

June 22, 2010



Greenwich
Village
Society for
Historic
Preservation

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Hon. Robert Tierney
Chair, New York City Landmarks Preservation Commission
One Centre Street, 9th floor
New York, NY 10007
via fax to 212-669-7955, -7797

Re: Outstanding Need for Landmark Protections for South Village

Dear Chair Tierney:

I write to express the great delight of the Greenwich Village Society for Historic Preservation that the Landmarks Preservation Commission has chosen to designate the first section of our proposed South Village Historic District today, with approval of the extension of the Greenwich Village Historic District. However, I must also write to express our great dismay about the widespread loss and compromise of historic buildings in this neighborhood which has taken place while the Landmarks Preservation Commission has considered designation, and express our great concern that, under the Commission's current apparent timeframe, it is likely that much more will be lost.

As you know, the South Village historically contained perhaps the largest intact collection of housing and social, cultural, religious, educational, and charitable institutions connected to late 19th and early 20th century immigrant life in New York City, as well as one of the largest collection of sites connected to the cultural, literary, intellectual, and political ferment which emerged from New York City in the late 19th through the mid-20th century.

Unfortunately, in the eight years since the Greenwich Village Society for Historic Preservation first approached the Commission about protecting these precious resources through landmark designation, and the three and a half years since a formal proposal and 95-page report arguing for designation was submitted to the Commission, a startling number of these sites have been demolished or compromised. This includes the Circle in the Square Theater (New York's first non-profit theater), the Sullivan Street Playhouse (one-time home of the longest running play in modern history, the Fantasticks), the Provincetown Playhouse and Apartments (considered the birthplace of modern American theater, as well as the home of several of the early 20th century's most important cultural institutions), and the Tunnel Garage, a unique monument to the dawn of the automobile age and possibly the first Art Deco building in New York City.

Perhaps just as disturbingly, numerous historic buildings which form an integral part of the fabric of this neighborhood and tell its story have been destroyed or altered during this time. This includes an 1835 Greek Revival house on Leroy Street, a stable and a late 19th century tenement which was once the home of poet W.H. Auden on Cornelia Street, and an altered 1820's rowhouse and a rare

surviving rear tenement on Sixth Avenue. Last year, an 1861 rowhouse at 178 Bleecker Street, in the middle of a row of similar houses in the heart of the South Village, was demolished without action by the Commission. This not only leaves a gaping hole in the symbolic center of the South Village, but the developer is threatening to erect an entirely out-of-scale new structure in its place.

This pace of destruction will only continue without swift action by the Commission to designate the remaining two-thirds of the South Village which we have urged be given landmark status. Unfortunately, however, we understand that the Commission is not considering the remaining section of the South Village as a next step, but plans to further subdivide the neighborhood into at least two more stages. Further, no date has been given for consideration of landmark status for even this first section. At the current pace, this would mean at least several more years before the entire South Village is considered for landmark status, at which point we can reasonably expect that much more of the neighborhood's irreplaceable historic resources would be compromised or lost.

Therefore I again urge you to expedite consideration of landmark status for the entire remaining South Village as soon as possible. As you know, Borough President Stringer, Congressman Nadler, State Senator Duane, City Councilmember Chin, and Assemblymember Deborah Glick have also made similar requests of the Commission.

While we are very pleased with the news of today's vote, we must ask that it be joined with a commitment to protect the remainder of this neighborhood as soon as possible as well. Without such action, this step forward in protecting what remains of one of New York's great historic neighborhoods will inevitably be followed by further unnecessary and irreversible loss and destruction.

Sincerely,



Andrew Berman
Executive Director

Cc: City Council Speaker Christine Quinn
Borough President Scott Stringer
Congressman Jerrold Nadler
State Senator Tom Duane
State Senator Daniel Squadron
City Council Member Margaret Chin
Assemblymember Deborah Glick