



GREENWICH VILLAGE SOCIETY FOR HISTORIC PRESERVATION

City Plan Would Gut Local Zoning Protections

GVSHP Fights To Save 'Contextual' Height Limits

Early this year, the City put forward a plan which would change neighborhood zoning rules citywide. Called 'Zoning for Quality and Affordability,' the City claims that by rolling back existing height restrictions, the plan would increase the quality and affordability of new residential developments. GVSHP has come out strongly against the plan, saying it would accomplish neither goal, but would shatter the scale and context of our neighborhoods and undo hard-fought-for protections that took years or in some cases decades to secure.

The proposal would most acutely affect 'contextual zones,' where the height of new development is limited to help ensure it matches its surroundings. GVSHP helped secure such zoning for nearly the entire East Village and parts of the Far West Village; such zoning also covers parts of East and West 13th and 14th Streets.

But the plan would not only affect existing contextual zones, but future ones as well. GVSHP has been fighting hard to get contextual zoning in the South Village and along the University Place and Broadway corridors, where current zoning allows development 300 feet high or more. But if the City's proposed zoning changes are enacted, the contextual zoning height limits we have been seeking for these areas would be loosened too.

The City's plan would lift contextual height limits for any new market-rate residential development. But in "inclusionary zones" within contextual zoning districts, such as in parts of the East Village, it would further lift the height limits by up to 31% for luxury, market-rate developments that reserve 20% of their units for 'affordable' housing.

Under the City's plan, the additional height increase would also apply to 'senior affordable housing.' But astonishingly, the City would only require that a small fraction of a development actually be dedicated to senior affordable housing in order to qualify for the entire height increase; by far the majority of such developments could be luxury condos.

Making matters worse, the plan would also encourage taller development in non-contextual zones as well, which cover most of the rest of our residentially-zoned neighborhoods. It would do this by lifting those areas' height limits, which developers are not required to follow, but are encouraged to do so by zoning incentives.



City Hall press conference organized by GVSHP about the rezoning plan; Exec. Dir. Andrew Berman is speaking.

While the plan would not alter the power of the Landmarks Preservation Commission to control the design and height of any new development in landmarked areas, it would increase the pressure for allowing taller new construction in these areas as well.

The City's rationale for the plan is questionable at best. They claim that loosening the contextual controls for market rate developments will make them more attractive and appealing. But as GVSHP has pointed out, developments in non-contextual zones tend to be less attractive and well-designed than those in contextual zones, poking a huge hole in this theory.

Historic Victory For LGBT Landmarks

*City Says Yes to Stonewall,
Not Yet to Other Sites*

GVSHP scored an important victory in early June when the City finally agreed to consider the Stonewall Inn for landmark designation, a site internationally recognized as the birthplace of the modern Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender (LGBT) rights movement for the three days of protests and demonstrations sparked by a police raid there in June, 1969. For a year and a half, GVSHP campaigned to get the City to consider Stonewall and three other critically important LGBT history sites for landmark designation.

The other LGBT history sites GVSHP put forward are: Julius' Bar at 159 West 10th Street, the site of the first civil disobedience for gay rights in 1966, which led to the end of New York State's de facto ban on gay bars; the LGBT Community Center at 208 West 13th Street, one of the oldest such centers in the world and early home of several influential activist groups from ACT-UP to GLAAD; and the former Gay Activists Alliance Firehouse at 99 Wooster Street, where one of the most impactful post-Stonewall

gay rights groups planned zaps and public demonstrations that influenced a generation of activists, until a firebombing forced them out of this disused former city firehouse.

All four sites are located within designated historic districts, but no references to their significance to the LGBT rights movement are included in the designation reports. As a result, they could be regulated purely based upon architectural distinction, and major alterations or even demolition could be approved, as is sometimes allowed within designated historic districts.

GVSHP has been on the front lines of seeking recognition and protection for Village sites connected to the struggle for LGBT rights. In 1999, GVSHP was the successful co-applicant for placing Stonewall on the State and National Registers of Historic Places, the first ever for a site based upon LGBT history. 51-53 Christopher Street, where the bar was originally located, and the surrounding streets and park where the events took place which are today commemorated annually with pride events across the globe, were both included. In 2012 GVSHP got Julius' Bar determined eligible for the State and National Registers of Historic

Places, based upon a successful 1966 "sip-in" staged there (a variation upon the ubiquitous "sit-ins" of the era) to protest New York State regulations making it illegal to serve alcohol to homosexuals and all others considered "disorderly."

But the City has not always been willing to recognize and protect LGBT history sites. In 2012, when GVSHP got an 1820 rowhouse at 186 Spring Street which was home to several highly influential figures in the modern gay rights movement ruled eligible for the State and National Registers of Historic Places, the city refused to landmark it, issuing demolition permits instead. And in 2009, the City refused to landmark the Provincetown Playhouse and Apartments, renowned as a launching pad for LGBT theater and many LGBT playwrights' careers (among many others things), allowing NYU to largely destroy it.

But more recently, the Landmarks Preservation Commission has recognized the critical LGBT history in several landmark designations put forward by GVSHP, including Webster Hall (the home of early drag balls and other LGBT social events), and the new South and East Village Historic Districts.

This year, after a letter-writing campaign and a planned press conference in front of the Stonewall, the City finally announced in late May the site would be considered for landmark designation. As we go to press, a final vote on landmarking has not yet been set, and no commitment has yet been made on the three other sites. If designated, Stonewall would be the first site landmarked by New York City primarily for significance to LGBT history. Great progress is being made, but we still have more to do.



(l. to r.) Stonewall Inn, 51-53 Christopher Street; Julius Bar, 159 West 10th Street

Neighborhood Updates

South Village

GVSHP continues to push for landmark and zoning protections for the entire South Village, especially the un-landmarked area south of Houston Street. In 2006 GVSHP proposed the entire South Village for landmark designation; in 2010, the City landmarked the first phase of our proposed district, and in 2013 landmarked the second phase, though only after a vigorous

campaign to force them to do so. In 2014 GVSHP also proposed contextual zoning with sensible height limits for much of the neighborhood, to add an extra layer of protection to landmarked areas, and to prevent out-of-scale development in non-landmarked areas.

Currently any building can be demolished in non-landmarked areas of the South Village, and new development can go as high as 300 feet or more. We have seen an increasing number of

demolitions and out-of-scale new construction in the area, such as the nearly 200 ft. tall One Vandam development, and plans for more are, regrettably, in the works.

Unfortunately, the current administration, like the last one, has resisted moving any further with additional landmark protections for the South Village, or for zoning protections. GVSHP has met repeatedly with the City about these proposals, and sought to find common ground that would allow them to advance in some form. We have also been working closely with City Councilmembers Corey Johnson and Margaret Chin, who represent the area, to apply pressure to the City. To help, go to gvshp.org/sovilhelp.

University Place/Broadway Corridors

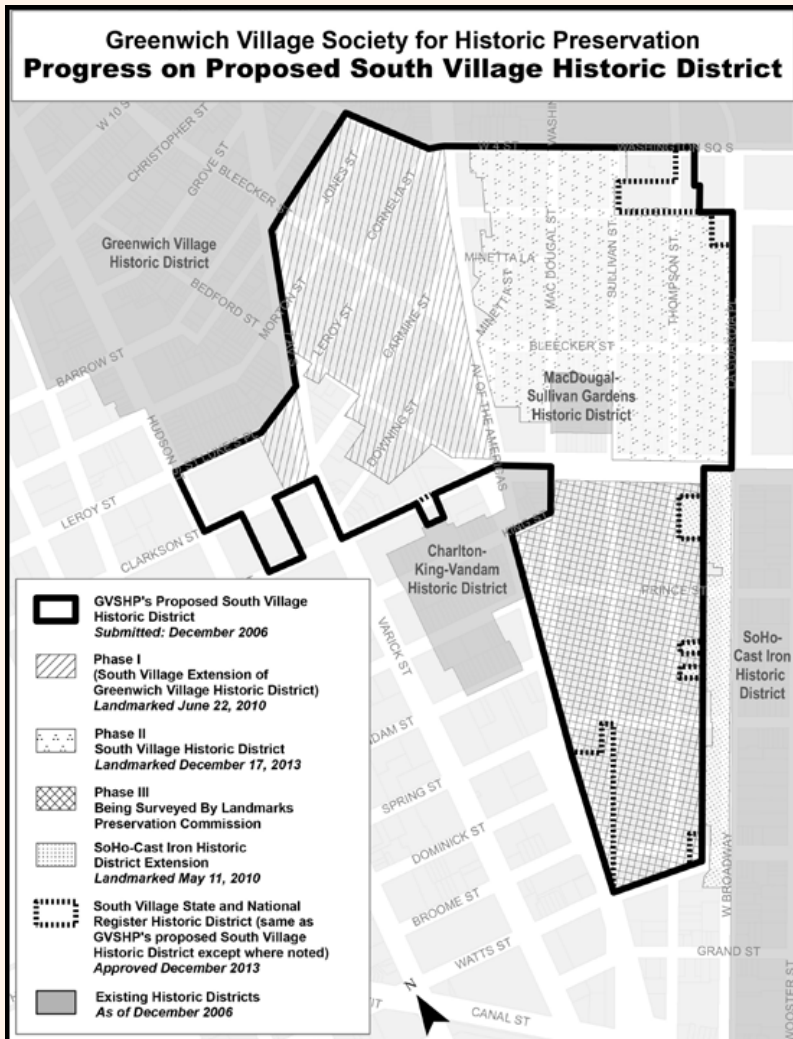
The blocks on and just off these two streets, between 9th and 13th Streets, are somewhat unique in the Village in that they almost entirely lack landmark or zoning protections. This means buildings can be demolished at any time, and new development can reach 300 feet high or more.

That's exactly what's planned for the Bowlmor site at University Place and 12th Street, where demolition is underway and a 308 ft. tall tower is set to replace it. In response, GVSHP is pushing for a rezoning of the area with reasonable height limits, and is studying the area for possible landmark proposals.



Image of the approximate size and massing of the planned tower at Bowlmor site.

Unfortunately, the introduction of the City's 'Zoning for Quality and Affordability' plan (see p.1) has placed two hurdles in front of this effort. The City has been resistant to consider any other rezoning proposals until this citywide plan goes through the process, and their plan would actually weaken the contextual zoning protections and height limits we are seeking for this area. To help, go to gvshp.org/univplhelp.



Legislative Roundup

Small Business Jobs Survival Act (SBJSA)

GVSHP has endorsed the Small Business Jobs Survival Act (SBJSA), a measure with multiple sponsors in the City Council which the Mayor and Council Speaker are yet to support. The bill has not yet received a hearing, which is a requisite step for it to come forward for a vote.

The disappearance of small, independently-owned businesses in our neighborhood and citywide is an enormous problem. While there



Intro. 775—the Landmarks Time Limits Bill

Recently introduced by City Council Landmarks Chair Peter Koo and City Council Land Use Chair David Greenfield, Intro. 775 would significantly hamstring landmarking efforts. The bill would put a time limit on the consideration of landmark designations; if the Landmarks Preservation Commission did not act quickly enough, the building, site, or neighborhood under consideration for landmark designation



Brewer Landmarks Reform Legislation

While GVSHP is troubled by Intro. 775, we have been working with fellow preservationists on an effort spearheaded by Manhattan Borough President Gale Brewer and other City Councilmembers to draft legislation which could improve the functioning of the Landmarks Preservation Commission.

The package of legislation the Borough President has been working on would seek to: help ensure



(l. to r.) Borough President Gale Brewer and City Councilmembers Peter Koo and David Greenfield

are no simple or easy solutions, the SBJSA would give these businesses greater leverage to negotiate fair leases with landlords, and more time to find new homes if such agreements cannot be reached.

GVSHP is also working with allies to seek zoning changes that would limit the expansion of chain and big-box stores in our neighborhood. Our Business of the Month program also continues to highlight and support local small businesses in our neighborhood, and encourage patronage by local residents. Have a favorite small business you'd like to help support? Nominate them as a 'Business of the Month' at gvshp.org/smbus.

would automatically be disqualified for landmark designation for a period of five years.

While GVSHP believes that the Commission should be encouraged to move expeditiously, this bill would throw the baby out with the bathwater. Rather than helping to ensure swift action, the bill penalizes the public and our city's architectural and cultural heritage for delays, by denying landmark status to potentially worthy sites, and giving developers a five-year window to alter or demolish properties. GVSHP has reached out to the bill's authors, mobilized the public about the bill's troubling language, and is working to change or block the legislation.

that the Commission moves in a timely manner to consider potential landmark designations, without penalizing delays or preventing future consideration of sites which may need more time for consideration; strengthen protections to ensure buildings are not demolished while being considered for landmark designation; improve the process by which requests can be submitted to the Commission to consider sites for landmark designation; and increase the transparency of the landmarking system by making more information about the work of the Commission publicly available, including violations, permits, requests for evaluation, and sites which have been calendared for consideration for landmark designation. The Borough President is seeking to have the package introduced shortly.

East Village Building Explosion

GVSHSP was shaken, literally and figuratively, when a massive fire and multiple building collapse occurred this spring at 2nd Avenue and 7th Street just, blocks from our offices. Two lives were tragically lost, dozens of residents displaced, and many longstanding local businesses, some already struggling, were shuttered or cut off from the public. It was heartening to see local community groups step up to shelter and raise money for residents. GVSHSP did its part to notify people about how to help, and encouraged support for local businesses.

At some point the long process of rebuilding those sites will begin. Fortunately, due to the contextual rezoning and landmarks protections we were able to help secure in recent years for this site and much of the East Village, any new development will be limited in height and scale, and have to go through a landmarks review process to ensure it is compatible with its historic surroundings. GVSHSP will notify the public about the hearings on any such application for new development on the site and how to weigh in, and will advocate for maintaining the qualities which make the East Village so special.



The sad aftermath of the explosion at 2nd Avenue and 7th Street.

14th & 8th Zoning Variance

A zoning variance is being sought to allow an office building at the southeast corner of 8th Avenue and 14th Street that would exceed by two-thirds the normally allowable size of development there. Developers are entitled to zoning variances if they can prove that zoning rules would prevent them from making a “reasonable return” on their property, that this is the result of a unique hardship which is not self-created, and that the variance they are seeking is the minimum necessary to make a reasonable return and would not negatively impact neighborhood character.

GVSHSP closely examined this variance application, like all such applications in our neighborhood, and found this one questionable. While under the existing zoning a building of the proposed height could be built, it would not be nearly as massive as proposed. And while there may be some conditions which make development of the site more expensive or difficult (a subway line underneath requires additional structural support for a new building, and the shallow lot makes inclusion of the required rear courtyard for a residential development difficult), we believe there are less extreme ways of addressing these issues and still allowing the developer their legally-entitled return. The application will be heard before the Board of Standards and Appeals later this year.



REBNY Lie\$: Report

The Real Estate Board of New York (REBNY) continues to attack preservation in New York City, seeking to undo existing protections, prevent future ones, and weaken regulatory systems that protect our built environment and prevent overdevelopment. REBNY’s latest claim is that preservation leads to unaffordability, and unfettering development is necessary to reverse this. Unfortunately, many in government, public policy, and the media have been repeating this meme unquestioned.

That’s why GVSHSP released its report “Consider

the Facts and Check the Source: Campaign Cash and REBNY’s Real Record on Affordable Housing.” We showed how in spite of their posturing, REBNY’s considerable campaign donations have long helped block any progress on affordable housing. In fact, REBNY is one of the single largest donors to anti-affordable housing elected officials, and

their political action committee helped sway control of the State Senate to an anti-affordable housing majority.

GVSHSP shared our report with elected officials, policy-makers, and reporters throughout the city, encouraging them to “check the facts and consider the source” before passing along false and discredited ideas about preservation and affordable housing from REBNY.





This new development on 2nd Avenue in the East Village lines up perfectly with its surroundings under existing contextual rezoning. Under the city's plan, a development here could be nearly twice as tall.

And the City claims that increasing the height limits for “inclusionary” developments will result in more developers choosing to opt into this voluntary program (where 20% of units in new developments are rent- and income-restricted in exchange for the developer receiving a one-third increase in allowable floor area) and thus more affordable housing will be built.

But GVSHP has pointed out that the reasons cited by developers for not more frequently

opting into the “inclusionary” housing program are not height limits, but economies of scale, bureaucratic hurdles, a lack of financing, and the complexity of combining affordable and market-rate developments into one building—none of which this plan would change.

If approved, the plan would have a permanent and profound effect upon the landscape of our neighborhoods, which is why GVSHP has dedicated considerable resources to educating the public about it and demonstrating to policy-makers its detrimental effects and the opposition to it.

In March we organized a press conference on the steps of City Hall with elected officials and community groups from across the city speaking out against these provisions of the plan. We have formed a citywide coalition, and are working with a broad array of Community Boards and housing groups to respond to it. We've published op-eds in local and citywide publications and spearheaded letter-writing campaigns to city officials.

In response, in May the City made some changes to the plan, eliminating or reducing a few of the many proposed height limit roll backs, and allowing more time for public comment and review. But the plan still maintains many of the most troubling elements.

'Zoning for Quality and Affordability' is now undergoing preliminary public and environmental

review. Public hearings and votes by local Community Boards, the Borough Presidents, the City Planning Commission, and the City Council are expected to take place in the fall, and the plan can only take effect if approved by both the City Planning Commission (which is controlled by the Mayor, who put forward the plan) and the City Council. Responding to this deeply troubling plan, growing our coalition, and educating and mobilizing the public about it will be top priorities for GVSHP throughout the year.

Neighborhood Updates (continued from p.3)

NYU Expansion Plan

GVSHP and a coalition of neighborhood and preservation groups and elected officials sued to overturn the City's approval of NYU's enormous, twenty-year, 2 million square foot expansion plan. Aside from shoehorning an enormous complex of above- and below-ground buildings (including the largest building ever built in the Village) into a largely residential neighborhood, the plan gives away public park space, overturns local zoning protections, and eliminates urban renewal deed restrictions. In spite of incredible odds, our lawsuit was successful at the State Supreme Court level, but was overturned upon appeal by the City and NYU.

Now our case comes before the highest court in New York State, which will ultimately decide its fate. Because of the enormous precedent it will set, our suit has received supportive briefs from a broad range of civic and environmental groups, former city commissioners, and a bi-partisan group of state legislators. Oral arguments began in June, and a decision is expected later this year.

From the Director

This time of year, gratitude is on our minds here at GVSHP. Our Annual Benefit House Tour in May was our most successful ever, opening beautiful homes throughout our neighborhood to the public. And our Annual Village Awards in June lets us say thanks to some of the people, places, businesses, and institutions that make our neighborhood



so special. This year's awardees are longtime Village craftswoman Barbara Schaum; recently reborn Village institution Bonnie Slotnick Cookbooks; trailblazing activist David Rothenberg; treasured art repository the Renee & Chaim Gross Foundation; the beautiful restoration of 201 East 12th Street; and authors, photographers, and storefront documentarians James & Karla Murray.

But these happy moments also remind us of the real challenges we face on many fronts. Small businesses in our neighborhood are under ever-increasing threat. The real estate industry has landmarking in its powerful crosshairs. The current administration has been slow, at best, to consider reasonable preservation measures to protect neighborhoods and prevent overdevelopment. Case in point: City Hall's response to our proposed zoning changes to prevent developments like the planned 308 ft. tall tower at University Place and 11th Street? So far, silence.

But we are making progress. Our Business of the Month program is celebrating and assisting local entrepreneurs. Stonewall is receiving groundbreaking and long-overdue recognition. And our pushback helped lead to changes and delays in the citywide rezoning plan, which still lacks approval.

We have a lot to appreciate, and a lot to do.



Acknowledgements

The Greenwich Village Society for Historic Preservation gratefully acknowledges the Kaplen Brothers Fund, New York City Department of Cultural Affairs, New York State Council on the Arts, Lynne Waxman Foundation, the J.M. Kaplan Fund, City Council Members Rosie Mendez, Margaret Chin, and Corey Johnson, and State Assemblymember Deborah Glick for their grants in support of our work.

GVSHP Bulletin Board

Join our e-mail list for alerts on critical preservation and development issues—gvshp.org/email.

Help the cause by volunteering—go to gvshp.org/volunteer.

Buy the Book! **Greenwich Village Stories** is a love letter to Greenwich Village and East Village featuring works of sixty-six artists, writers, and neighborhood icons, with beautiful photos and artwork. All proceeds support GVSHP. See gvshp.org/gvstories.

Visit GVSHP's blog **Off the Grid** for fun and fascinating glimpses into our neighborhoods' hidden history, eye-catching architecture, and colorful characters—see gvshp.org/blog.

Get with the Program! Upcoming lectures, book talks, walking tours, and panel discussions are listed at gvshp.org/programs; past program videos are at gvshp.org/pastprograms.

Want to know about landmarks applications in your neighborhood? See proposed changes to landmarked building in the Village, East Village, Meatpacking District or NoHo, when hearings and votes will take place, how you can testify or affect the outcome, and sign up for alerts about the status of the application—go to gvshp.org/lpc.

Planned Giving—make a legacy gift to GVSHP. Call 212/475-9585 x39.

Learn about 1,100 buildings GVSHP has helped get landmarked since 2003—see gvshp.org/10.

Did you know? Every day GVSHP monitors all 6,500 buildings in our neighborhoods for new building, alteration, or demolition permits, and all 3,000 landmarked structures for any proposed major changes.

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