



**Testimony in Support of Designation of
Gay Activists Alliance Firehouse
99 Wooster Street, Manhattan
Tax Map Block 501, Lot 30
June 4, 2019**

My name is Andrew Berman, and I am the Executive Director of Village Preservation. I am here today to express our strong support for the proposed designation of the Gay Activist Alliance Firehouse for individual landmark designation.

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In 2014, Village Preservation proposed the Firehouse, along with the Stonewall Inn, the LGBT Community Center, and Julius' Bar for landmark designation, addressing the lack of recognition of the important LGBT history of these sites in their historic district designations, which in all cases made no mention of this incredibly important aspect of these buildings' history. The Stonewall Inn was landmarked in 2015, and the Center is now under consideration along with the GAA Firehouse. We appreciate the LPC moving this proposed designation forward, and note the remarkable progress of the last several years. Prior to 2015 there was not a single individually landmarked building in New York City based primarily upon LGBT history. In fact, while there has been significant progress on that account in the designation of historic districts, until today the Stonewall Inn remained New York City's sole individual LGBT historic landmark. We are happy to see that change.

The GAA Firehouse more than merits landmark designation. The Gay Activists Alliance was one of the most influential post-Stonewall LGBT groups, pioneering "zaps" against political opponents while also promoting the earliest gay civil rights legislation in the country. Their presence at the firehouse at 99 Wooster Street was particularly consequential, as they turned the building into a de facto LGBT community center, when no such entity formally existed. Their re-use of the abandoned city-owned structure also spoke to the growing movement transforming lower Manhattan at that time where disused structures were reimagined for new and unconventional purposes, heralding a period of unrivalled political and social creativity and ferment in this area in the mid-to-late 20th century. Even the firebombing of the building in 1974, which hastened the Gay Activist Alliance's departure from the building, spoke to the often violent pushback which openly-LGBT people, especially advocates for social change, commonly faced at this time.

While the Gay Activists Alliance occupied this building at the time of the SoHo Cast Iron Historic District designation in 1973, there is no mention of its presence in the designation report, nor of the singularly important role in history this building played, which was not yet apparent at the time.

Five years after we first proposed the GAA firehouse for landmark designation, we are happy to be able to stand before you today to urge you to vote to designate this site a New York City landmark.