

NEWS VILLAGE PRESERVATION

GREENWICH VILLAGE SOCIETY FOR HISTORIC PRESERVATION

WINTER
2020 NEWSLETTER

PLAN FOR HUGE TOWER ON LOWER FIFTH

DEVELOPER SEEKS TO DEMOLISH HISTORIC BUILDINGS, REPLACE THEM WITH TOWER 4X THE HEIGHT

In December, Madison Equities, new owners of a pair of 1848 houses at 14-16 Fifth Avenue (8th/9th Streets) which were combined into a single apartment building in 1936, announced plans to seek permission from the Landmarks Preservation Commission to demolish the 5-story, 20-unit building and replace it with a 244 ft. tall, 18-unit, super-luxury tower. Because the site is located within the Greenwich Village Historic District, the existing building can only be demolished, and the new structure built, if after holding public hearings the city's Landmarks Preservation Commission determines the current building is of no architectural or historic significance, and its replacement is "appropriate" for the site and district.

Village Preservation strongly opposes both requested findings, and has been working against such a possibility for more than

two years. In 2017, plans were leaked by the developer to demolish the newly-purchased building and replace it with a 367 ft. tall tower. At the time, Village Preservation led a public outcry against the plan, which then went silent for two years.

In the meantime, we performed extensive research on the buildings to establish their historic significance. Our findings included that they were built by the prominent Brevoort family and were initially among the most prestigious mansions in New York, part of a row of grand Gothic Revival homes which still survives, albeit partly altered, at No. 10 Fifth Avenue (which like No. 14-16 lost much of its ornament in the 20th century, but under landmarks supervision was largely restored). Over the years a series of prominent New Yorkers called the buildings home, including writer Bret Harte, sewing machine innovator and entrepreneur Isaac Singer, and Oscar-winning actress Celeste Holm, who lived here while starring in the original run of *Oklahoma!* on Broadway.

As inappropriate as the proposed demolition of this historic building is, its proposed replacement is even more so. At 244 feet tall it would tower over its block and neighbors. Our analysis shows that the average height of buildings on Lower Fifth Avenue in the Greenwich Village Historic District is 140 feet — 75% lower than what is proposed. The average height of buildings on the block bounded by Fifth and

Sixth Avenues, 8th and 9th Street where the tower would stand?: sixty-two feet, or roughly one quarter of what's proposed.

Adding insult to injury, when Madison purchased the buildings, at least half of the 20 units were affordable and rent-regulated. They propose to replace this with just 18 super luxury units, none of which are likely to serve as primary residences for a single person.

See gvshp.org/16Fifth for the latest on hearings and plans for this site, and how to help.



14-16 FIFTH AVENUE IS THE FIVE-STORY BUILDING IN THE CENTER. A DEVELOPER WANTS TO REPLACE IT WITH A 244 FT. TALL TOWER



SOME OF THE MANY HISTORIC BUILDINGS IN THE AREA THE CITY HAS SO FAR REFUSED TO RECOGNIZE WITH LANDMARK DESIGNATION: (L. TO R.) 72 FIFTH AVENUE, 43-47 EAST 10TH STREET, AND 808 BROADWAY.

PUSHING FOR REAL PROTECTIONS SOUTH OF UNION SQUARE

MAYOR & RIVERA STILL NOT OFFERING LANDMARKING NEEDED FOR GREENWICH VILLAGE AND EAST VILLAGE

Village Preservation is taking a multi-pronged approach to getting meaningful landmark and/or zoning protections for Greenwich Village and the East Village south of Union Square — virtually the only area of either neighborhood lacking in such protections. The approval of the Mayor’s 14th Street Tech Hub by the City Council in 2018 has increased pressure for demolition and out-of-scale and out-of-character development in the area, with multiple tech-related office towers replacing historic low-rise buildings.

Demonstrating the Area’s Historic Significance

Through in-depth research we have performed and the work of architectural historians we have retained, Village Preservation has provided voluminous documentation regarding the countless prominent artists, architects, labor leaders and organizations, authors, publishers, suffragists, civil rights movements, inventors, business innovators, and key industries inextricably linked to this area. Examples include Willem de Kooning, Jackson Pollock, Franz Kline, the NY Woman’s Suffrage League, Frank O’Hara,

Anais Nin, and the headquarters of the NAACP.

Prominent Supporters

We have secured high profile support for our landmarking proposal from members of Congress, the State Senate, and State Assembly; preservation organizations from across the city; artists’ trusts, publishers, businesses, and labor organizations connected to the history of the area; and community boards and local civic leaders.

Exposing the Shady Tech Hub Deal

Through Freedom of Information requests, we have issued reports exposing the corrupt nature of the Mayor’s Tech Hub deal approved by Councilmember Carlina Rivera and the City Council. This includes showing that the primary



DEMONSTRATING AT THE TECH HUB GROUNDBREAKING

beneficiaries of the deal were donors to the Mayor’s campaign and now-defunct non-profit; that other bidders for the project offered to pay more and include more public amenities in a smaller building that didn’t require the commercial upzoning we and others opposed and which has increased development pressure in the area; and that the City has absolutely no written records of the criteria for or process by which it picked this bid over others that offered the public more money and benefits and less negative impacts. This garnered significant press coverage and criticism of the project and process by good government groups.

Calling Out Non-Protections and Broken Promises

When Councilmember Rivera ran for office, she promised to only support the Tech Hub (which hinged upon her approval) if it came with comprehensive protections for the surrounding Greenwich Village and East Village neighborhoods. She instead voted for it without such protections. She and the City have since tried to present measures which do virtually nothing as offering such protections. This includes landmarking 7 buildings out of 193 we proposed for historic district (landmark) status in the neighborhood — just 3.6% — and choosing only buildings which are currently not endangered and face no likelihood of danger any time in the near future. It also includes a measure to require special permits for new hotels in the area. But the city’s own analysis shows that this measure would still encourage historic, low-rise, residential buildings in the area

to be demolished and replaced with high-rise office buildings, and is thus virtually useless in protecting this neighborhood. We successfully lobbied to have both affected community boards vote unanimously to reject the measure and instead call for real neighborhood protections, ensuring that neither the City nor the Councilmember can claim these measures deliver on promised protections in any way. This allows us to continue to push for real action.

More info including all reports and how to help can be found at gvshp.org/savemyneighborhood.

UNSCRUPULOUS DEVELOPERS AND LOBBYISTS CONTINUE TO TARGET EAST VILLAGE

Village Preservation has led opposition to a plan to increase the allowable size of a planned office tower at St. Marks Place and 3rd Avenue by 20% via an air rights transfer from 4 St. Marks Place, a historic house we got landmarked in 2004. Fortunately the transfer requires significant public approvals, and we got the Community Board to unanimously reject the application, which Borough President Brewer, State Senator Hoylman, and Assemblymember Glick also opposed.

The decision here will likely come down to Councilmember Carlina Rivera, as the transfer requires City Council approval. As we go to press, she has not yet stated a position. For the latest and to urge a 'no' vote, go to gvshp.org/3stmarks.

We continue to battle the owner of the landmarked former PS 64/CHARAS-El Bohio at 605 E. 9th Street, who has consistently sought to destroy and place illegal uses inside the

historic property. The owner has sued us for opposing his plans, and allowed the building to become dangerously unstable. We have, with some success, pushed city agencies to take enforcement action against him and ensure the building is properly maintained. We are also calling upon Mayor de Blasio to keep his campaign pledge to seek to return the building to public use, which he has not yet done. More at gvshp.org/charas.

In 2019 we also launched an effort to expand landmark protections in the East Village, by far the majority of which lacks such protection or recognition. We've created online resources showcasing the history of every building in the neighborhood, commissioned reports by noted architectural historians, and met with the Landmarks Preservation Commission to push them to act.

For more info and to support the effort, see gvshp.org/evlandmark.



RECENT DEVELOPMENTS IN SOHO (L.) AND NOHO SHOWING THE SCALE ALLOWED UNDER EXISTING RULES. AN UPZONING COULD MORE THAN DOUBLE THE ALLOWABLE SIZE OF NEW DEVELOPMENT

POTENTIAL NOHO/SOHO REZONING IN THE WORKS

In December, the Mayor, Borough President Gale Brewer, and City Councilmember Margaret Chin released their results of a year-long study of these historic neighborhoods with an eye towards changes to regulations affecting development in the area. The study process was controversial, as groups like Village Preservation and any certified artists were excluded from the "Advisory Group," and most residents expressed opposition to changes that would allow bigger buildings and larger retail.

The study results were left largely vague, with few clear recommendations. However, it did allude to the possibility of allowing larger retail than currently permitted on certain streets, and "upzoning" some sites to allow affordable housing construction. Village Preservation, like most in these neighborhoods, supports affordable housing. But we don't support upzoning, which would mean larger buildings than the 10-12 story ones currently allowed. The de Blasio administration frequently uses the promise of affordable housing to justify massive upzonings, which largely benefit developers and his campaign donors.

Next steps for the study and recommendation are still TBD; see gvshp.org/NoHo for the latest and how to help.



PLANNED OFFICE TOWER AT 3 ST. MARK'S PLACE (L.) AND LANDMARKED HOUSE AT 4 ST. MARK'S PLACE FROM WHICH A DEVELOPER WISHES TO TRANSFER AIR RIGHTS

NEW RESOURCES BRING NEIGHBORHOOD HISTORY TO LIFE

MAPS, TOURS, IMAGES, ORAL HISTORIES HELP HONOR & PRESERVE OUR LEGACY

We continue to add resources to our website viewed by thousands of people which illuminate and celebrate the history of Greenwich Village, the East Village, and NoHo, and make the case for their preservation.

We greatly expanded our **Greenwich Village Historic District Map** (gvshp.org/GVHD50tour) so that it now has over two dozen tours covering nearly 1,000 sites of interest in the district, from homes of artists, writers, and musicians, to Jewish, African American, LGBT, immigration, and Women's history, as well as churches, firehouses, wood frame houses, "little Flatirons," "most charming" spots, and street name origins. This is in addition to then-and-now pictures of every one of 2,200 buildings in the district when landmarked in 1969 and today.

We've added new tours and resources to our **East Village Building Blocks** website (gvshp.org/buildingblocks), which has information on every one of 2,500 buildings in that

neighborhood, including date of construction, architect, original owner and use, alterations over the years, and important figures or events connected to it, as well as present-day and historic images. We have everything from the neighborhood's oldest structure (1795) to those just built. Tours include Loisaida, Little Ukraine, the Yiddish Rialto, Punk Rock, Squats, tenements, music venues, synagogues, and Kleindeutschland. Recent additions include a film of well-known Beat poets at a local watering hole, the home of author Philip Roth, information about the Children's Aid Society and the Hebrew Technical Institute, images of interior mosaic tiles in local tenements, and the history of an early shelter for transgender youth.

We've added several great new **oral histories**, including ones with pioneering Performance Artist Penny Arcade, Strand Bookstore owner Fred Bass, Cooper Square affordable housing advocate Val Orselli, Westbeth artist and tenant advocate George Cominskie, and B&H Dairy owners Ola and Fawzy Abdelwahed. These join over fifty other oral histories with everyone from preservationist Jane Jacobs to musician David Amram, filmmaker Jonas Mekas to photographer Marlis Momber, and dozens of prominent neighborhood merchants, architects, community leaders, and preservationists. Explore them all at gvshp.org/oralhistory.



RFK, BILL PASSANNANTE, AND ED KOCH
PHOTO COURTESY OF THE ESTATE OF FRED W. MCDARRAH

We've also added hundreds of new pictures to our **Historic Image Archive**, now numbering over 2,200 images ranging from the late 18th to the early 21st century. Recent additions focus on dearly departed local businesses, changes to landmarked buildings over time, New York City in the 1980s and 90s, and Fred W. McDarrah images of iconic local residents and visitors including Jane Jacobs, John Belushi, Bobby Kennedy, Ed Koch, Allen Ginsberg, Ellen Stewart, Dustin Hoffman, Jodie Foster, William Burroughs, Norman Mailer, and Robert DeNiro. See them all at archive.gvshp.org.

And we've added dozens of new entries to our **Civil Rights and Social Justice Map** at gvshp.org/civilrightsmap related to the LGBT, African American, Women's, immigrants, and Asian American civil rights movements. We've also begun a **Preservation History Archive** at gvshp.org/presarchive, which includes the records of the West Village Committee and its fight against Westway and work with Jane Jacobs to design and build the West Village Houses; letters from preservationist Otis Pratt Pearsall showing the earliest efforts to landmark Greenwich Village in the 1960s; and Village Preservation's own archives going back to our founding in 1980 as the Greenwich Village Trust, and our early work to extend landmark protections to the Greenwich Village waterfront and create the Sheridan Square Viewing Garden and Jefferson Market Garden Fence.



70 BARROW STREET, FROM OUR 'FIREHOUSES'
TOUR ON GREENWICH VILLAGE HISTORIC
DISTRICT MAP

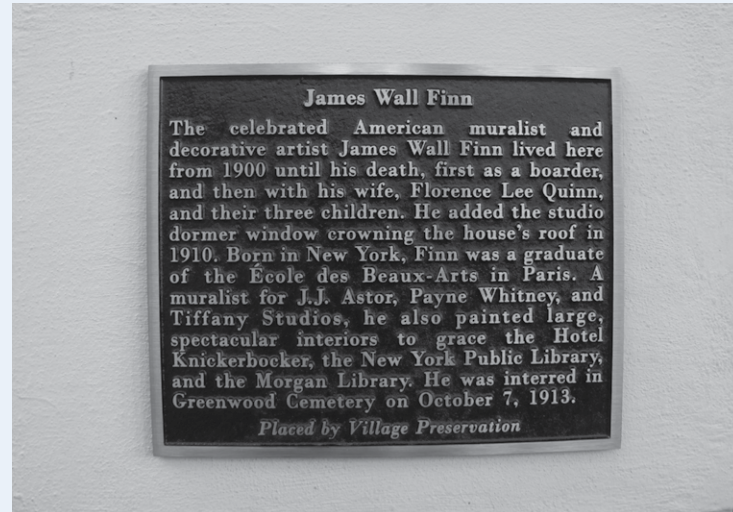


THE FORMER CHILDREN'S AID SOCIETY BUILDING AT 630 EAST 6TH STREET,
FROM OUR BUILDING BLOCKS WEBSITE

IN BRIEF



CHESS FORUM, FEATURED IN OUR SMALL BUSINESS VIDEOS



CELEBRATING SMALL BUSINESSES

AND LANDMARKING

We launched a video campaign promoting local small businesses in landmarked areas and how the two go hand in hand. Our studies have found that landmarked areas have lower retail vacancy rates, and the distinctive historic character of landmarked areas can help draw customers, especially to independent businesses that provide unique services and products.

We started with The Hat Shop, Thompson Alchemist, and Archery NYC, all in the Sullivan Thompson Historic District, and the Chess Shop, located in the South Village Historic District. Each offers one-of-a-kind shopping, and is inspired by and contributes to its historic surroundings.

See them all on our YouTube page at gvshp.org/smallbizvid.

LIMITING CHAIN STORE

PROLIFERATION

We have been working hard to secure measures to limit the spread and concentration of chain stores in our neighborhood, which currently New York City, unlike many other municipalities, does not regulate. Working with allies we have advanced a proposal for such limitations in the East Village, where it has been supported by local merchants and community groups. We recently secured support from the local community board, and are working towards seeing such a measure implemented for the first time anywhere in New York City. If successful, we hope to be able to replicate it and secure similar measures in places like Greenwich Village, working with local residents, merchants, and property owners on the parameters of such regulations there.

See gvshp.org/chainlimit for more info.

PLAQUE HONORS

GREAT MURALIST

As part of our Historic Plaque Program and year-long celebration of the 50th anniversary of the Greenwich Village Historic District, we unveiled a plaque on the former home and studio of great American muralist James Wall Finn at 16 West 9th Street. While far from a household name, Finn was responsible for some of our city's most spectacular works of interior art, including murals on the ceiling of the main branch of the New York Public Library, the Morgan Library and Museum, the New Amsterdam and Lyceum Theaters, and the Knickerbocker Hotel. Special thanks go to homeowners Rob and Nina Kaufelt for their generosity, support, and love of history and neighborhood. This was our fifteenth plaque; prior ones have marked the homes of Jean-Michael Basquiat, the Martha Graham Dance Studio, James Baldwin, Lorraine Hansberry, Elizabeth Blackwell, Frank O'Hara, and the Fillmore East, among other spots.

See more at gvshp.org/plaque.



LUCY & LENNY CECERE WAY

We were proud to see the unveiling of Lucy and Lenny Cecere Way on MacDougal Street south of Houston Street, where the couple lived and owned a business for decades. Village Preservation proposed and launched a petition drive for the street co-naming to honor these quintessential Villagers, who worked tirelessly for their community and provided a beloved local businesses, 'Something Special,' which for many was an extension of their home. Lucy worked throughout her life for services for seniors in the neighborhood and for landmark protections, while husband Lenny ran the family business in the ground floor of their home. Both were the children of Italian immigrants and were very involved in local churches, civic, and veterans' organizations. Lucy was a past Village Award recipient and a member of our South Village Advisory Board.

SUPPORTING MORE PUBLIC REVIEW

FOR REZONINGS AND NEW DEVELOPMENT

Village Preservation endorsed Ballot Measure #5 this past year, which gave New Yorkers more time and information about proposed zoning changes and land use actions in their neighborhoods. These land use measures can have profound impacts upon our communities, and unfortunately most people know too little about the proposed changes and how they can be involved in the approval process. While only a very small step, Ballot Measure 5, approved overwhelmingly by voters in November, is a step in the right direction.

As a 501C3, we cannot and do not endorse or oppose candidates for public office. However we can and do endorse or oppose ballot measures and proposed legislation, and can ask candidates for and publicize their positions on issues of concern to us, and educate the public about elected officials' and candidates' records and positions. We strongly encourage the public and our members to access this information and educate themselves, and to vote at election time.



VILLAGE PRESERVATION DID PUBLIC OUTREACH TO CALL ATTENTION TO THE PLIGHT OF THE YIDDISH WALK OF FAME, NOW LOCATED OUTSIDE A CHASE BANK.

SECURING A FUTURE FOR THE YIDDISH WALK OF FAME

We've been leading a coalition of elected officials, East Village community groups, Jewish history organizations, and the family of Second Avenue Deli owner Abe Lebewohl to try to preserve and find a permanent home for the Yiddish Walk of Fame, installed in the sidewalk in front of the Deli at Second Avenue and 10th Street by Lebewohl in 1984. But the Deli moved uptown more than a decade ago, and the granite markers commemorating the greats of Yiddish Theater, once centered on Second Avenue in the East Village, have become worn and cracked, can't be preserved in place, and no longer have a caretaker.

We're working to find a way to remove the markers from the sidewalk to keep them as intact as possible, and find a permanent home where the damaged originals can be preserved and displayed. We're also seeking a new sidewalk location in the area for a new version of the Walk of Fame made in materials that can last and be permanently maintained in the sidewalk, and to find a permanent caretaker and maintenance fund for them.

For more info or to get involved, see gvshp.org/yiddish.

FROM THE DIRECTOR

ANDREW BERMAN



The 2010s were a decade of great accomplishments for Village Preservation. We secured landmark designation of over 1,000 buildings, from West Street to Avenue D and everywhere in between, including our South Village Historic District, the largest extension of landmark protections in Greenwich Village since 1969. We

secured zoning protections for dozens of blocks in the East and West Village, including protections from air rights transfers from the Hudson River Park. We launched our blog, our Business of the Month program, our historic plaque program, our online historic image archive, our Civil Rights and Social Justice Map, and our continuing education program, digitized almost sixty oral histories, and reached thousands with our kids ed program, our general programming, and our YouTube page.

But the new decade is starting with great challenges too. Developers want to demolish a historic building in the Greenwich Village Historic District and replace it with a 244 ft. tall tower – both of which would set terrible precedents. The area south of Union Square faces increasing tech development pressure and the city continues to resist needed landmark protections. Small businesses are struggling to survive, and we need to demand more landmark protections in the East Village and better enforcement of existing protections in the West Village.

These are big challenges, but we're up to them. I hope you'll join us in ensuring the 2020s are a great decade for preservation of our neighborhoods.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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We also gratefully acknowledge in-kind support from Ancolie, Andrew Lear, Bus Stop Café, Carole Teller, Doyle Partners, the Estate of Fred W. McDarragh, First Republic Bank, Grey Dog, Gourmet Garage, Julius' Bar, Murray's Cheese, The New School, The New York Studio School, St. John's in the Village, Salmagundi Club, The Spaniard, Union Square Events, Veselka, Westside Market, and The Whitney Museum of American Art.

BULLETIN BOARD

SAVE THE DATE

Our Annual Spring Benefit House Tour will be Sunday, May 3.

STAY IN THE KNOW

Join our email list for alerts on critical preservation and development issues—gvshp.org/email.

SEE THE LATEST APPLICATIONS FOR CHANGES TO LANDMARKED PROPERTIES

in our neighborhoods at gvshp.org/lpc.

VISIT OUR BLOG OFF THE GRID

for fun and fascinating glimpses into our neighborhoods' hidden history, eye-catching architecture, and colorful characters—see gvshp.org/blog.

GET WITH THE PROGRAM!

Upcoming lectures, book talks, walking tours, and panel discussions are listed at gvshp.org/programs; past program videos are at gvshp.org/pastprograms.

FOR THE CHILDREN

Our Kids Ed program serves over 1,000 students annually regardless of need, using the Village as a living lab to show how history can be understood from the built environment around them. Find out more at gvshp.org/kidsed.

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