



Greenwich
Village
Society for
Historic
Preservation

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**STATEMENT BY ANDREW BERMAN, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR,
GREENWICH VILLAGE SOCIETY FOR HISTORIC PRESERVATION
IN SUPPORT OF THE PROPOSED EAST VILLAGE/
LOWER EAST SIDE HISTORIC DISTRICT
June 26, 2012**

Good afternoon Commissioners, and thank you for the opportunity to testify. On behalf of the Greenwich Village Society for Historic Preservation, I would like to express our unequivocal support for designation of the proposed East Village/Lower East Side Historic District, which we hope the Commission will approve as soon as possible.

The East Village is one of the most historically significant areas of New York City. Extant structures date to the late 1700's, and the area is rich in evidence of New York's mercantile history in the early 19th century, its dramatic transformation by waves of immigration starting in the mid-19th century, and its rebirth and as a mecca for artists, painters, writers, and musicians in the 20th century.

Considering this incredible concentration of history, the East Village is surprisingly lacking in landmark or historic district protections. The proposed East Village/Lower East Side Historic District captures just a fraction, but an incredibly important fraction, of this important history. Throughout the proposed district are numerous early 19th century Federal and Greek revival houses built for the merchants and businessmen who first settled this neighborhood two hundred years ago. Some of these houses have meticulously preserved or restored facades, while others were transformed to house immigrant families, stores, union headquarters, theaters, and houses of worship. The district also contains a remarkable variety of mid-19th to early 20th century tenements, providing testament to and a record of the lives of hundreds of thousands of New Yorkers for whom this city was their first stop in a new world.

Perhaps most dramatically, however, the proposed district also contains an extraordinary array of buildings housing critical institutions that speak to the East Village's dynamic and unique social and cultural heritage. Congregation Mezritch Synagogue, the East Village's last operating tenement synagogue; the Anthology Film Archives, located in the former Third District Magistrate's Court; East 2nd Street's Russian Orthodox Cathedral, the former Olivet Memorial Church; the former Industrial National Bank on 2nd Avenue; St. Stanislaus Church on East 7th Street; 101 Avenue A, the home of the Pyramid Club and the former home of Leppig's Hall; Middle Collegiate Church; the former Fillmore East and Commodore Theater, now Emigrant Savings Bank; the Hebrew Actor's Union; the Catholic Worker; and McSorley's Saloon are all found within the proposed district. Each speaks to the vibrant and diverse kaleidoscope of cultures which have defined the East Village home and called it home .

While these critically important historic sites remain, too much of the East Village's historic fabric has been eroded or destroyed in recent years. With good reason, we fear more will be lost without action by the Landmarks Preservation Commission. Even within the proposed district, over the past year since the Commission announced its intention to consider the area for landmark designation, we have seen two early 19th century houses altered or demolished, and several other buildings compromised. Outside the district, in just the past year we have seen some of the oldest structures in the East Village demolished or altered beyond recognition.

We therefore believe that it is urgent that the Commission move to designate the proposed East Village/Lower East Side Historic District as soon as possible. We hope that the Commission will stay true to its word, as expressed at public meetings about the proposed East Village/Lower East Side Historic District, and continue onward to consider other parts of the East Village for landmark designation as well.

Thank you.