



**Greenwich  
Village  
Society for  
Historic  
Preservation**

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August 20, 2009

Hon. Scott Stringer, President  
Borough of Manhattan  
One Centre Street, 19<sup>th</sup> floor South  
New York, NY 10007

Via fax and e-mail

**Re: Demolition of Provincetown Playhouse and Apartments,  
133-139 MacDougal Street, by New York University**

Dear Borough President Stringer:

Thank you for your letter of August 17<sup>th</sup> regarding the fact, uncovered by the Greenwich Village Society for Historic Preservation, that New York University had demolished parts of the walls of the Provincetown Playhouse theater which they had promised to preserve. I greatly appreciate your swift response to this disturbing news.

In your letter, you express understandable outrage regarding the university's failure to disclose this information to members of the Task Force on NYU development which you founded and facilitate. You rightly point out that the support which NYU received from some for its plan to demolish the majority of this building was premised on the university's promise to preserve the façade and four interior walls of the small theater segment of the structure. As you know, GVSHP has expressed multiple deep concerns about NYU's adherence (or lack of adherence) to commitments it has made throughout this process, and therefore I find your statements in this regard vital to ensuring that NYU be held accountable for its actions.

However, I also believe that there are other critical disturbing questions raised by this and other recent actions and statements by NYU, which concern the university's interest in and ability to maintain its commitments and to be truthful and forthcoming with the Task Force and the general public. These include:

- While NYU claims that the 'need' to demolish these sections of the wall of the theater was the result of an analysis from their construction team that they were "structurally in very poor condition," NYU also claimed last year that it had done a thorough analysis of the structural integrity of the entire building, and from that determined that the building could not be re-used for the offices they desired to locate on this site (GVSHP questioned this never fully substantiated claim, which was the basis for NYU's plan to demolish all but the small theater portion of the building). How is it that NYU did a thorough enough analysis of the building to conclude that it could not be re-used for offices, but this analysis did not identify that the theater walls were "structurally in very poor condition?" Or was NYU aware of this fact at the time that it presented its 'commitment' to preserve the walls of the theater, and made the commitment

knowing that it would not keep it?

- Even if there was no information in this analysis of the structural integrity of the building that there were issues with the condition of the walls of the theater, how could NYU have made the promise to preserve that portion of the structure without confirming that such preservation was feasible, or at least noting that this commitment was based upon an as yet unconfirmed feasibility? Since NYU was very clear in arguing that the building was too old and its structure too weak to be adapted for modern uses, should they not have been aware of the possibility that they could not keep their promise to preserve the theater walls if they demolished the remainder of the building? Those who did support this plan might not have if they had this information, or might have only supported it contingent upon the feasibility of preservation of the theater walls being confirmed.
- Now that these sections of the walls have been dismantled, how will the veracity of NYU's claim that this was necessary, as opposed to merely expedient, be confirmed?
- In an e-mail to the Task Force, NYU has claimed that the sections of the wall they removed were "mainly the subsurface portion of the eastern two-thirds of the wall." However, photos of the site (see attached) clearly show that most of the portion of the wall removed was in fact above-grade.
- In public statements, NYU Vice-President Alicia Hurley tried to explain the university's actions by saying that she "discovered the removal [of the segments of the wall by the construction crew] only last Thursday, August 13." However, in an e-mail to the Task Force, Vice-President Hurley also said "a few weeks ago, our construction team presented to us an analysis that showed that a portion of the northern wall (mainly the subsurface portion of the eastern two-thirds of the wall) was structurally in very poor condition" and thus had to be removed. These two statements, and these two explanations of the university's actions, seem to contradict one another.
- Similarly, in recent days NYU has tried to explain its application (also discovered by GVSHP) for construction permits for a larger and taller building than it has promised to build on the site of the former Catholic Center at 58 Washington Square South by claiming that such filings are required by the Department of Buildings in order to apply for zoning variances to build the shorter, smaller building it says it wants to. However, the Department of Buildings, as well as members of your own land use staff, has confirmed that there is no such requirement. Thus we still have no explanation for why NYU is pursuing permits for the larger, taller building, though in a best-case scenario they may merely be seeking permits for foundation work prior to going through the public review and approval process for the new building. Even this explanation, however, raises serious questions about their not

informing the Task Force of their intentions, the appropriateness of their seeking to begin foundation work before their project has completed the promised public review and approval process, and their lack of truthfulness about their actions.

As you know, the Greenwich Village Society for Historic Preservation has participated in the Task Force with great vigor since its founding, although we have also had great trepidations about NYU's willingness to keep its word and deal honestly with the broader community. Throughout the process of the Task Force, NYU's actions have continued to call its intentions into question. I ask that the issues raised in this letter be thoroughly addressed by the Task Force and by NYU, in order that the question of the university's willingness and ability to engage in honest negotiations and communications is resolved.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Andrew Berman". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke at the end.

Andrew Berman  
Executive Director

Cc: NYU Community Task Force

