

2016 Annual Report

Executive Director Andrew Berman

Good evening everyone, and welcome to GVSHP's 36th Annual Meeting and our 26th Village Awards.

I'd like to thank our very generous co-hosts for this evening, The New School, and our wonderful Awards Committee, especially Co-Chairs Katherine Schoonover and Tom Birchard, for their terrific work in selecting this year's honorees from hundreds of worthy nominations. I'd also like to thank GVSHP's incredibly hard-working staff – Sam Moskowitz, who put together tonight's program, Lanny Stephens, Sarah Bean Apmann, Harry Bubbins, Chelsea Dowell, and Matthew Morowitz. And I'd like to extend a special acknowledgement to all the GVSHP Trustees here tonight, whose generosity with their time and talent make what we do possible.

We have some truly wonderful awardees to get to tonight. But before that, it's my distinct pleasure to provide you with a review of GVSHP's activities and

accomplishments over the past year.

I think it's no exaggeration to say that this has been among the most challenging of times for GVSHP, with more threats to preservation than we have seen in decades. But I am happy to report that our members have stepped up, supporting GVSHP like never before, providing us with the resources we need to continue our work in an ever-tougher climate.

One prime example was this past May, when GVSHP staged its major annual benefit, our highly-anticipated Spring House tour. In spite of some rare, less-than-perfect weather, the tour was a tremendous success, our highest-grossing benefit ever. Hundreds of tour-goers got exclusive access to some of the most beautiful and historic houses, spacious lofts, incredible art collections, and imaginatively renovated homes in the Village, the doors of which were generously opened by their owners. The event raised nearly a quarter of GVSHP's annual budget, and was made possible by an incredibly hard-working committee, including Chairs Cassie Glover and Kyung Choi-Bordes, more than 130 volunteers, and dozens of

generous businesses and sponsors.

This was just one of many forms of support GVSHP received over the past year.

Membership support, which comprises about 70% of our annual income, continued to rise. More than 300 new members joined GVSHP last year, bringing in over \$100,000 in new membership support. From 2001 to 2015, total membership support grew by nearly 1,100%, while the number of GVSHP members increased by almost 500%, greatly increasing GVSHP's capacity for education, research, and advocacy.

New members come from a variety of sources, including our programming. This past year GVSHP conducted 60 public programs, attended by over 5,100 people – a nearly 25% increase over last year's already impressive numbers. Almost all of our programs are free and open to the public, with the exception of our members-only events. These included tours of local theaters, churches, and synagogues; lectures on Edna St. Vincent Millay and Woody Guthrie; and slideshows on topics ranging from East Village community gardens to West Village nightlife in the 1980's.

We also continued our highly popular historic plaque program in partnership with the Two Boots Foundation. This past October we added a plaque honoring James Baldwin to the front of his former home at 81 Horatio Street, which was attended by members of his family, the publisher of his writings, and artists and writers he inspired, including Fran Lebowitz. Last June we added a plaque to honor the former home of Martha Graham's original dance company, and later this summer we plan to unveil a plaque marking the former home and studio in NoHo of artist Jean-Michel Basquiat.

Throughout the year, with the help of the GVSHP Broker Partnership, we expanded enrollment in our Continuing Education Program for real estate professionals, educating more brokers and realtors who work in our communities about the value of history and preservation. Given the critical role these professionals play in shaping our neighborhood, this education pays invaluable dividends. The GVSHP broker partnership also staged a very successful Comedy Night fundraiser in April, and in October, they held a wonderful benefit concert at the Eldridge Street Synagogue with the Andy Statman Trio. This coming

Wednesday the 29th they will be hosting a wine, cheese, and jazz garden party at the Jefferson Market Garden, with tours of the historic library included.

Of course GVSHP's Educational activities were not limited to adults. Over the past year, demand for GVSHP's Children's Education program grew, as more schools across the five boroughs enrolled in the program which serves children in grades one thru seven, using in-class sessions and a tour of the Village to teach about immigrant history, urban development, and 19th century life in New York, cultivating the next generation of preservationists. More than half of the students who enrolled in the program qualified for need-based scholarships from GVSHP, allowing them to participate for free. The program, like our general programming, is made possible by a combination of government and private grants, but the single largest source of support for these programs is membership contributions, so thank you, to our members, for making this possible.

GVSHP has also been expanding our social media presence, to engage and mobilize a broader audience. In the past year our Facebook reach has grown by nearly 50%, our Twitter following has grown by nearly 25%, and the viewership of

our YouTube page has grown by 30% in the last year. This includes nearly 7,000 views of the videos of our programs, which for the first time surpassed the number of in-person attendees, showing the value of making every one of our programs permanently available for viewing on the web.

And today, I am pleased to announce that we are launching GVSHP's Instagram account, starting with images of tonight's event. We hope you'll follow us, and please feel free to share and tag your own images with 'GVSHP' and 'Village Awards.' This is another great way for us to spread the word, through pictures, about what we value most about our neighborhood.

Our website continues to attract users and connect us to interested people and potential supporters from across the globe. In the past year it drew well over 300,000 pageviews, connecting visitors near and far to information about our neighborhoods' history, current preservation efforts, and ongoing events.

Our blog, ***Off the Grid***, which is added to almost daily, accounts for a large part of that viewership, and since its founding a little over five years ago, has acquired an

increasingly robust readership. Of its 1,400 hundred posts, more than 165 have had more than a thousand page views, and more than a dozen have been accessed over five thousand times each.

One of the most popular and necessary features on website is our new “Business of the Month” program. Begun in late 2014, each month GVSHP selects an independently-owned local small business to highlight its special contributions to our neighborhood. Nominations come in from a broad cross-section of the public, selections are shared widely via social media, and winners can proudly post their selection in their store windows. Through this program, GVSHP aims to help storeowners who are struggling, call attention to those who are succeeding, and increase patronage and support for all our small businesses.

We’ve also been using our on-line presence as a tool for helping local residents learn about what’s going on every day in our neighborhoods, and how to get involved. Our Landmarks Application Webpage is the first of its kind in the city, providing invaluable information about every single public hearing application for a change to a landmarked building in our neighborhoods. It provides the history

of the building, the proposed changes, when and where the application will be heard by the Community Board and the Landmarks Preservation Commission, and how you can give in-person, e-mailed, or written testimony before a decision is made. It tracks the application from its first filing to its resolution, and allows you to sign up for alerts to update you on all such developments.

In the last year, this webpage has received nearly 30,000 pageviews from nearly 15,000 unique visitors, making this an incredibly valuable and widely-used resource.

Of course GVSHP also carefully reviews every single one of these landmarks applications ourselves, and when appropriate, alerts our members, and advocates to the Community Board and Landmarks Preservation Commission for what we believe is the right outcome. In the past year, our Preservation Committee reviewed almost 100 such landmarks applications, in nearly every corner of our neighborhood, ranging from storefront alterations to demolition and new construction. Our input, and that of the public we help facilitate, clearly impacted the outcome of many of these applications.

A different kind of on-line tool which GVSHP introduced over the past year is our historic image archive. Containing hundreds of photographs, etchings, drawings, and colored postcards, the collection's oldest images date from the early 19th century and the newest ones from the early 1970's. You can see the [9th Avenue Elevated](#) when it was up and the [Sixth Avenue El](#) when it came down; old [Department Stores](#), [churches](#), and [hotels](#); [pear trees](#) and [prisons](#); New Yorkers as varied as [Peter Cooper](#) and [Montgomery Clift](#); and many, many pictures of [Washington Square](#) and the [Washington Square Art Show](#) over the years. While the archive's contents are concentrated in and around the Village and East Village, its range stretches across the five boroughs, with images easily accessible through our mapping tool. If you have not already, I hope you will check it out.

While not new, GVSHP's Oral History collection was greatly expanded over the past year, adding 20 new subjects, including musician David Amram, filmmaker Jonas Mekas, guitar empresario Matt Umanov, and photographer Marlis Momber. These interviews, available on our website, joined long-standing GVSHP oral histories with preservation pioneers such as Jane Jacobs, and those involved with the creation of Westbeth, such as architect Richard Meier. If you have not

listened to or read them, please do – they offer remarkable first-person insights into the history, culture, and development of our neighborhoods.

In looking back over the past year, however, GVSHP's single largest area of focus was, as always, our advocacy work, and this past year we had no shortage of work to do.

On Gansevoort Street, we worked closely with local community groups like tonight's awardees Save Gansevoort to push back against an outrageous plan to transform an iconic block in the Meatpacking District which GVSHP got landmarked in 2003. The initial plan was awful; demolition of three buildings, outlandishly large and poorly designed additions to a third set of buildings, and two oversized, out of place new structures.

Gradually the developer and the LPC scaled back and improved the designs, making them significantly more in keeping with their surroundings. But frustratingly, the Commission seemed more interested in accommodating the developer than with upholding its mandate to preserve and protect the history of

this area. When the Commission told the developer to limit the height of any new construction to the size of previously existing buildings on the site and other “loft style” buildings in the area, GVSHP and Save Gansevoort dug deep into historic building permits to prove the size of these buildings, to try to ensure the developer did not get an inch more than they were allowed. Here again the LPC wavered – the size of the buildings were reduced, but were still significantly in excess of the limits the Commission itself previously stated the developer should abide by. This illustrates the ongoing challenge we face from a Landmarks Preservation Commission which is increasingly permissive with developers in historic districts. Fortunately, in the case of the Gansevoort project, the story may not be over. The developer will likely seek a change in allowable uses for the site to make this plan financially feasible – a change only allowable with the consent of the City Council and the City Planning Commission after public hearings. So stay tuned.

At a much earlier stage is a plan to rezone the 3-block long St. John’s Terminal site at West and Houston Streets, to allow a 5-building, nearly 2 million square foot residential, hotel, and commercial and retail complex. The tallest of the new

buildings would reach higher than the nearby Trump SoHo, and would together be more than five times its size. The City seems all too eager to accommodate the proposed changes, which would increase the size of the allowable development and the underlying value of the land tremendously.

Currently some public givebacks are being offered – money to repair the crumbling nearby Pier 40 and its public playing fields, and the inclusion of some much-needed affordable housing at the complex. But this is not nearly enough to justify the enormous windfall the developer would receive, nor the huge impact the project and proposed changes would have.

So GVSHP is pushing to have the scale of the project, especially its vast amounts of traffic-generating destination retail, re-thought, and to have any approvals linked to much needed and long overdue landmark protections for the last remaining section of our proposed South Village Historic District, which the City has thus far refused to landmark. We are also pushing for protections for the waterfront blocks of Greenwich Village, where state legislation passed in 2013 allows up to 1.5 million square feet of “air rights” from the nearby Hudson River

Park to be moved inland, which could vastly increase the size of allowable development in this area.

Two recent proposals for new construction on Jane Street, in the heart of the Greenwich Village Historic District, also speak to the new kinds of threats our neighborhood faces. At 85-89 Jane Street, a plan to convert two commercial buildings into a single-family mega-mansion include adding two shockingly out-of-place glass and concrete towers, rising to 80-90 feet above this residential street. And at 11 Jane, a developer proposes to knock down a 2-story garage and replace it with a 95 foot tall apartment building, which looks more like a 1950's office building, that would loom over its more humanly-scaled and designed neighbors. Both are expected to come before the Landmarks Preservation Commission later this month. GVSHP will be using all its resources to fight hard against their approval; what the Landmarks Preservation Commission does here will say a lot about just how safe areas of our neighborhood which we thought were protected really are.

One area of where we have seen some progress, albeit only after considerable pushing, has been in recognizing and protecting landmarks connected to LGBT history, which seems all the more relevant in light of the tragic events of the last few days.

This year Julius' Bar, one New York City's oldest bars and its oldest gay bar, was listed on the State and National Registers of Historic Places thru the efforts of the LGBT Historic Sites Project, with whom GVSHP works closely. GVSHP had gotten the bar determined eligible for listing in 2012, based upon the 1966 "Sip In" which took place there, which helped undo discriminatory laws which at the time made gay bars in effect illegal and subject to closure and harassment. GVSHP is pushing to also have the building landmarked, which would help ensure its historic features are preserved. The family of Fred W. MacDarrah, who took this and so many other iconic pictures of life and history being made in the Village in the mid-20th century, generously donated to GVSHP rights to sell a limited run of prints of the image, which raised considerable funds to support our work.

And now the Stonewall Inn is poised to become the first site ever made a national park or monument based upon LGBT history, an effort GVSHP supported. This follows GVSHP's successful fight in 2015 to get the Stonewall landmarked, and in 1999 to get it listed on the State and National registers of historic places – both firsts for a site based upon LGBT history.

Even as we made progress on this front, at City Hall there were concerted efforts to turn back the clock on preservation. Intro. 775, the landmarks “drop dead deadline” bill, suddenly resurfaced at the end of May. Claiming to make the landmarking process more “transparent” and “predictable,” Intro. 775 was put forward by the real estate industry to make avoiding landmarking easier for powerful and well-connected developers. GVSHP helped lead the charge against this pernicious measure, turning out hundreds at the City Council hearing last year. Due to this backlash, the Council removed the most dangerous piece of the bill, a five-year moratorium on reconsideration of any site for landmark designation which did not meet the deadlines, during which time demolition could proceed unimpeded. But the 1 to 2 year deadlines remained in the bill – deadlines which more than half our city's landmarked properties had failed to

meet – and if designation did not take place in time, the sites would be automatically removed from consideration, and demolition permits could be issued.

Fortunately, GVSHP and other preservationists found at the 11th hour that the Landmarks Preservation Commission in fact get around the bill's rigid timeframes by de-calendaring and re-calendaring the site, thus starting the 1-2 year clock over again, and avoiding the building or neighborhood falling to the wrecking ball.

But this is far from an ideal solution. And it was deeply disappointing that more than 2/3 of the City Council voted in favor of the measure, in spite of overwhelming public opposition. But we were heartened by the strong and passionate support we received from the ten Councilmembers who voted 'NO,' including all three local City Councilmembers, Corey Johnson, Rosie Mendez, and Margaret Chin. We owe a special debt of gratitude to Councilmembers Mendez and Johnson, who not only stood by us but joined us on the steps of City Hall to urge their colleagues to vote NO on 775 unless it was amended, and worked hard with us to try to change or improve the measure. Their leadership and advocacy

makes the incredibly difficult environment we face at City Hall, from both the Mayor and the Council, a little bit easier.

Intro. 775 was not the only way the Real Estate industry tried to undermine preservation this past year, nor was it the only case in which we were able to push back with significant results. In September the Real Estate Board of New York issued a report claiming that landmarking accelerated the loss of affordable housing in neighborhoods – ironic, coming from an entity which has campaigned tirelessly for unfettered development aimed at the highest end of the economic spectrum.

But rather than just pointing out the irony of REBNY's claim, GVSHP teamed up with affordable housing advocates and the researcher behind the data REBNY used as the source for their claim, to rebut their false and misleading contentions about landmarking's effect. What REBNY hoped would be a press cycle touting their study and tarnishing the image of preservation, turned into a story about how the researcher behind the work, preservationists, and affordable housing advocates all refuted REBNY's bogus assertions.

Over the past year we also continued to face frustration from the Mayor's refusal to accept our rezoning plan for the University Place/Broadway corridors, where 300 ft tall towers with no affordable housing are not only allowed but encouraged. This past winter hundreds of us were joined by local elected officials in calling upon the City to move ahead with the GVSHP's rezoning plan for the area, which would put in place reasonable height limits while adding incentives or requirements for including affordable housing in new developments, the supposed top priority of the Mayor. But the City refused to budge, and instead a 280 ft tall condo tower is rising on the Bowlmor site at University Place and 12th Street.

But this isn't the end of the story. GVSHP has identified more than a dozen other potential development sites in the neighborhood, and scores of units of affordable housing that could be created if our rezoning plan went through. The Mayor's response? No potential other potential development sites really exist in the area, and thus no rezoning is really warranted.

Unfortunately, in the past month we have discovered that two of the sites GVSHP identified as potential development sites are in fact moving ahead, in spite of the city's assertions. The former hotel at Broadway and 11th Street has been purchased for \$100 million, making development – possibly very high-rise development – a strong likelihood, and plans have just been filed to replace the lovely cast iron building at 827 Broadway with a 290 foot tall office tower.

But we are not giving up, and we will not abandon this part of the Village, which is uniquely lacking in landmark protections or adequate zoning protections. We will use these cases to call the city out on their hypocrisy and their dishonesty about the threats to this neighborhood, and we will demand action to protect our neighborhood's special character. Some of that is already taking place behind the scenes, but expect to hear more about some very public steps we will be taking soon, for which we will need your help and participation.

We did get the Mayor to move, considerably, on his plan to roll back hard-fought-for neighborhood height limits. The 'Zoning for Quality & Affordability' plan was introduced last year, and immediately came under fire from GVSHP and groups

citywide for gutting local zoning protections while offering little in return. GVSHP organized press conferences with City Councilmembers, and issued reports showing how the proposed changes would lead to no increase in affordable housing production, just taller buildings in residential neighborhoods.

Before its final passage by the City Council, we got many of the worst elements of the proposal removed. In the Far West Village, the height limits we secured over the years remained more or less intact. In the East Village, we kept most of the zoning protections and height limits we had fought for covering most of the area, though in some parts of the neighborhood, those limits were lifted by 15 feet for new developments that contain 20% affordable housing – down considerably from the 25 feet the Mayor sought.

While there were many cases like this where we blocked or reduced the impact of a proposed new anti-preservation policy, there were some wonderful cases where we just plain won. Earlier this year we finally got the 200 year old federal-era house at 57 Sullivan Street designated a New York City landmark – something GVSHP had been fighting for since 2002. The house was actually first considered

for landmark designation in 1970, which was scuttled the first time, making this the end of a nearly half-century wait.

This was actually part of a broader victory by GVSHP and preservationists, since 57 Sullivan Street was one of nearly one hundred sites which had been under consideration for landmark designation for more than five years that the City initially proposed to drop from consideration without a hearing or final decision. GVSHP and our allies vociferously protested the plan, arguing instead that these sites should all get a fair public hearing and their “day in court,” and a final decision. The City agreed, and more or less adopted our plan in its entirety, and it was out of this that 57 Sullivan Street was landmarked along with thirty other properties across the five borough, some of which had been waiting as long as fifty years for designation.

This designation was especially sweet for GVSHP because it has been a special part of our mission to document and preserve federal-style houses in Lower Manhattan – those built in the earliest days of our republic, roughly between 1790 and 1830. GVSHP took the occasion of this designation to survey all the

federal-era houses we have helped get landmarked over the past twenty years, and this spring issued a report documenting each and every one. Since 1999, GVSHP has been able to help get 136 of these houses throughout Lower Manhattan landmarked, included in historic districts, or listed on the State and National Registers of Historic Places. GVSHP will continue to advocate for the preservation of these houses, which are typically the first and only buildings ever constructed on their sites.

Speaking of the South Village, another sweet victory came just a few weeks ago when the scaffolding came down and restoration work was finally completed on 43 MacDougal Street. For nearly ten years, GVSHP has been fighting to get this landmarked 1846 house at King Street restored. A disinterested owner allowed the abandoned corner structure to rot for years, attracting mold, vermin, and vagrants, threatening the safety and well-being of the historic structure and its neighbors. GVSHP had pushed the City to take legal action against the owners to repair and maintain the building. After considerable pressure, the owners sold, and a new owner promised to restore the building, to which we responded with cautious optimism. We supported their application to the Landmarks Preservation Commission to make minor changes and bring the building back to its original

charming glory. And now, after nearly two years of work, 43 MacDougal once again shines as a lovely historic gem. Perseverance, and a little bit of faith, ultimately paid off.

Finally, I can't help but note that this year marked the 100th anniversary of the birth of Jane Jacobs, a woman whose life and work inspires much of what we do at GVSHP. Jane was of course very special to us at GVSHP. She was a longtime member of our Board of Advisors, and she generously conducted an oral history with us. In 2006 after she died, we got the street outside her home on Hudson Street renamed 'Jane Jacobs Way,' and co-hosted the public celebration of her life in Washington Square Park. On May 5th of this year, what would have been her 100th birthday, we held a panel discussion on her impact and legacy with experts in the field.

But perhaps most importantly, we work every day to try to live up to Jane Jacobs' ideal of a diverse, healthy community and city that preserves its history, values small businesses, and promotes grass-roots rather than top-down planning. Spurred on by Jane's vision, we have fought hard for and secured landmark

designation of more than 1,100 buildings, and contextual rezonings of nearly 100 blocks of our neighborhood. We regularly promote small businesses. And every day we connect the public to the process of shaping the future of their neighborhoods.

With all that's going on in our city now, it seems as though Jane Jacob's bright vision is needed more than ever. We at GVSHP fight every day to not only keep that legacy alive, but to try to extend it into our present and our future.

But we can't do it alone. So thank you to all of you, our members and supporters, for working with us to celebrate what we love about our neighborhoods and to try to make them even better. I hope you will stay with us to enjoy the rest of this wonderful evening, and stay with GVSHP as we work hard to preserve and protect our neighborhood in the coming year. Thank you.