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Greenwich
Village
Society for
Historic
Preservation

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Hon. Robert Tierney, Chair
New York City Landmarks Preservation Commission
One Centre Street, 9th floor
New York, NY 10007

Re: Historic District Designation of the South Village

Dear Chair Tierney,

Thank you for last week's public hearing on the proposed South Village extension of the Greenwich Village Historic District. As I believe was amply demonstrated at the hearing, there is deep and broad support for designation of the South Village as a historic district.

As I believe was also amply demonstrated, there is also a great deal of concern about the ongoing compromise of the historic fabric and character of the neighborhood, and the loss of historic structures and sites. It would truly be a shame if even more of this unique neighborhood's irreplaceable historic resources were lost or diminished before designation took place.

I therefore urge the Commission to move ahead with the designation of this proposed extension, covering most of the third of the South Village west of 6th Avenue, as soon as possible. Without such swift action, there may be further attempts to alter or destroy elements of the neighborhood's historic fabric, or to insert new construction without the oversight and public review which landmark designation affords.

It was very welcome to hear at the meeting that the Commission had begun the process of surveying some portion of the remaining two-thirds of the proposed South Village Historic District. This area is equally important, and equally threatened, as the first third of the South Village that the Commission has already surveyed, and warrants consideration and action to protect its historic resources as soon as possible.

I therefore urge the Commission to survey the entire remaining two-thirds of the proposed South Village Historic District, and begin the process of formal consideration of that area for landmark designation, as soon as possible. When we first began discussions with the Commission about potential designation of the 38-block, 750-building proposed South Village Historic District, the Commission had significantly fewer resources than it does now and generally claimed to be unable to designate districts of this size in one piece. However, since then the Commission's staffing and funding have been increased following advocacy by preservation groups and some members of the City Council, and the Commission has designated districts of the size of the remaining portion of the South Village or larger. Given the ongoing dangers this area faces, I hope the Commission will similarly act to consider this entire area at once, and in the shortest possible time frame.

Finally, at the hearing the possibility of designating 61 and 57 7th Avenue South as “no-style” buildings within the proposed historic district extension was raised by their owner. After careful review of the buildings and their historic records, the Greenwich Village Society for Historic Preservation would disagree that #57 warrants designation as a “no-style” building. The decorative brick façade of the building, which dates from 1924, is typical of the many tenements and small apartment buildings which form the backbone of the South Village’s architectural character. Also, #57’s relation to the construction of 7th Avenue South through the South Village connects it to a significant facet of the neighborhood’s history and development. While designation of a building as “of style” within the proposed historic district extension would not preclude the possibility of some alteration or addition being found appropriate, it would recognize that the building does contribute to the historic and architectural character of the neighborhood, and would not automatically allow for its demolition.

It is deeply gratifying to see consideration of landmark designation of a portion of the South Village moving forward, and some review of some portion of the remaining two-thirds of the South Village beginning. It is the sincere hope of the Greenwich Village Society for Historic Preservation that this entire process can be completed, and appropriate landmark protections put in place, before the South Village’s historic character is further lost or compromised.

Sincerely,



Andrew Berman
Executive Director

Cc: Manhattan Borough President Scott Stringer
Congressman Jerrold Nadler
State Senator Tom Duane
State Senator Daniel Squadron
City Council Speaker Christine Quinn
City Councilmember Alan Gerson
City Councilmember-elect Margaret Chin
Assemblymember Deborah Glick
National Trust for Historic Preservation
Preservation League of New York State
Municipal Art Society
New York Landmarks Conservancy
Historic Districts Council
South Village Advisory Board