



**Greenwich
Village
Society for
Historic
Preservation**

*Founded in 1980, the
Society fights to protect
the architectural heritage
and cultural history
of the Village.*

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May 18, 2006

Hon. Amanda Burden, Chair
New York City Planning Commission
22 Reade Street
New York, NY 10007

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

Dear Chair Burden and Chair Tierney:

I write to you regarding the very serious concerns of the Greenwich Village Society for Historic Preservation (GVSHP) about the planned development of a 250-ft. tall, 330 room hotel at 848 Washington Street in the Meatpacking District. We are deeply troubled by both the design and the planned use of this impending development.

In October of 2003, GVSHP wrote to the Landmarks Preservation Commission (LPC) expressing our concern about the potential impact of the LPC's decision to exclude the western blocks of this neighborhood, including this site, from the then-recently designated Gansevoort Market Historic District. These blocks were of course excluded in spite of our original proposal for a historic district which did include them, and which the LPC originally examined. At the time, the rationale offered by the City for these blocks' exclusion was that they did not wish to take action on those properties which touched the High Line, since that structure's fate was still in doubt. Of course by late 2003 the City's commitment to re-use the High Line and turn it into a public park was well known, and thus we urged that these blocks be considered for a follow-up action to add them to the historic district, as we were originally led to believe they would be. Though we have raised this issue on several occasions, such consideration has never taken place, and in fact a very fine market building on this site which would have been a perfect addition to the historic district was demolished to make way for this planned development.

In June of 2004 we wrote to the City Planning Commission (CPC) expressing our concern about the allowance for hotel development in the Meatpacking District under the current zoning, fearing that large-scale hotel development would soon follow and have a negative impact upon the area, and we urged that CPC consider changing the zoning to eliminate this allowance. In spite of our regularly raising this issue, such consideration has never taken place.

Unfortunately, this now leaves us with the current situation with the planned development at 848 Washington Street. This massive hotel, modeled upon Morris Lapidus designs of the 1950's and 60's, will have a tremendous impact –

visual and otherwise – upon this neighborhood, which is already beset by vastly increased traffic, noise, and numbers of late-night visitors. Unfortunately, because of the lack of landmark protections and zoning restrictions for the site, this development is as-of-right. Thus in spite of our attempts to work with the developer and convince him to make changes to the plan, he has refused, and the community is left with little recourse.

We hope that the plan does not move forward in its current form, and ask for any assistance either agency can provide in this regard. However, we also ask that both agencies re-examine the long-standing requests for consideration of landmark designation of Gansevoort Market's western blocks and for elimination of the allowance for hotel development in this neighborhood. Without such changes, the planned Balazs hotel will undoubtedly not be the last development of an inappropriate design or scale in this neighborhood's non-landmarked edges, and it will undoubtedly not be the last hotel planned for the area either.

We therefore again ask that you work with us, other community groups, and of course our local elected officials and Community Board, as we all try to find solutions to this neighborhood's ongoing growing pains. We fear that without such assistance, new development will only continue to erode this neighborhood's character and quality of life.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Andrew Berman", with a long horizontal line extending to the right.

Andrew Berman
Executive Director

Cc: City Council Speaker Christine Quinn
Manhattan Borough President Scott Stringer
State Senator Tom Duane
Assemblymember Deborah Glick
Community Board #2, Manhattan