



**Greenwich  
Village Society  
for Historic  
Preservation**

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**TESTIMONY OF THE GREENWICH VILLAGE SOCIETY  
FOR HISTORIC PRESERVATION  
REGARDING PROPOSED "TECH HUB"  
at 14<sup>TH</sup> STREET & IRVING PLACE  
May 9, 2018**

My name is Andrew Berman, and I am the Executive Director of the Greenwich Village Society for Historic Preservation. On behalf of our members, and many New Yorkers, I am here to express my outrage that this hearing is being held on this incredibly controversial and consequential item with virtually no public notification. As of last night, City Planning's online Land Use Tracking System still did not show this hearing having even been scheduled. Councilmember Rivera was unaware of it until Monday evening. No notification went to the literally thousands of people who have emailed the City Planning Commission on this topic over the last several months. The review session took place literally the business day after the Borough President's recommendation was released. This is a sham process, simply designed to keep the public out.

In spite of this, I and many others are here to say that any approvals for the Tech Hub MUST be accompanied by zoning or landmark protections for the Greenwich Village and East Village neighborhoods directly to the south, along the University Place, Broadway, and 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> Avenue corridors. Without such protections, approval of the Tech Hub will simply accelerate the destruction of the predominantly residential, low-to-mid-rise neighborhood to the south. Current inadequate zoning and increasing pressure from the expanding tech industry is turning these neighborhoods into an extension of Midtown South and Silicon Alley. This is simply unacceptable, and yet it is an issue the Department of City Planning has refused to address for more than three years.

West of 4<sup>th</sup> Avenue along the University Place and Broadway corridors, current zoning allows 300 to 400 ft. tall office, hotel, or condo towers as-of-right. Just such a condo tower is nearing completion at University Place and 12<sup>th</sup> Street, sticking out like a sore thumb. An office tower of this scale was planned for a block east on Broadway, and was only stopped by our successful efforts to get the historically significant site landmarked. Nearly a half dozen similar projects are planned or in motion in the area.

East of 4<sup>th</sup> Avenue, developers are encouraged to sidestep the area's existing affordable housing zoning incentives and predominantly residential character by allowing market rate commercial developments 10% larger than residential ones. The affordable housing incentives only apply to residential, not commercial, developments. As a result, modest walk up apartments with rent stabilized units are being demolished to build 300-plus room hotels -- by a developer who is a campaign fundraiser for the Mayor, and the Mayor's appointee to the Economic Development Corporation, the agency behind the Tech Hub.

Can you honestly say that this type of transformation is right for these neighborhoods? The real estate press and developers themselves have made clear that part of what is drawing development to this area is the prospect of the new Tech Hub on 14<sup>th</sup> Street.

Demonstrate to New Yorkers that you are not simply beholden to the campaign donors of the Mayor, who have been driving this process from the beginning. Do not approve the Tech Hub unless it is accompanied by the real zoning or landmark protections for the affected area to the south, as thousands of New Yorkers have called for.

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It's not just thousands of New Yorkers who have called for the neighborhood protections we have called for, or who have specifically said they must come along with any planned Tech Hub for the area. Those who have endorsed these neighborhood protections include every elected official who represents the area, including Congressmember Carolyn Maloney, Borough President Gale Brewer, State Senators Brad Hoylman and Liz Kruger, Assemblymember Deborah Glick, and of course past City Councilmember Rosie Mendez and current Councilmember Carlina Rivera. Community Boards 2 and 3 have both passed resolutions in support of such protections, CB 3 including it in its ULURP recommendation on the Tech Hub, as did the Borough President.

Additionally, a vast array of affordable housing, planning, neighborhood, progressive, and good government groups have come out in support of the neighborhood protections for this area we have been calling for, and the Department of City Planning has thus far refused to consider. These include:

- The Cooper Square Committee, an affordable housing provider
- Fourth Arts Block, a cultural consortium
- Good Old Lower East Side, an advocate for low-income neighborhood residents
- The Metropolitan Council on Housing, a citywide advocate for tenants and affordable housing
- New York Communities for Change, a citywide advocate for underserved New Yorkers
- The Lower East Side Power Partnership
- The East Village Community Coalition
- The East Village Independent Merchants Association
- Lower East Side Preservation Initiative
- Bowery Alliance of Neighbors
- The Historic Districts Council, the citywide advocate for historic neighborhoods
- The Municipal Art Society, the citywide advocate for sound planning principles
- Vision Urbana
- Loisaida Inc.
- Coalition for a District Alternative, the East Village's progressive Democratic Club
- Village Independent Democrats, Greenwich Village's original progressive Democratic Club

Many of these groups would be here today had more than 24 hours notice been provided for this hearing. Why is it that all of these elected officials, community boards and groups, and affordable housing advocates support the reasonable zoning protections we have proposed for this area, but the Department of City Planning refuses to?

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I'm not sure if all of the members of Commission are aware of what the zoning protections are that we have proposed for this area, which the Department has consistently refused to consider. So let me offer some details.

West of 4<sup>th</sup> Avenue, we seek to replace the current zoning, which has no height limits and offers no incentives for affordable housing, with new zoning that would not only not reduce the allowable FAR, but would increase it, albeit modestly, for developments which include affordable housing. We would limit the height of new construction to a maximum of about 145 feet, which is about the height of the tallest buildings in the area. We are basically seeking to replace the existing zoning with its contextual counterpart, with affordable housing provisions added. Had these provisions been enacted, the condo tower now rising at University Place and 12<sup>th</sup> Street could have included nearly 30,000 square feet of affordable housing.

East of 4<sup>th</sup> Avenue, such affordable housing provisions and height limits already exist. There we are simply seeking to eliminate the loophole through which developers get around the affordable housing incentives and build out of character large-scale commercial developments. We would do this by lowering the allowable commercial FAR. This would not lower the maximum allowable FAR in the district nor change the height limits at all. What it would do is not allow more 300 room hotels to be built where none currently exist, like the Mayor's campaign fundraiser and appointee to the Economic Development Corporation is doing on East 11<sup>th</sup> Street between 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> Avenues. Right now the maximum allowable FAR for commercial developments in the area is 6, while the maximum allowable FAR for market-rate residential developments is 5.4, bonusable to 7.2 if affordable housing is included. Because the base FAR for commercial is 10% higher than as-of-right market rate residential, developers are choosing to forgo the affordable housing incentives and build these out-of-character buildings. A modest reduction in the allowable FAR for commercial developments only, in this predominantly residential area, would eliminate this dynamic.

But the Department has consistently refused to consider even these modest and reasonable proposals. Why? Because the Mayor's donors and fundraisers would be affected? Do you really believe that New York City is better off with the current zoning, in which little or no affordable housing can or will be created, and out-of-scale and out-of-character development will dominate Greenwich Village and the East Village? The zoning we have proposed to protect the neighborhood would create affordable housing, and maintain the area's predominantly residential character and low-to-mid-rise scale. We strongly urge you to reconsider, and protect these neighborhoods as part of any planned Tech Hub.