Village Historic District. This both ignores the particular history of the South Village which so many have come together to celebrate, and leaves unclear what if any commitment there is to the other 2/3 of the proposed district.

GVSHP and many of our neighborhood and preservation allies are pushing the LPC to take action to protect the South Village as soon as possible, especially now that potential developers

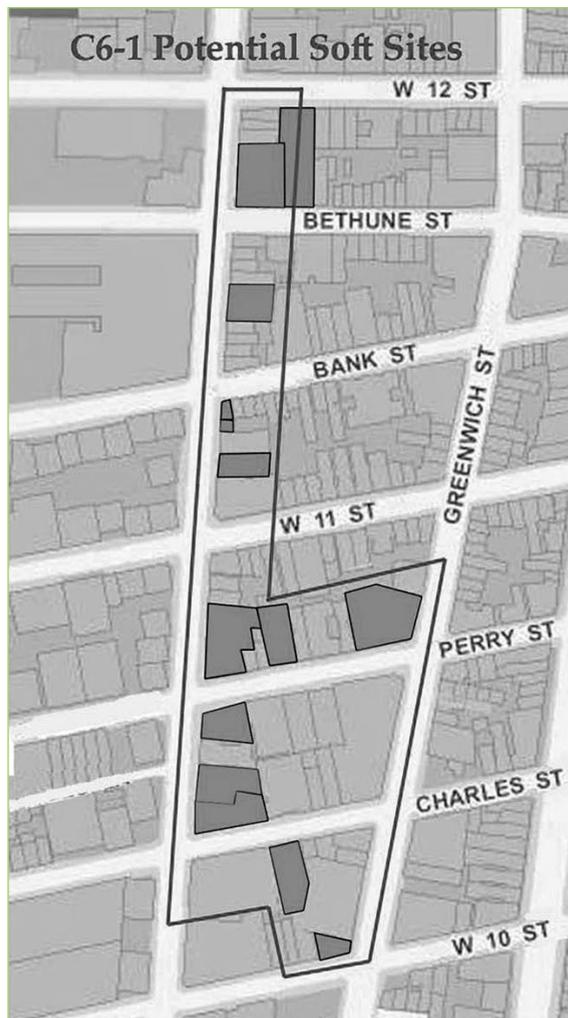
have been notified that their properties may be landmarked. We are also urging the LPC to commit to consider the remaining 2/3 of the South Village as soon as possible, and to recognize and honor the entire neighborhood’s special history as a South Village Historic District. See gvshp.org/SV.

More inside ▶

What's New in the Far West Village

Rezoning to Prevent Overdevelopment:

GVSHP and a coalition of community groups have proposed a rezoning of an outdated zoning district in the Far West Village which encourages out-of-scale commercial and dormitory development. The 'C6-1' zone in



GVSHP's analysis of the C6-1 district in the Far West Village found more than a dozen potential development sites.

the Far West Village was last updated in 1961, and is the only zoning district left in the neighborhood which gives bonuses for dormitory, hotel, and office development as compared to residential development. This issue came to the fore last year when a developer put forth a plan for a 10-story hotel at 145 Perry Street at Washington Street.

While this site is within the Greenwich Village Historic District, meaning the design had to be approved by the Landmarks Preservation Commission (LPC), the use of the site as a hotel not only required no approval, but was actually strongly encouraged by the zoning. Thus while the LPC ultimately slightly reduced the proposal's size and changed its design, they could do nothing about the use. In response, early last year GVSHP and a coalition of community groups reached out to the City Planning Commission (which regulates zoning), Community Board 2, and local elected officials to seek support for a zoning change. A GVSHP survey found more than a dozen potential development sites within the zone, making the call for change all the more urgent.

Our persistent requests for a zoning change encountered a stone wall for close to a year. In order to call attention to the problem and rally support for the requested change, GVSHP and community groups sponsored a Town Hall meeting. More than 150 people turned out to express support for

rezoning, and the Town Hall resulted in a long-overdue meeting between City Planning, the Community Board, and elected officials on the request. Now City Planning is reviewing the proposal, elected officials are considering support for a change, and the Community Board, at our request, has passed a resolution in support. GVSHP and community groups are prepared to keep pushing until a zoning change is enacted, which would reduce the size of allowable development and eliminate the bonus for commercial and dorm development. See gvshp.org/C6-1.

145 Perry Street: After the economic downturn, the approved plans for a 90 ft. tall hotel at 145 Perry Street were dropped and a new developer put forward a plan for a smaller mixed residential and hotel development. GVSHP urged further refinements to the design to make it blend in with the neighborhood better, and the LPC agreed.

139-143 Charles Street (at Washington Street): In 2008, a developer put forward a plan for a 90+ ft. tall development at this crucial corner within the expansion of the Greenwich Village Historic District which GVSHP helped secure. The Society had serious reservations about the design and the size of the project, which fortunately needed the approval of the LPC. The Commission echoed many of our sentiments, telling the developer to rethink and reduce the size of the design. With the economic downturn, the developer never came back with a revised design, and instead began using the site (now an open lot and a small garage building) for commercial parking and an illegal billboard. GVSHP has been pushing city agencies to issue fines for the illegal billboard and seek its removal. See gvshp.org/139Ch.

What's New in the West and Central Village

St. Vincent's/Rudin Development: In March the LPC voted 8 to 3 to approve plans for a new hospital tower (286 ft. tall, vs. the originally proposed 329 ft. tall) on the site of the O'Toole building. This followed a 6 to 4 vote to approve St. Vincent's hardship application to demolish O'Toole last fall. While GVSHP has consistently supported St. Vincent's ability to modernize its hospital facilities, the Society also raised serious issues with the 'hardship' application to allow the demolition of a landmarked building, and the precedent it could possibly set for other institutions.

GVSHP has also raised serious objections to aspects of the Rudin development plan attached to the new hospital, which originally included demolition of all the hospital's historic buildings to make way for new condos. The LPC agreed with some of these objections, and four of the five historic buildings originally proposed for demolition must now be preserved. But there are still critical issues regarding the size of a planned new Rudin condo tower on 7th Avenue, as well as the design of the proposed new buildings on 11th and 12th Street.



9-11 Memorial tiles at Greenwich and 7th Avenues.

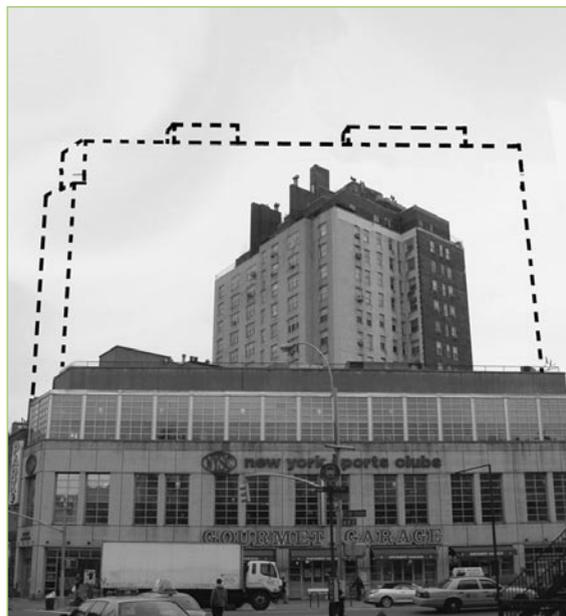
The project cannot move forward, however, until it receives all of its approvals and all financing is in place. The Rudin plan still requires landmarks approvals, the entire plan must be approved by the City Planning Commission and City Council, and the hospital plan needs State approval as well. Additionally, the hardship finding is facing a legal challenge.

See gvshp.org/StV.

New School: Early this year The New School (TNS) informed GVSHP and others that it was dropping its plan for a controversial new building on Fifth Avenue between 13th and 14th Streets. The prior plan was for a 350 ft. tall building, rising nearly straight up on the site, with all-glass facades. The enormous size and bulk would have been made possible by zoning variances to allow air rights transfers and setback waivers. GVSHP strongly opposed this prior plan. TNS is now exploring a plan for a smaller building without air rights transfers and setback waivers, and is considering dropping the all-glass facade.

See gvshp.org/TNS.

125 7th Avenue So.: Early this year a developer put forward a plan to add four stories to 125 7th Avenue So., a 1990 building between Christopher and 10th Streets. The plan would have roughly doubled the building's height with an awkward glass addition, and changed the design of the remaining lower portion. GVSHP raised strong concerns about the proposed



125 7th Avenue South, with the outline of the proposed addition.

design's materials, size, and relationship to its surroundings, and the LPC seemed to largely agree; the developer was told to go back to the drawing board. No new plan has yet been submitted.

9-11 Memorial Tiles: GVSHP wrote to the MTA regarding the deteriorating condition of the 9-11 memorial tiles on the fence surrounding its lot at Greenwich and 7th Avenue So. An increasing number of these tiles, made in the days after the World Trade Center attacks, are breaking off or yellowing or cracking, with little sign that the MTA is caring for them. GVSHP has asked the MTA to either come up with a plan for maintaining the tiles on site in an appropriate manner, or to seek a more appropriate permanent home for what is one of the most visible and well-known 9-11 memorials in New York.

What's New in the Meatpacking District

GVSHP has been leading the charge against variances to allow a vast increase in the size of a proposed new building at 437 West 13th Street at Washington Street, and to allow a huge big box retail space in its base. The owner wishes to demolish the existing Art Deco meatmarket building on site (which is in the Gansevoort Market National Register Historic District and which was in the proposed NYC landmark district until the owner lobbied to have it removed), and replace them with a 215 ft. tall glass-walled skyscraper with a windowless blank north wall facing the rest of the Gansevoort Market Historic District.

To do this requires a zoning variance allowing construction of a building 55% larger than zoning allows, as well as a variance allowing a big box retail space three times larger



GVSHP opposed the proposed 215 ft. tall tower for 437 West 13th Street.

than permissible. Most of the variances were approved by the Community Board 2 Zoning Committee, but after GVSHP and its members urged a reversal by the full board, several of the approvals were dropped. The application now goes to the Board of Standards and Appeals, which ultimately decides if the project will get the special exemptions requested. See gvshp.org/437W13.

Earlier this year GVSHP also urged changes to the design of the traffic calming measures around the Meatpacking District. While supportive of the idea of expanding pedestrian spaces in the area, the Society felt the jumble of bollards and stone slabs, along with the markings on the cobblestones, were not cohesive and did not respect the historic character of the district. The Department of Transportation is currently reconsidering and reviewing its design.

What's New in the East Village

When the City rezoned the East Village last year, one of GVSHP's strongest objections was to the exclusion of the 3rd and 4th Avenue corridors and the Bowery from the plan. These blocks have seen outrageously out-of-scale development, including NYU's 26-story dorm on East 12th Street and several 20+ story hotels on the Bowery. Councilmember Rosie Mendez supported this call, and was able to secure a commitment from the City to meet with GVSHP and community groups on this issue following the rezoning. All met in April to discuss a rezoning plan proposed by GVSHP, the Community Board, and local residents. City Planning has committed to review the plan, and we are expecting a response within the coming weeks.



The landmarked former PS 64 faces neglect and deterioration from an owner who opposed landmark designation.

GVSHP also joined a broad coalition of community groups, Councilmember Mendez, and Borough President Stringer in calling upon the owner of the landmarked old PS 64, former Charas/El Bohio Cultural Center at 605 East 9th Street to end the willful deterioration and destruction of this property, and calling upon the City to intervene to force the owner to make needed repairs and seal up the building. The owner had failed in several attempts to overturn the landmark designation of the building and the City's refusal to allow construction of a giant "dorm-for-hire" on the site.

GVSHP also continued to push for landmark designation of Congregation Mezritch Synagogue at 415 East 6th Street (the East Village's last operating "tenement synagogue") and the Russian Orthodox Cathedral at 59 East 2nd Street, two historic East Village edifices threatened by development plans last year which have since been dropped. See gvshp.org/EV.

Spotlight On: Rules and Legislation

Billboard Scaffolding Bill Would Hurt Neighborhoods and Small Businesses

GVSHP has been a leading voice against Intro. 623, a City Council bill sponsored by a majority of council members that would for the first time ever legalize billboards on sidewalk sheds (scaffoldings). Aside from the obvious effect this bill would have encouraging the proliferation of billboards in our neighborhoods, GVSHP raised the red flag about how the bill would also result in more sidewalk sheds and sheds which stay up longer. Sheds are already a problem in our neighborhoods, as too many remain up for years in spite of their supposed temporary nature. These sheds darken sidewalks, impede the flow of pedestrian traffic, can shelter garbage and criminal activity, and have been known to lead to stores underneath going out of business because customers and street traffic are kept away. GVSHP argued that once

the City allows the sheds to house billboards, which can generate enormous income, these structures will multiply and remain up longer than necessary, simply in order to generate advertising revenue for sign companies and property owners.

Proponents of the bill put forward two fundamentally flawed arguments in its favor: 1) residential neighborhoods would not be affected by the new rules, and 2) licensing these billboards would bring much-needed revenue into the City. However, GVSHP surveyed our neighborhoods and showed that the bill would in fact apply to many predominantly residential areas (see map). We also joined with business, neighborhood, and civic groups in arguing that the increase in sidewalk sheds would lose more revenue for the City by hurting and shuttering small businesses. As we go to press, the bill has been heard but not voted on by the City Council.

See gvshp.org/blbd.

New Rule for Challenging Development Permits Could Curb Public Input

GVSHP joined a loud chorus of neighborhood groups and elected officials in raising serious concerns about a proposed Department of Buildings (DOB) rule which would standardize the process for challenging the granting of building permits, but at the same time could also curb public input in the process. The DOB proposal included requiring some building plans be posted on-line—a long-overdue reform—but at the same time would have limited to 30 days the period during which the public could challenge DOB's approval of permits on the basis of their having been issued erroneously or in violation of zoning rules. GVSHP frequently challenges such permits, as do many other neighborhood watchdog and preservation groups.

Under the proposed rule, any challenge received after the 30 days, even if valid, could be ignored by DOB, and thus require the challenge be filed with the Board of Standards and Appeals instead. This is a prohibitively costly and time-consuming procedure which is often not resolved until after a building is built.

GVSHP urged instead that the time limit for challenges be expanded or dropped, and that DOB make more information available to the public about impending building permits so faulty permits could be more easily caught, and the public could be better informed about development proposals in their neighborhoods. After initially planning to adopt these new rules immediately after a public hearing, DOB at first decided to wait 30 days, and then announced that they were reviewing the proposals in response to public feedback. As we go to press the fate of the proposed rules remains unclear. See gvshp.org/DOBrule.



GVSHP's analysis showing areas which would be affected by Intro. 623, the Billboard Scaffolding bill.

43 MacDougal Battle Continues

This landmarked 1846 house at King Street is suffering neglect and damage from an irresponsible owner, and has become a health and safety hazard for its neighbors. For several years now, GVSHP and neighbors have tried to get first the owner, and then the City, to correct the increasingly horrendous conditions on site, which include rats, squatters, toxic mold, waste, and a historic building left open to the elements to deteriorate. Due in part to pressure from GVSHP, city agencies have levied \$120,000 in fines against the owner, but they remain unpaid. The City has taken stopgap measures in response to our complaints, including rat baiting, erecting scaffolding to prevent debris from falling, boarding up windows, and sealing up the ground floor with plywood to prevent entry. But GVSHP is calling for permanent solutions, such as filing a “demolition by neglect” case against the owner to force repairs, making full repairs and billing the owner, and taking possession of the property. See gvshp.org/43MacD.



Conditions at 43 MacDougal Street have continued to deteriorate; GVSHP has pushed city agencies to take action.

M8 Bus Threatened

GVSHP joined a broad coalition of community groups urging the M8 bus be saved after the MTA’s “doomsday plan” called for its discontinuation.

Travelling from river to river, the M8 is a valuable resource for students, seniors, and the disabled, and is a lifeline for 8th Street, St. Mark’s Place, and Christopher Street—our neighborhoods’ commercial “main streets,” which need all the help they can get during these tough economic times. As we go to press the line’s fate remains up in the air. See gvshp.org/M8.

Silver Towers Ruled “Exceptionally Significant”

Following our success last November securing landmark designation for Silver Towers, its Picasso sculpture, and its landscaping, this February GVSHP was able to secure a “determination of eligibility” for the complex for listing on the State and National Register of Historic Places.

Because the complex is less than the requisite 50 years old, a finding that it was “exceptionally significant in the areas of architectural design and planning” was required. The determination provides another potential bulwark against NYU’s plan to build a 40-story tower—the Village’s tallest—in the complex’s open space on Bleecker Street. See gvshp.org/ST.

Small Businesses and Theaters Continue to Struggle

Early this year the Oscar Wilde Memorial Bookstore shut its doors on Christopher Street after 40 years of operation. A GVSHP Village Award winner in 2008 and the world’s first gay and lesbian bookstore, Oscar Wilde was just one of many recent tragic losses of local businesses, including Vesuvio Bakery on Prince Street, Le Figaro Cafe on Bleecker Street, and Love Saves the Day on Second Avenue in the East Village.

GVSHP has been calling upon the City to develop measures to help small local businesses and theaters stay afloat in our neighborhoods, especially during tough economic times like these. We have held forums and co-sponsored film showings on the plight of these businesses, and have more such events planned throughout this year. We also wrote to city and state officials in support of several small theaters facing huge rent increases in the Archives Building in the Far West Village. One glimmer of good news—those theaters were saved when it was discovered that the landlord was not actually entitled to the rent increases being imposed upon the tenants.

Triangle Shirtwaist Factory Fire Centennial

GVSHP is part of a coalition of preservation groups, historians, and labor advocates planning the events marking the 100th Anniversary of the Triangle Shirtwaist Factory Fire, that seminal 1911 tragedy which profoundly affected laws governing labor practices and building and fire codes in New York City. The event will be held on March 25, 2011. Circle the date on your calendar, and go to gvshp.org/TSF to learn more.



From the Director

These are challenging times for GVSHP, as they are for so many right now. The economic downturn means government and foundation grants, and even individual membership support—the Society’s single largest source of income—are significantly harder to come by than just a few months ago. Fortunately GVSHP has been steeling itself for the inevitable rainy day, but I don’t think that any of us ever imagined just how rainy that day would be.



Contrary to conventional wisdom, the downturn does not mean that development has stopped in our neighborhoods, or that threats to preservation have disappeared. The massive Rudin and St. Vincent’s plan continues to wend its way through the approval process. The New School has scaled back, but not eliminated, its massive development plans for 65 5th Avenue. And NYU is supposed to release its “NYU 2031” plan this year, which will call for its largest expansion yet in our neighborhoods. Meanwhile plans for oversized hotels, condos, and office buildings continue to loom over the South Village, the Meatpacking District, the East Village, NoHo, and the Far West Village.

During the downturn, GVSHP is pushing for needed and long-overdue expansions of zoning and landmarking protections for the most vulnerable areas of our neighborhood, including the largest expansion of historic district protections in Greenwich Village since 1969 (our proposed South Village Historic District) and zoning restrictions for the Far West Village, Hudson Square, and the near East Village. We are also working hard to provide more of the free and low-cost children’s educational programming and lectures, walking tours, book readings, and other programs the public has come to expect from us, and has been flocking to in increasing numbers during these tough economic times.

These are difficult times, but GVSHP has never shied away from a challenge. We’ll be working harder than ever this year to educate about the history of our neighborhoods, and to ensure that it remains around for future generations to appreciate. I hope you’ll join us.

New on GVSHP.org

Late last year GVSHP launched its new website, with the goal of creating a clearer, more engaging, and more user-friendly format. The new website includes complete transcripts and selected digital recordings of our oral histories with great figures of the Greenwich Village preservation movement, and a new “Memory Book” which allows the public to submit their own recollections about the history of our neighborhood and to read and explore the recollections of others. We have also added an interactive map which will allow you to search all of GVSHP’s on-line historic resources and preservation campaigns geographically.

GVSHP has also now launched several social-networking and Web 2.0 pages, including MySpace, Facebook, YouTube, and Flickr—please join them!

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