



**Greenwich
Village
Society for
Historic
Preservation**

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January 11, 2011

Margaret Forgione, Manhattan Borough Commissioner
NYC Department of Transportation
59 Maiden Lane, 37th Floor
New York NY 10038

Re: Proposed Street Reconstruction of Astor Place & Cooper Square

Dear Commissioner Forgione,

I write to you regarding DOT's proposed reconstruction of the streets along Astor Place and Cooper Square. This project was first proposed several years ago, and in its latest version was presented to at a joint meeting of Community Boards 2 and 3 on January 6th of this year.

The Greenwich Village Society is supportive of efforts to make city streets more pedestrian-friendly and to extend green spaces. However, we believe that any plan should respect and preserve the significant history of the streets that converge today at this location. In its current iteration, DOT's plan would remove important references to the way the street pattern reflects the early development of Manhattan Island.

Astor Place follows the path of an old Native American trail that appears on maps of Manhattan at least as early as 1639 - only a decade or so after the Dutch first settled on the island. In its early days, the trail was used to connect the present-day Bowery to a trading post on West 14th Street. When John Jacob Astor officially opened Astor Place as a street in 1836, he maintained its connection with Stuyvesant Street (see Figure 1), another remnant from Dutch Manhattan. Stuyvesant Street was originally a lane stretching across the holdings that Peter Stuyvesant purchased from the Dutch West India Company in 1651. Today, Astor Place along with Stuyvesant Street and its crown jewel - St. Marks Church-in-the-Bowery, the second oldest church in Manhattan - are some of the only reminders of the Native American settlement and Dutch New York (the church, which dates from 1799, was commissioned by Stuyvesant's grandson Petrus to be constructed on the site of the original chapel that once stood in its place and under which Peter Stuyvesant is buried).

We are concerned about DOT's proposed enlargements to the curb at points around Astor Place and Stuyvesant Street, as can be seen in Figure 2. If these portions of the street are to be pedestrianized, we ask that there be a clear delineation of the original street configuration. We also ask that there be a permanent commitment from DOT that the memorialization of these highly-significant historic roadbeds be maintained in perpetuity.

Thank you for your attention this matter.

Sincerely,

Andrew Berman, Executive Director

Cc: Andy Wiley-Schwartz, Assistant Commissioner for Planning and Sustainability

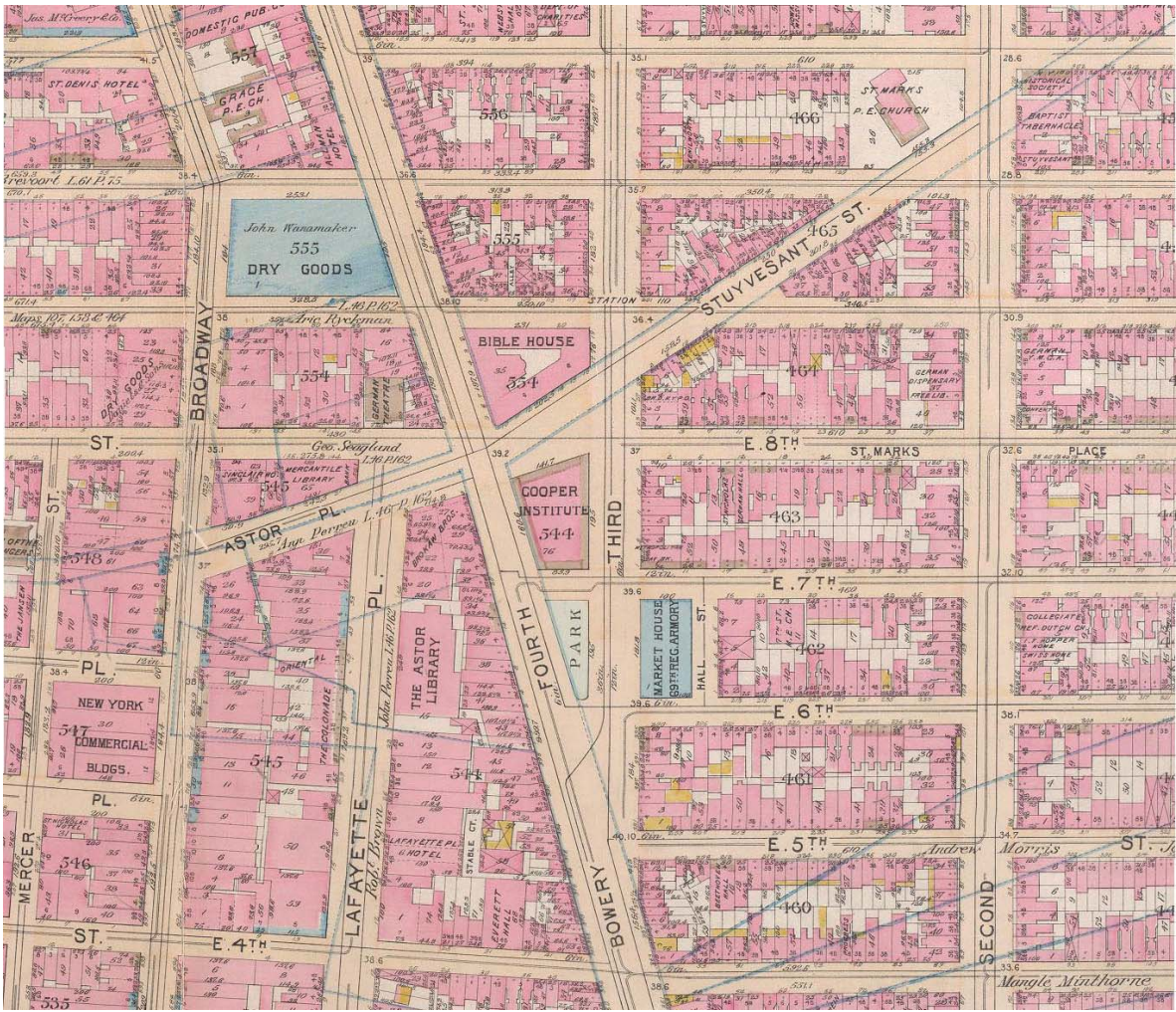


Figure 1: 1897 Fire Insurance Map, courtesy New York Public Library
Map clearly delineates the original link between Stuyvesant Street and Astor Place.

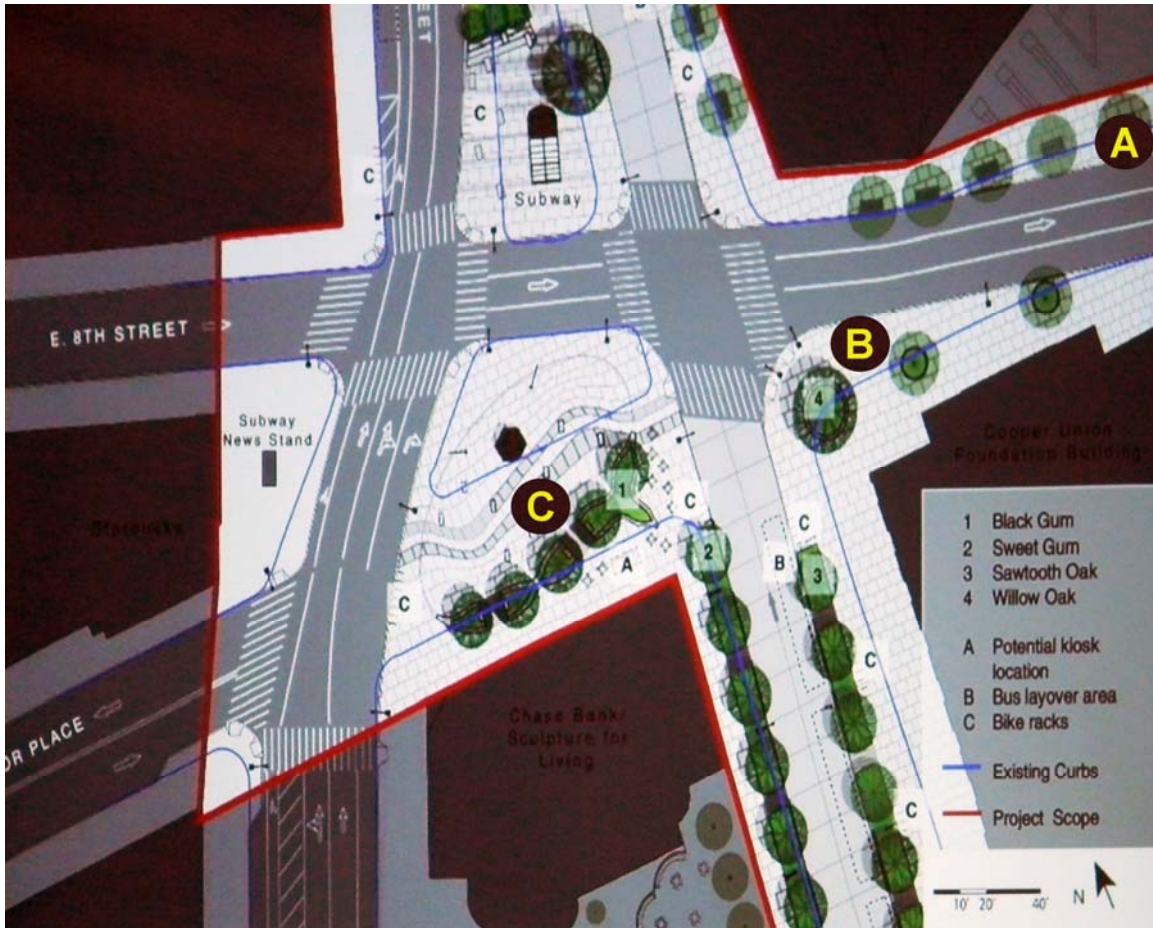


Figure 2: DOT Proposal, as presented at joint CB2/3 meeting on January 6th, 2011

DOT's current proposal would remove evidence of the historic street pattern. At point A, the proposed extension of the curb would erase any reference to the former connection between Astor Place and Stuyvesant Street. Enlarging the curb at point B and de-mapping the street at point C would further obliterate any notion of this important history.