



Greenwich
Village
Society for
Historic
Preservation

232 East 11th Street
New York, New York 10003

(212) 475-9585
fax: (212) 475-9582
www.gvshp.org

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TESTIMONY OF THE GREENWICH VILLAGE SOCIETY FOR HISTORIC PRESERVATION
IN SUPPORT OF DESIGNATION OF THE PROPOSED
SULLIVAN-THOMPSON HISTORIC DISTRICT

November 29, 2016

Good morning Commissioners, and thank you for the opportunity to testify. My name is Andrew Berman, and I am the Executive Director of the Greenwich Village Society for Historic Preservation. GVSHP is the largest membership organization in Greenwich Village, the East Village, and NoHo, and wholeheartedly supports designation of the proposed Sullivan-Thompson Historic District.

After meeting with the Landmarks Preservation Commission in 2002 and 2004 to pursue landmark designation for the entire South Village, in late 2006 GVSHP submitted a formal proposal with boundaries for a proposed South Village Historic District. At the time, the Landmarks Preservation Commission agreed to consider the proposed district in three phases. Most of first phase, west of 6th Avenue and north of Houston Street, was designated in 2010. Most of the second phase, between 6th Avenue and LaGuardia Place, north of Houston Street, was designated in late 2013. And we are very glad to see that more than 90% of the third and final phase of the proposed historic district, located between Houston and Watts Streets, east of Sixth Avenue, is now before you today to be considered for designation.

Reaching this point is a testament to literally thousands of people over the last ten years who have written the Commission, rallied, attended hearings, and signed petitions in support of designation. We are particularly grateful to City Councilmember Corey Johnson, who has worked unrelentingly to get us to this point.

The area under consideration, like the rest of the South Village, is not only undeniably deserving of designation, but unquestionably in need of it. In 2012, the Preservation League of New York State named the entire South Village, including this area, one of its "Seven to Save," or one of the seven most important, endangered historic sites in the State. In 2013, the entire South Village, including the proposed Sullivan-Thompson Historic District, was listed on the State and National Registers of Historic Places, for its architectural and historic significance, especially in relation to immigrant history.

Sadly, in the last several years many of the district's significant historic structures have been lost due to the lack of landmark protections. This includes the 1922 Tunnel Garage, one of the earliest and most beloved Art Deco structures in New York; the 1820 Ezra Weeks-Daniel Ludlow House at 54 MacDougal Street, a structure connected not only to its namesakes but to Aaron Burr and Alexander Hamilton; and 186 Spring

Street, an 1824 federal style rowhouse determined individually eligible for the State and National Registers of Historic Places for its exceptional significance in connection to post-Stonewall LGBT history.

Compounding the tragic loss of these and many other structures in the area is the fact that current zoning could allow new construction here up to 300 feet in height, which is woefully out of character for this uniformly low-scaled district. Developers such as Donald Trump's son-in-law Jared Kushner have recently bought up properties in the area. Only landmark designation will prevent more such losses and inappropriate development.

The proposed designation before you is more than ten years in the making, and captures two centuries of New York's history and evolution. With yet another proposed rezoning on this district's edges right now that will increase development pressure, this is the time to act. We urge you in the strongest of terms to approve the proposed historic district as soon as possible, and finish the job of extending landmark protections to the entire South Village.

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The one hundred sixty buildings of the proposed Sullivan Thompson Historic District contain a rich and unrivalled array of buildings which speak to New York's explosive growth in the 19th and early 20th century. It speaks particularly powerfully to New York's role as a mecca for innovators and immigrants, in this case especially Italian-Americans, who were once the single most populous ethnic group in New York City.

In examining this area one is immediately struck by the incredible St. Anthony of Padua Church and its related buildings. The oldest buildings are the striking Romanesque Revival church on Sullivan Street and the imposing Second Empire style friary on Thompson Street. Constructed in 1886, these buildings form the oldest extant Italian-American Church in the country, part of the very first Catholic parish established in 1859 to serve Italian-Americans. Subsequent buildings constructed by and for the church in the neo-Classical, post-modern, and mid-century modern ecclesiastical style create a substantial imprint upon this section of the South Village.

The district also contains several houses constructed in the Federal or Greek Revival style from the beginning of the 19th century through the 1830's. Some are in pristine condition and have barely changed in almost two hundred years; others have been tenementized almost beyond recognition.

However by far the lion's share of buildings in this district, and what arguably forms its heart, are the tenements constructed from the mid-19th to the early 20th century. This section of the South Village arguably has perhaps the most impressive collection of largely intact tenements in every conceivable style and configuration. This includes pre-law, old-law, and new law tenements, as well as an exceptional collection of reform housing tenements faced with white glazed brick. Built in the second decade of the 20th century by Dominick Abbate's Citizen's Investing Company, these five remarkable New York buildings can only be found on Sullivan and Thompson Streets.

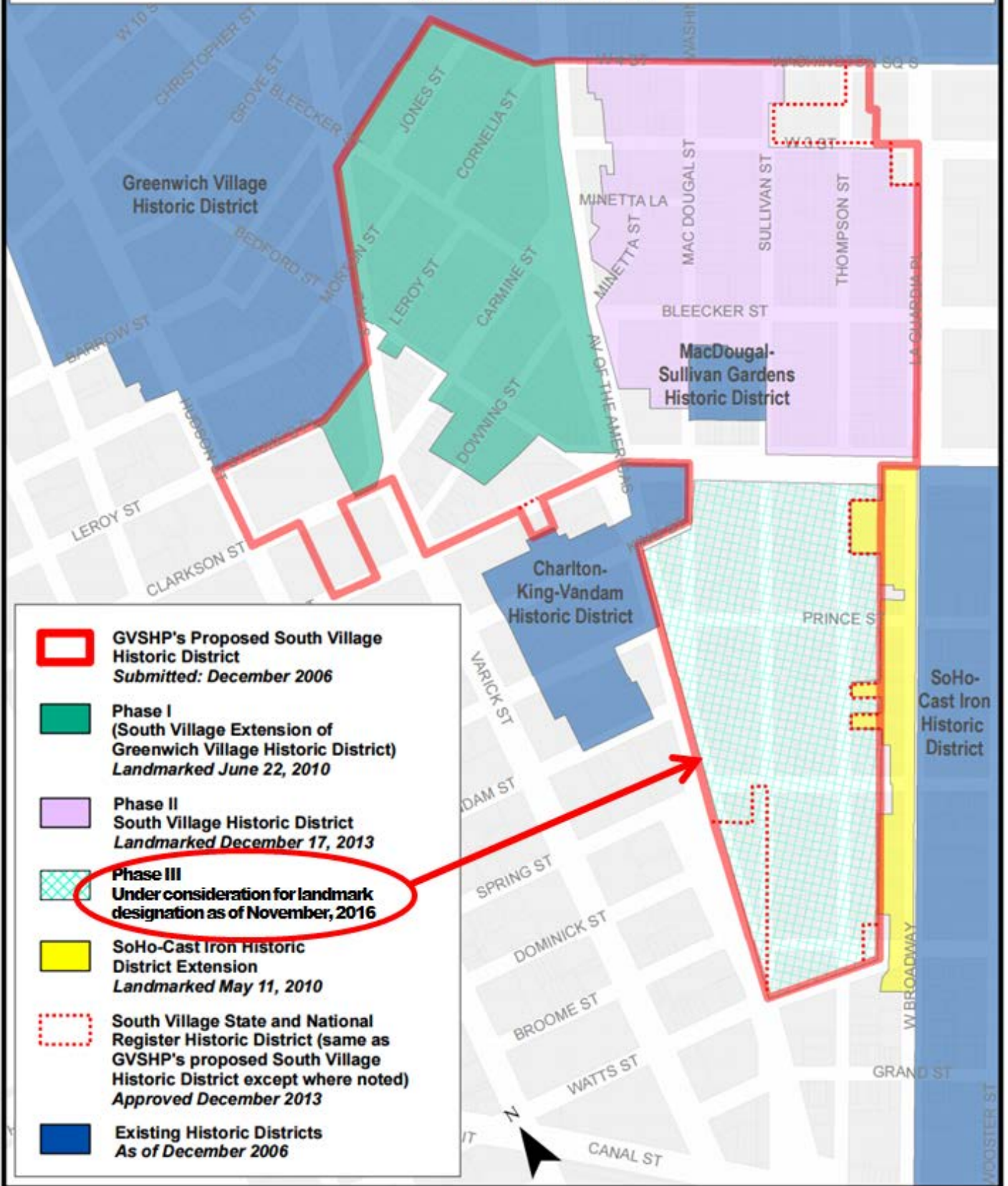
There are few parts of New York where one can walk down streets and see what an immigrant community at the turn of the last century, during the last great wave of immigration to New York City, looked like. Not only do these tenements have surprisingly rich and beautifully detailed facades, but in this area a remarkable number of them maintain intact their original cornices, ironwork, entryways, wooden doors and wooden or cast iron storefronts. This irreplaceable detail, which has miraculously survived here as it has in very few other places, gives these streets a distinctive and irreplaceable feel which can only be preserved by landmark designation.

This impressive array of housing for New York's working class immigrants shows how the laws governing housing changed through the late 19th and into the early 20th centuries. Four story pre-law tenements covering nearly their entire lots gave way to five-story old law tenements with small "dumbbell" cutouts to afford a minimum of light and air into each room, which in turn were replaced by new law tenements, some of which rose to six or seven stories without an elevator, but which gave each room and apartment a more meaningful source of light and air. These in turn gave way to "H"-plan reform housing and model tenements, whose simple but clean style and improved amenities harkened towards the urban renewal developments and middle- and upper-middle-class white brick apartment buildings which became so ubiquitous in New York in the mid-20th century.

Nearly every style of late 19th to early 20th century New York is represented here, from Neo-Renaissance to Neo-Grec, Romanesque Revival to Arts and Crafts. This remarkably well-preserved neighborhood cries out for landmark protections, which we hope the Commission will act swiftly to provide.

Thank you.

Greenwich Village Society for Historic Preservation Progress on Proposed South Village Historic District as of Nov., 2016



Historic Buildings Demolished Within Proposed Sullivan Thompson Historic District since Landmarking Effort Began



Tunnel Garage, Broome & Thompson Streets.

Built 1922. Demolished 2006.

Note terra-cotta image of Model-T Ford.

Determined eligible for State and National Registers of Historic Places.

Landmarks Preservation Commission declined to landmark it at the time.



Ezra Weeks-Daniel Ludlow House at 54 MacDougal Street
Built 1820
Demolished 2014
House was connected to some of the most important historic figures in early New York (and American) history, including Aaron Burr, Alexander Hamilton, Daniel Ludlow, and Ezra Weeks.
Landmarks Preservation Commission declined to landmark.



186 Spring Street House
Built 1824
Demolished 2013
Determined individually eligible for State and National Registers of Historic Places in 2013 due to strong connections to historic advances in LGBT civil rights movement in the 1970s and early 1980's, on the local, state, and federal level, as well as the U.S. Supreme Court.
Landmarks Preservation Commission declined to landmark.



Eliot Spitzer
Governor

Carol Ash
Commissioner

New York State Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation

Historic Preservation Field Services Bureau • Peebles Island, PO Box 189, Waterford, New York 12188-0189
518-237-8643
www.nysparks.com

May 1, 2007

Andrew Berman
Executive Director
Greenwich Village Society for Historic Preservation
232 East 11th Street
New York, NY 10003

RE: Proposed South Village Historic District
State and National Registers Application
New York County, NY

Dear Mr. Berman:

Thank you for your interest in seeking State and National Registers listing for the proposed South Village Historic District. I very much enjoyed touring the area with you and Melissa Baldock last month. Andrew Dolkart's report *The South Village: A Proposal for Historic District Designation* (2006) is quite thorough and the arguments presented for the cultural, historical and architectural significance of the proposed district are compelling. Based on my site visit, the documentation provided, and further in-house review, it is the opinion of the State Historic Preservation Office that that proposed South Village Historic District appears to meet the criteria for listing to the National Register of Historic Places. The Resource Evaluation and district map showing the boundaries are enclosed with this letter.

If you are interested in pursuing listing at this time I heartily encourage you to proceed with the completion of a National Register nomination. The GVSHP, as the sponsor of the nomination, will be responsible for preparing the nomination including two sets of black and white photos. We will need to receive from you the names and mailing addresses of all owners within the district boundaries for notification purposes.

As always, we encourage you to seek the support of community groups and property owners. As you know, a district cannot be listed on the National Register if the majority of the owners object to listing so it is important to work with the owners early in the process to explain the benefits of listing. The GVSHP will need to schedule a public informational meeting - about one month prior to the State Review Board meeting - so SHPO staff can explain what listing means to the property owners and answer questions.

Please give me a call at (518) 237-8643, extension 3266, or email me at kathy.howe@oprhp.state.ny.us so we can further discuss the National Register process and the

schedule. I look forward to working with you on the South Village Historic District. I will be responsible for continuing to assist you in developing the nomination, presenting the proposal to the Review Board, and processing the final submission to the National Park Service.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Kathleen A. Howe". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Kathleen A. Howe
Historic Preservation Specialist

cc: Andrew S. Dolkart
Tania Werbizky, Preservation League of New York State

enc.



New York State Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation

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Governor

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Commissioner

RESOURCE EVALUATION

DATE: May 1, 2007

PROPERTY: South Village Historic District

ADDRESS: (see attached district map)

STAFF: Kathy Howe

MCD: Manhattan

COUNTY: New York Co.

USN: 06101.016146

- I. Property is individually listed on SR/NR:
name of listing:
- Property is a contributing component of a SR/NR district:
name of district:
- II. Property meets eligibility criteria.
- Property contributes to a district which appears to meet eligibility criteria.
- Pre SRB: Post SRB: SRB date

Criteria for Inclusion in the National Register:

- A. Associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history;
- B. Associated with the lives of persons significant in our past;
- C. Embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period or method of construction; or represents the work of a master; or possess high artistic values; or represents a significant and distinguishable entity whose components may lack individual distinction;
- D. Have yielded, or may be likely to yield information important in prehistory or history.

STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE:

The South Village Historic District encompasses approximately 800 buildings in the neighborhood situated south of Washington Square Park. The proposed district abuts three National Register listed districts: the large Greenwich Village Historic District to the north; the compact Charlton-King-Vandam Historic District on the west; and the SoHo Cast-Iron Historic District on the east. The boundaries of the South Village Historic District are indicated on the attached district map.

The streets of the district are lined with a rich array of buildings of architectural, historical, and cultural significance. While late-19th and early-20th century tenements are the dominant building type in the district, its converted early-19th century row houses, churches, reform housing, institutional and civic

buildings, back buildings, garages, and lofts also reflect the working-class and immigrant communities of the South Village. Overall the buildings in the district possess integrity of location, design, setting, materials, workmanship, feeling, and association.

The neighborhood served as the center of New York's African-American community in the mid-19th century. By the late-19th century many Italian immigrants lived and worked here as well as Germans and Irish. Beginning in the early decades of the twentieth century and continuing beyond the post-World War II era the South Village has been the setting of important counter-cultural movements, institutions, and trends including the bohemian era, jazz clubs, gay bars, off-Broadway theater, Beat culture, and the folk music revival.

The district's period of significance - ca. 1820 to the mid-1960s - incorporates the architectural, historical, and cultural evolution of the neighborhood. The district meets Criterion A in the areas of social history and ethnic heritage. Additional areas of significance may be identified as research on the district continues. It also meets Criterion C, most notably for its collection of pre-law, old law, and new law tenements in a range of popular styles including Neo-Grec, Italianate, Romanesque Revival, and Beaux Arts. Many of these retain their historic wood and glass storefronts. Row houses (many transformed to commercial and multi-family uses), churches, institutional and ecclesiastical buildings, and other structures also add to the architectural significance of the district. The South Village Historic District retains an extraordinary collection of buildings and structures that reflects the physical and historical development of this working-class neighborhood.



South Village Historic District

Boundaries indicate
State/National Registers eligible district

