



**Greenwich  
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Historic  
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**TESTIMONY OF THE GREENWICH VILLAGE SOCIETY**  
**FOR HISTORIC PRESERVATION**  
**REGARDING PROPOSED NEW BUILDING**  
**AT 685 WASHINGTON STREET**  
**IN THE GREENWICH VILLAGE HISTORIC DISTRICT**  
**EXTENSION**  
**January 22, 2008**

Good afternoon Commissioners, I appreciate the opportunity to testify before you today.

I am particularly thankful for the opportunity to address you regarding 685 Washington Street, because as you may know, the Greenwich Village Society worked very hard, and very closely with the Landmarks Preservation Commission, to ensure that this site was included in the recently enacted Greenwich Village Historic District extension. Though originally excluded, we knew that what was built on this site would have a great impact upon its landmarked surroundings, and we hoped to ensure that new development here added to, rather than detracted from, its unique historic environs. We were very pleased, and grateful, that the Commission did ultimately decide to include it.

We are less pleased with the proposed design before you today. While we see development on this site as inevitable, we feel that the current design is wrong in terms of scale and design, and feel strongly that it should be entirely rethought and reconsidered.

This stretch of Charles Street has some of the most distinctive buildings in the Greenwich Village Historic District extension, most of which are considerably more modest in their dimensions than the proposed building. The oldest building in the extension, the 1820 house at 132 Charles Street, lies just across the street, while the modestly scaled 1853 Levi Springsteen House can be found just east of it at The individually landmarked federal-style gem at 131 Charles Street is just east of the site, while the diminutive 1897 stable at 129 Charles Street lies just further east. Even the larger tenements at the Greenwich Street end of the block are only five stories tall, as is the more grandly scaled former police precinct headquarters next to the site at 135 Charles Street.. But even that anomalous building has a façade which is modulated to break up its mass and avoid the monotony of the proposed design.

From the north, the proposed building would be particularly problematic. The enormous largely blank north wall would tower over the even more modestly-scaled modern-historicist townhouses at 689-693 Washington Street and their front yards. From there the multiple setback levels of the proposed building would be particularly visible, and intrusive.

Additionally, the design of the building does not really seem to connect or relate well in any way to the character of this part of the Greenwich Village Historic District. The balconies are completely out of place, and the heavy limestone trim on top of the streamlined, horizontal form is much more reminiscent of mid-century apartment buildings you might find on Ocean Parkway or Queens Boulevard than anything in this part of Greenwich Village.

We believe the design should be completely rethought. The height should be reduced considerably. The mass should be broken up rather than maintaining the single, long form currently shown on Charles Street. And the design should be simpler, sparer, and more elegant in its ornamentation and use of materials. While the combination of tenements, early 19<sup>th</sup> century houses, stables, and industrial buildings found in the area are quite varied in their forms, they all share these characteristics of simplicity and elegance. We hope that any new design here can as well, which is why we fought so hard to ensure this site would come under your jurisdiction.

Thank you for your attention.