

Cobblestones At our request, Councilmembers Gerson and Quinn are introducing legislation aimed at protecting historic cobblestone streets; it will require that cobblestones be appropriately restored when damaged or removed, and that removal is a last resort. Currently, lax city regulations often allow historic cobblestones to be unnecessarily removed and replaced in a slipshod manner, or not replaced at all and instead tarred over. The legislation will apply fines for violations. For more info or to support this legislation, check our website for updates or call us at (212) 475-9585.

Still Not a Pretty Picture GVSHSP continues to push the city to make sure that three landmarked houses at 305-311 West 11th Street, owned by Annie Leibovitz, are appropriately repaired. Nearly two years ago, GVSHSP reported to the city the illegal work by the owner which resulted in the severe damage we still see today. We have since regularly demanded vigorous enforcement action, and when no repairs were made, we picketed the properties on the one-year anniversary of the original work. GVSHSP met with the Landmarks Preservation Commission Chair

Neighborhood
Preservation
Briefs



and staff this summer to convey our extreme concern about the structures' state and the lack

Fighting Institutional Overdevelopment We continue to push for measures to prevent the overdevelopment of our neighborhoods by institutions, which can build larger than normally allowable buildings under current

of progress on their repairs. The Commission offered a full accounting of repairs underway and planned, and

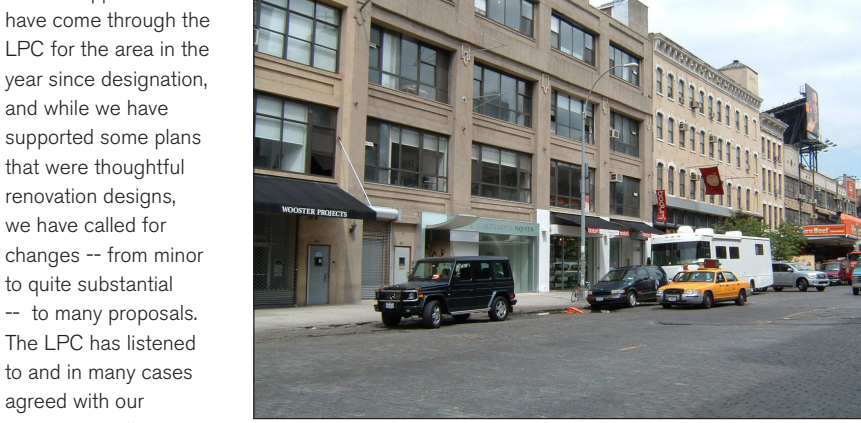
Preserving Historic Church Buildings GVSHSP is working with a coalition of organizations trying to ensure the preservation of historic buildings owned by the Catholic Archdiocese of New York. Earlier this year, the archdiocese announced that they are looking to close and sell off several of their Manhattan churches, but have not yet announced which ones. As there are several such historic churches in the Village not protected by landmarking, this is of course a subject of concern. The coalition is seeking to work with the archdiocese and community groups to help ensure that historic structures are ultimately preserved and kept intact wherever possible.

Village Care The Society has been working with neighbors regarding a plan by Village Care of New York (VCNY) to build a large new elder care facility at 54 Downing Street (214 West Houston Street), an area of very distinctive, diminutively scaled historic architecture in our South Village Landmark study area (see page four). The eight-story, 85-foot high building would set back behind a plaza on Downing Street, breaking the streetwall and looming over its largely two-to-five-story neighbors. Special approvals are needed for the large increases in the building's height and size, and while GVSHSP respects VCNY's mission and services, there are great concerns about these aspects of the proposal and the precedent they would set elsewhere in the Village. GVSHSP is seeking a resolution that will maintain the scale and historic character of this special block, while allowing VCNY to fulfill its mission and site its facilities.

Post-Designation,
Now What?

Continuing the Work to
Save Gansevoort Market

protect this special area has been won, the war still rages on. In the newly designated Gansevoort Market Historic District (see map www.gvshp.org/gansmaps.htm), a tremendous number of applications for new projects and proposed changes to existing buildings have been brought to the Landmarks Preservation Commission (LPC) since designation. SGM and GVSHSP review each individual application, and often lobby the LPC heavily to change proposals we deem inappropriate for the district. More than a dozen applications have come through the LPC for the area in the year since designation, and while we have supported some plans that were thoughtful renovation designs, we have called for changes -- from minor to quite substantial -- to many proposals. The LPC has listened to and in many cases agreed with our suggestions, illustrating the importance of remaining vigilant about the proposed new projects and the review process which landmarking offers. SGM and GVSHSP have also worked hard to report violations of landmarks law in the area and have them corrected. There have been a tremendous number of such violations in this new district, and we have been aggressive in seeking inspections and adjudication by the City. Finally, SGM is working with the City to pay for and select the placement of the distinctive brown Historic District street signs that will mark the Gansevoort Market Historic District. We expect these signs to be in place in 2005.



of Gansevoort Market. There are many hurdles to such a possibility, and many factors to weigh. However, such a move would ensure an appropriate and compatible use for this area that would reinforce and add to the market character of the neighborhood, and thus was deemed worth exploring. In May SGM held a gala fundraiser for the effort, and in June hired a consulting team to work with the Flower Market Association in examining the possibilities for a relocation plan to the area. This feasibility study and its findings should be complete this fall and will be shared with the public and the City for further examination of this possibility. This study is being made possible in part by the generous support of the J. M. Kaplan Fund.

Two great outstanding concerns remain regarding the future of the area: the fate of the blocks without landmark protections to the west of

the designated historic district (between West and Washington Streets), and the need to maintain and reinforce the historic character of the neighborhood, especially its market character.

In 2002, SGM/GVSHSP called upon the City to eliminate hotel development in the area as incompatible with the neighborhood's unique mix, and this Spring, in response to the area's exploding popularity, GVSHSP renewed that call and added a request that the City embark upon broader planning for the area. After we twice defeated plans for a 450-ft. tall tower at 848 Washington Street (based on the inclusion of residential development in the plan, currently prohibited by the zoning), this summer hotel developer Andre Belazs announced plans to develop a hotel on the site. GVSHSP met with and expressed several strong concerns to the developer about the as-of-right project, including scale, design, and impact on the High Line and area traffic. As planning and design for the project moves forward, Belazs agreed to consider the issues we raised and promised that the building's height

will be significantly shorter than prior plans'. In September, the firm of Polshek Partners, which has a long history of preservation-oriented design work and support for Gansevoort Market preservation efforts, was chosen for the project. We have been told feedback from us and others will be solicited as the design process moves forward. Finally, SGM has undertaken its "Meat Market Blooms" project, an examination of the possibility of relocating the Flower Market, now being displaced from its lower Midtown home, to the western, undesignated blocks of Gansevoort Market. There are many hurdles to such a possibility, and many factors to weigh. However, such a move would ensure an appropriate and compatible use for this area that would reinforce and add to the market character of the neighborhood, and thus was deemed worth exploring. In May SGM held a gala fundraiser for the effort, and in June hired a consulting team to work with the Flower Market Association in examining the possibilities for a relocation plan to the area. This feasibility study and its findings should be complete this fall and will be shared with the public and the City for further examination of this possibility. This study is being made possible in part by the generous support of the J. M. Kaplan Fund.



Silver Towers
Superblock

Pei, Picasso, and the Village's
Modern Legacy

Village complex and superblock, bounded by Bleecker, Houston, and Mercer Streets and LaGuardia Place.

Built to the designs of I. M. Pei in 1966 and containing New York's only public outdoor Picasso sculpture (one of only two in the Western Hemisphere), the complex marked a turning point in both Pei's career and in modern architecture. The complex is noteworthy for the sculptural dynamism and technological innovation of its 30-story cast-in-place concrete towers; its integrated response to urban renewal, university redevelopment, superblock planning, and affordable housing mandates; the sensitive interweaving of the layout with the existing streetplan; and the modernist, non-axial central outdoor space circulating around a cubist sculpture. The complex was built largely by NYU, and includes one tower of affordable co-operative housing built to compensate for the prior housing demolished to make way for the development.

After careful study and consultation with the residents of the complex, including City Councilmember Alan Gerson, who is a strong advocate for the effort, GVSHSP proposed the complex to the Landmarks Preservation Commission (LPC) for designation. The proposal has generated a strong showing of support from the National Trust for Historic Preservation, the Municipal Art Society, the American Institute of Architects NYC Chapter, several modern architecture preservation

Though best known for its 19th and early 20th century architecture, Greenwich Village is home to some significant and influential works of modern architecture. One such example is the Silver Towers/University

The I. M. Pei-designed Silver Towers superblock, with modernist landscaping and Picasso sculpture

groups, and State Senator Tom Duane and Assemblymember Deborah Glick. Hundreds of residents and supporters have also written to the LPC in support of designation.

The effort is particularly timely now for two reasons. As is apparent, the complex has aged considerably, and repairs are necessary to maintain the towers' facades and other architectural features; landmark designation would allow LPC to ensure that such repairs are done appropriately, without damaging those features. Also, NYU has announced its intention to develop a large science center on the site of a supermarket in the northwest corner of the complex. Not only could a large-scale development there jeopardize the original design, but the site is just feet from the north facade -- and windows -- of the residential tower, which NYU was required to erect for Village residents to replace housing lost for the development. Done incorrectly, this development could compromise not only the integrity of the original design but also the livability of the residential co-op -- a give-back to the community by NYU forty years ago. For more information and to support this effort, see www.gvhsp.org/silvertowerssuperblock.htm.

Historic South
Village Project
Takes Shape

Vital Area Reveals Historic
Patterns and New Threats

GVSHSP's Historic South Village Preservation project reaches a new stage this fall as we wrap up the herculean task of researching basic historic data on the 600-plus buildings in our study area (see map at www.gvshp.org/southvillagevirtualtour.htm), which renowned architectural historian Andrew Dolkart will use to issue a report for GVSHSP documenting the architectural and historic significance of the area (with funding provided by Preserve NY, a grant program of the Preservation League of New York State, and the New York State Council on the Arts). This will be followed shortly by a proposal by GVSHSP for landmarking and possibly zoning protections for the area, and will be accompanied by lectures, walking tours, and other programming to highlight the historic South Village.

GVSHSP's research has already unearthed some compelling and surprising information about the area. Well-known as home to one of the nation's largest Italian-American immigrant communities in the late 19th century, the South Village, we discovered, also contains: a

high concentration of buildings that not only housed Italian-American immigrants but were built and designed by Italian-Americans as well; New York's first Italian parish, established in 1866; and the remnants of some of New York's earliest African-American settlements, upon which much of the Italian-American community was built (St. Benedict the Moor's African Church, for instance, became an Italian parish).

The area's architecture also captures important stories. Tenements designed to house some of the city's poorest residents were nevertheless often designed with richly detailed exteriors of stone, brick, and iron ornament in the latest architectural styles. Older houses were often altered and subdivided in the late 19th century and early 20th centuries to accommodate waves of immigrant families, and then



The Former Circle in the Square Theater at 159 Bleecker Street, before demolition began

immediately began plans to demolish the interior and construct an eight-story building. GVSHSP immediately reached out to the owner to urge that plans be modified to keep the building in character with the surrounding area, largely composed of three-to-six story brick buildings. GVSHSP also immediately reached out to the LPC and urged the Commission to do whatever it could to protect this historically significant building and its surroundings. As we go to press, the fate of the building remains in doubt. For more information on this effort, or to help, go to www.gvshp.org/southvillage.htm. Councilmembers Quinn and Gerson, Assemblymember Glick, State Senator Duane, and Congressmember Nadler have all supported this effort.

often further altered to house artist's spaces in top floor lofts. In the age of the motorcar, stables became residences, and many houses, factories, stables and movie theaters also became experimental theater spaces, as the area became a breeding ground for literary, musical, and counter-cultural innovation in the 20th century. One such example was the Circle in the Square Theater at 159 Bleecker Street. Originally built as a local movie house,

it later became a nightclub and the Amato Opera House, before becoming home to Circle in the Square, the city's first non-profit theater. However, this summer a developer purchased the building and

From the Director

Greenwich Village Historic District, still one of the largest, most varied, and most cherished historic districts in New York City -- or anywhere, for that matter. Next year will mark the 25th anniversary of the founding of the Greenwich Village Society for Historic Preservation in 1980. Both milestones give us pause to reflect upon where our community and our organization have been, and where we need to go.

When GVSHSP was founded in 1980, the greatest threat to historic preservation was not from new development but from alterations to and deterioration of existing properties. Twenty-five years later, this is no longer the case. Massive development pressure has transformed much of the unprotected areas of the Village, in many cases in a particularly unsympathetic manner, and it will continue to do so without active intervention. Similarly, we have begun to see that preserving the character of our neighborhoods cannot be accomplished through landmarking alone; zoning is an important tool to help ensure that new development, whether outside of landmark districts or in them, has an appropriate scale and contains appropriate uses. Zoning is also vital to address the institutional overdevelopment our neighborhoods face.

These realities guide GVSHSP's direction in the coming year. We have put forward bold landmarking and rezoning proposals for the Far West Village (see page one), the area most immediately threatened by overdevelopment, and we intend to dedicate our resources toward seeking implementation of these preservation measures. We expect to complete the exhaustive study of the South Village necessary to put forward a landmarking proposal for this area, and we'll look at potential zoning changes to preserve the neighborhood's character as well. We're also working with several East Village groups to pursue a similar two-track approach there. And we're working with our allies in city government to advance our proposal for zoning reform to prevent the institutional overdevelopment that our neighborhood faces.

While present and future needs occupy most of our time at the Society, we're also working hard to honor and learn from the past. We've acquired a vast collection of archival materials, oral histories, and photographs documenting our neighborhood and its preservation movements. In the next year we'll be seeking to make these archives broader, more prominent, and easier to use. As our organization enters its 25th year, we intend to make sure that the lessons of the past will not be lost.

Andrew Gerson