



**Greenwich  
Village Society  
for Historic  
Preservation**

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August 17, 2018

Acting Chair Fred Bland  
New York City Landmarks Preservation Commission  
One Centre Street, 9<sup>th</sup> floor  
New York, NY 10007

**Re: Historic District Designation for Area from 14<sup>th</sup> Street to 9<sup>th</sup> Street,  
Fifth Avenue corridor to Third Avenue corridor**

Dear Acting Chair Bland:

I write to strongly urge the Commission to immediately consider historic district designation for the rich array of historic buildings in this area. The Greenwich Village Society for Historic Preservation has submitted to the Commission detailed information on 193 such buildings in this area, covering much but not all of the above-referenced area lying outside of existing designated historic districts (relatively new buildings were not included). Because of the recent approval of a commercial upzoning for an adjacent site at 120 East 14<sup>th</sup> Street for a 'Tech Hub,' there is rapidly increasing pressure upon this area for new development. This means that much of this area's striking of 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century architecture, in many cases connected with great innovations in commerce in the 19<sup>th</sup> century and with art and literature in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, could be lost.

I understand that in response to the information we submitted, the Commission is considering designation of seven individual buildings within the affected area, or 3.6% of those we identified. It is also my understanding that none of those selected face any immediate threat.

While considering any architecturally or historically significant building for landmark designation is always welcome, a much needed and more appropriate response would be for the Commission to consider broader historic district protections including this important swath of New York City's architectural, cultural, and artistic heritage. The increasing development pressure which this area faces makes the need to do so extremely urgent.

As you know from the materials already submitted to the Commission, this area contains a rich array of historic resources that tell the story of New York's transformation from modest mercantile city, to commercial capital of America, to the cultural capital of the world in the post-war years. The area provides rich evidence of New York's first stage of residential development in the second quarter of the 19th century, with dramatic transformations in the century and a half that followed.

From approximately 1830 to the mid-1850s, single-family homes were built in this area, later than the more southerly, easterly, or westerly blocks of Greenwich Village, the East Village and the Lower East Side, which developed earlier due to proximity to the waterfront. These homes are largely in the Greek Revival and Italianate style, ranging from grand to modest. While a few remain largely intact, most are substantially altered, reflecting the transformation of this area from a desirable residential neighborhood to one characterized more by commerce, industry, entertainment, immigrants and the working class.

Beginning in the mid-19th century, the area became the center of New York's upscale commercial shopping district, housing some of the city's most prestigious department stores, hotels, and business headquarters, particularly along Broadway.

By the late 19th and early 20th centuries, the area became home to more popular forms of commerce and entertainment, as well as industry, as the border of Union Square, Greenwich Village, and the Lower East Side became a vibrant mix of immigrants and workers. The bulk of the area's extant structures date from this era, and includes a dazzling array of loft, store, and office buildings, a concentration of printing houses, and a small number of tenements. Many of these buildings and their elaborate detailing survive to this day.

In the early 20th century, the more genteel blocks of the central part of Greenwich Village experienced an increase in interest from artists. This subsequently led to an increase in real estate development intended to attract more middle-class residents back to this neighborhood, especially those who wished to live around artists and the arts.

The migration by artists and their admirers to the eastern part of this area (east of Fourth Avenue), which was more industrial and commercial than the rest of Greenwich Village and still shadowed by the Third Avenue El until 1955 (the last elevated subway line in Manhattan to be taken down), occurred slightly later, in part in response to rising prices in the more central part of Greenwich Village. The western part of this area, along University Place, did see a boom in middle-class residential construction in the 1920s through 1940.

But it was not until the post-War era that the area becomes the center of the burgeoning New York School of Artists and the center of the art world, with an unparalleled array of artists' studios and lofts, as well as galleries and cafes where these artists met, socialized, and displayed their creations. This included the studios of Willem de Kooning, Frank Stella, and Robert Indiana, the Cedar Tavern, and the East 10th Street Galleries, and the Reuben Gallery on Fourth Avenue.

Throughout the 1950s and 60s, artists took over old loft spaces for their residences, workspaces, and galleries. Often these were not legal uses of these spaces. But a revolutionary change which allowed these and scores of other industrial buildings to be legally converted to residential use took place in this district. The old McCreery & Co. Dry Goods store at 801-807 Broadway has been under consideration for landmark designation since 1966. However, a devastating fire in 1971 and an unsympathetic owner threatened the building with demolition. An outcry from preservationists and a concerted effort to address concerns about the reuse of loft buildings such as this led to a re-writing of building and fire codes to allow this and other buildings' legal conversion to residential use, thus saving this building and subsequently saving and giving new life to literally hundreds of industrial buildings across New York City.

From 1974 on, the area's many loft buildings were rapidly converted to housing, many meticulously restoring the elaborate Belle Époque detail on these former commercial emporia and storage houses. With this, what had become a sometimes gritty and in some cases predominantly commercial and industrial area was transformed back into a predominantly residential one with a dynamic mixture of uses. During this time the area also became the center for New York's used book and antique sellers, who like the artists before them, found the area's ample old buildings a practical and fitting home for their products.

The district remains a mixture of early- to mid-19th century rowhouses, late 19th to early 20th century commercial and industrial buildings, and early to mid-20th century residential apartment houses, punctuated by striking individual landmarks like Grace Church, Rectory, and houses; the Police Athletic League; Webster Hall; and the former Van Tassel and Kearney Horse Auction Mart.

This important piece of New York's history and heritage is now endangered, and requires the Commission's immediate attention. I hope that you will act to consider this area and its nearly two hundred historic buildings for historic district designation.

Sincerely,



Andrew Berman  
Executive Director

Cc: Manhattan Borough President Gale Brewer  
City Council Speaker Corey Johnson  
City Councilmember Carlina Rivera  
State Senator Brad Hoylman  
State Senator Liz Kruger  
Assemblymember Deborah Glick  
Community Board #2, Manhattan  
Municipal Art Society  
New York Landmarks Conservancy  
Historic Districts Council