

GREENWICH VILLAGE SOCIETY FOR HISTORIC PRESERVATION

NYU's Expansion Plans Challenged

*Silver Towers Landmarked,
But Demo Plans for Playhouse Advance*

Early this year, NYU announced with much fanfare its agreement with local community groups and elected officials to a new set of "planning principles" to govern its future development as part of its "Plan 2031." GVSHP was one of those local groups, and we fought hard to ensure that prominent amongst the priorities would be re-using existing buildings rather than tearing them down, and seeking locations outside our neighborhoods for NYU's future growth. At first, NYU appeared to be following these commitments closely, announcing that two new dorms would be located in Midtown and Brooklyn.

But then NYU announced plans to tear down the venerable Provincetown Playhouse and Apartments on MacDougal Street, located within the proposed South Village Historic District (the designation of which NYU also promised, reluctantly, to support). GVSHP immediately called NYU on its broken promises, and waged a vigorous campaign to seek changes to the plan. After weeks of fierce criticism, NYU relented somewhat, promising to preserve the theater's interior walls and facade, while demolishing the other 94% of the building for a new law school.

While certainly preferable to NYU's original plan, GVSHP still felt strongly that the new scheme violated NYU's pledges regarding the South Village and re-use before demolition, and would result in the loss of one of the most historically significant buildings in New York City. In fact, as a result of GVSHP's documentation of the entire building's critical history as a cornerstone of Village culture and life, the entire Provincetown Playhouse and Apartments were declared eligible for the State and National Register of Historic Places. Nevertheless, after a vote of approval by the Community Board, NYU moved ahead with its demolition plans.

NYU also skirted its pledges by seeking permission to build a 40-story tower – the tallest ever in the Village – on the open space

around the I.M. Pei-designed Silver Towers on Bleecker Street. GVSHP had pushed to get this complex (primarily owned by NYU) and its Picasso sculpture landmarked since 2003, and NYU had recently 'agreed' to support designation, but then revealed it wanted permission to build on the protected landscaping. GVSHP and others vociferously opposed this plan, and on November 18th the City landmarked the complex, citing the significance of the open space as part of the design, hopefully putting this scheme to rest forever.

GVSHP continues to analyze and respond to NYU's 2031 plan, including publishing op-eds showing that the plan, if left unchecked, would nearly double NYU's speed of growth in our neighborhoods. For more information, see gvshp.org/NYUexpansion.

More inside ▶



GVSHP Exec. Dir. Andrew Berman leading protest against proposed plan for demolition of Provincetown Playhouse and Apartments building (l.); Silver Towers and its Picasso sculpture have been landmarked. (r.).

St. Vincent's Hardship Case Approved

But Many Hurdles Remain Before Hospital and Condo Plan Can Move Ahead

This spring, St. Vincent's Hospital and Rudin Management applied for permission to demolish all nine buildings on the St. Vincent's Hospital campus in the Greenwich Village Historic District. They proposed to replace all buildings east of 7th Avenue with an enormous new condo complex built by Rudin Management, and replace the O'Toole building west of 7th Avenue with a large new hospital. The plan was of an unprecedented scope and scale, and would undoubtedly have set a dangerous precedent.

GVSHP strongly opposed this plan, and refuted the notion that the hospital's East Campus buildings could not be adapted for re-use as residences rather than demolished as proposed, as we have seen done with countless other older buildings throughout our neighborhoods. After multiple public hearings with massive turnout, the Landmarks Preservation Commission (LPC) roundly rejected the plan, specifically saying that five of the nine buildings proposed for demolition were too historically and architecturally significant to be demolished, including the O'Toole Building and the four oldest East Campus buildings.

In spite of initially insisting that it was financially and physically infeasible to re-use the East Campus buildings, Rudin quickly came out with a new plan to preserve the four buildings, and to replace the other four with new residences of a smaller scale than originally proposed. While the new East Campus plan was a vast improvement over the old one, GVSHP nevertheless felt that several key aspects still needed reworking, including a

St. Vincent's / Rudin Proposal - West 12th Street

Existing Conditions



Prior Proposal
(Rejected by LPC)



Current Proposal



further reduction in scale of the proposed new 235 ft. tall 7th Avenue tower, removal of large retail picture windows from 12th Street, and preservation of the Reiss building.

St. Vincent's also quickly filed a hardship application to demolish the O'Toole building, and submitted a revised plan for a new hospital building to replace it, slightly shorter and squatter than the original one (299 vs. 329 ft. tall). By law, if owners can prove they are unable to maintain a landmarked building, they must be granted permission to demolish it, even if it is historically or architecturally significant. Hardship cases have been extremely rare under the landmarks law, and one had not been filed in nearly 20 years.

Hardship cases raise difficult questions, especially in the case of non-profits like St. Vincent's. The hospital argued that in order to fulfill its charitable mission it had to build a new hospital, and the O'Toole site was the only

site where it was feasible to do so (as opposed to claiming that it was financially unable to maintain the building). However, some argued that there were in fact alternative locations for a new hospital which had not been adequately explored, and that a hardship cannot be established if a building was purchased with landmarks regulations in place and the owner could still use the building for the purposes for which it was acquired. GVSHP raised both of these issues in our testimony, and strongly urged the City and State to assist with identifying and acquiring a new hospital site.

However, in a 6 to 4 decision, the LPC voted to approve the hardship demolition application. As we go to press, that decision may be challenged in court, the new hospital and East Campus plans have not yet been approved by the LPC, and the zoning changes required for the plan still require the approval of the City Council and City Planning Commission. For more info, see gvshp.org/StVinc.

East Village Preservation Makes Great Strides

New Zoning Preserves Neighborhood Character While Landmarking Efforts Save Historic Structures

Preservation efforts in the East Village took several giant leaps forward in the last several months. In November, a sweeping rezoning of the neighborhood was enacted, the first since 1961. The City's rezoning grew out of years of work by several local community groups (including GVSHP), local elected officials, and the community board. The plan for the first time ever imposed height limits, capped air rights transfers, eliminated the zoning bonus for hotels and dormitories, and in most areas substantially reduced the bulk of allowable new development. On Avenue D and Houston Street the rezoning did increase the allowable bulk of new development and added bonuses for the inclusion of affordable housing, though GVSHP urged the allowable bulk be reduced.

A major shortcoming of the rezoning, however, was its lack of inclusion of the 3rd and 4th Avenue corridors and the Bowery – areas of the East Village with some of the neighborhood's worst zoning and new development, including 20+ story hotels on the Bowery and a 26-story NYU dorm on East 12th Street. GVSHP spearheaded an effort to include these areas in the rezoning, which the City stubbornly resisted. Lacking City support, GVSHP is working with the community board, other community groups and local elected officials to advance a community-initiated rezoning of the area.

Threats to the neighborhood's historic structures, especially houses of worship, become increasingly frequent, especially just prior to the rezoning which prevents some

but not all new development. This summer, in response to a plan to demolish Mezritch Synagogue at 415 East 6th Street, GVSHP and the East Village Community Coalition (EVCC) immediately filed a request for landmark designation of the building, the last operating “tenement synagogue” in the East Village (so named because these structures filled narrow lots between tenements and historically served nearby immigrant residents). We provided substantial historic research to back up our request and put together a coalition of preservationists, elected officials, and neighborhood and Jewish community leaders who rallied to save the building. As a result, the congregation and a development partner scrapped their demolition plans, though the City has not yet moved forward on landmark designation.

Similarly, when GVSHP and EVCC discovered a plan to construct an 8-story condo on top of the historic Russian Orthodox Cathedral of the Holy Virgin Protection at 59 East 2nd Street, we again immediately filed a request for landmark designation backed up by historic data from our research, and rallied neighborhood, preservationist, and elected official support. The City brokered an agreement with the church barring any construction or demolition from moving ahead until after the rezoning of the neighborhood (which would prevent such development), thus sparing the building, at least for now. Meanwhile, landmark designation is being considered.

To further preserve the East Village's rich historic heritage, GVSHP has been researching and documenting the history of every building in the entire neighborhood. An incredibly generous \$13,000 grant from Preserve NY, a program of the NY State Council on the Arts and Preservation League of NY State, will allow us to hire a respected architectural historian to analyze the data and publish a report with recommendations for landmark protections for the entire neighborhood, a successful strategy we employed for preserving the South Village and Gansevoort Market.

For more info, see gvshp.org/EVil.



The endangered Congregation Mezritch Synagogue on East 7th Street, the East Village's last operating tenement synagogue.



The Westbeth complex; GVSHP is documenting the building's history, while the City is considering possible landmark status.

Far West Village Preservation Battles Continue

*Landmarking Progress Continues,
But City Resists Further Zoning Changes*

GVSHP has focused much of its energy in recent years on preserving the Far West Village, winning a western expansion of the Greenwich Village Historic District and a new Weehawken Street Historic District in 2006, and securing ground-breaking zoning restrictions for much of the neighborhood

in 2005. But even those victories still left some areas vulnerable, and GVSHP continues to work to preserve historically significant buildings and prevent inappropriate development throughout the Far West Village.

In October, the City landmarked the former Devoe Paint Factory at 110-112 Horatio Street, the sole intact surviving remnant of what was once a much larger industrial complex in the neighborhood. The designation is part of the gradual fulfillment of a promise, made by the City to GVSHP in 2005 in response to our campaign to Save the Far West Village, to landmark eight sites in the Far West Village above and beyond the two 2006 historic district designations. These also include the Keller Hotel at 150 Barrow Street, the Henry Wykoff House at 159 Charles Street, and the Edwin Brooks House at 354 West

11th Street, all designated in 2007. Promised by the City but not yet designated are the 13-building, full block Westbeth complex, Charles Lane, and the two 1839 houses at 370 and 372 West 11th Street. Each of these sites tells an important piece of the story of the development of the Village waterfront and of New York City as a whole.

In addition to the proposed landmark designation, GVSHP has been working on thoroughly documenting the history of the Westbeth complex, especially its ground-

breaking conversion from a laboratory for Bell Telephone to the world's first subsidized housing complex for artists, and one of the first-ever large-scale conversions of an industrial building for residential use. With a grant from the J.M. Kaplan Fund, GVSHP is nominating the entire complex for listing on the National Register of Historic Places, which will provide grant opportunities for the complex's upkeep and restoration. We are also conducting oral histories with key players in the development of the complex as an artists' residence, to help honor and illuminate this incredible history. These histories will be made available to the public.

While these efforts progress, needed zoning reforms in the Far West Village have been stymied. GVSHP and community groups have been pushing the City to rezone an anomalous zoning district covering parts of 6 blocks between Washington, Greenwich, West 12th and West 10th Streets which encourages out-of-scale development and gives bonuses for hotel and community facility development (see map p.5). After plans were proposed for a new hotel at 145 Perry Street and for a large and ungainly residential/community facility building at 139 Charles Street, GVSHP began the push to change the zoning to prevent more such developments. The rezoning request has been ignored by the City, but now both projects currently appear to be in a holding pattern.

Similarly, a large planned development at the Whitehall Storage site at 303 West 10th Street, which was carved out by the City from a previous rezoning of the area, also appears to be in limbo. GVSHP also pushed for changes to a plan for a new building at the northwest corner of West 12th and Greenwich Streets. For more info, see gvshp.org/protectingFWV.

Trump SoHo Condo-Hotel and Rezoning Fights Rage On

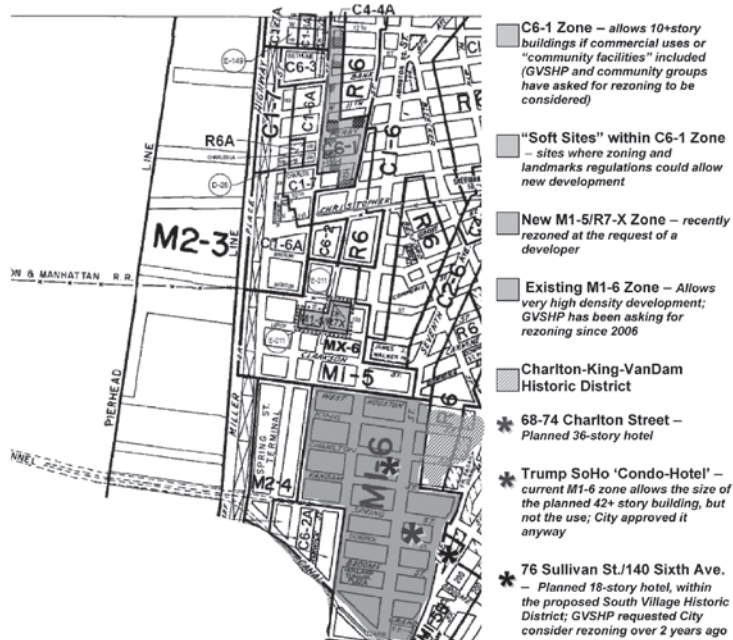
This spring the NYC Board of Standards and Appeals (BSA) upheld the Department of Building's approval of the Trump SoHo Condo-Hotel. Given that the BSA is a fellow city agency, no one was very surprised by this, but the vote did clear the way for a legal challenge of the city's approval in an independent court, which was filed by the SoHo Alliance. GVSHP has long opposed this project and contended that it violated zoning laws.

When the Trump project was approved, the City promised to change zoning regulations regarding condo-hotels to prevent more such projects from moving forward in locations like this. Almost two years later, no such changes have taken place.

When plans for the Trump project were first announced in early 2006, GVSHP also called for a change in the zoning for this area to prevent more out-of-scale development. The City refused to take such an action, claiming that the current zoning needed no changing, but then approved (with modifications) a developer-requested rezoning of a section of the area this summer. GVSHP called the City on this inconsistency, and again pushed for a rezoning of the area that would address overdevelopment concerns, launching a letter-writing campaign.

This fall the City finally seemed to relent slightly, seeking input from community groups about a potential rezoning of the area, although here again the rezoning would be initiated by a developer, Trinity Real Estate.

For more information, see gvshp.org/trump.



South Village Landmarking Progress, and Pitfalls

Just a little over a year after GVSHP formally submitted its South Village landmarking proposal, we received word that the City would begin a survey of the section of the proposed historic district west of 6th Avenue (roughly 1/3 of the district) with an

eye towards landmark designation. The Landmarks Preservation Commission spent much of this year performing the survey, and we hope to have word on next steps the City will take soon. Typically it takes years before the City begins to consider a historic district proposal, and the proposed South Village Historic District is much larger than any the

City has designated in nearly two decades. Nevertheless, we feel very strongly that the entire proposed historic district merits consideration and needs designation as soon as possible.

This feeling is based upon more than just sentiment. GVSHP has discovered plans to tear down an 1861 house at 178 Bleecker Street which is part of a largely intact row of houses in the heart of the proposed historic district. And GVSHP has also discovered plans to erect an 18-story hotel on the site of an old gas station at 76 Sullivan Street; the site is directly across the street from an almost completely intact 19th century streetscape of 3-story houses and 5-story

tenements, some 190 years old. GVSHP has brought these urgent threats to the City's attention and urged that landmarking and zoning protections be put in place immediately to prevent such destruction from taking place.

For more info, see gvshp.org/SoVillage.

In Memoriam 2008

GVSHP Marks The Passing of Preservation Giants: Regina Kellerman, Verna Small, and Margot Gayle

By the time Gina Kellerman helped found GVSHP in 1980 and became its first Executive Director, she had already spent decades toiling in the preservation trenches, having been the Landmarks Preservation Commission's (LPC) first researcher and having uncovered the history of New York's first, long lost Dutch-era City Hall. In her time at the LPC, Gina's work was key to the eventual adoption of the Greenwich Village Historic District in 1969, the city's first large-scale historic district designation and still the largest such district in New York City. While at GVSHP, Gina published *The Architecture of the Greenwich Village Waterfront*, which laid the groundwork for the eventual successful expansion of landmark protections to the Meatpacking District and Far West Village. Preservation was always a labor of love for Gina, as she continued as a consultant on historic property restorations and as a member of the GVSHP Board of Advisors and Preservation Committee. Her loss this spring was felt deeply by GVSHP's staff and board.

Verna Small also helped found GVSHP, as she did a host of other critical Village preservation organizations. She was a key figure in the preservation of Jefferson Market Courthouse and its conversion to a library, as well as a leader in the fight to ensure that the Greenwich Village Historic District was one large, contiguous district, rather than the



Regina Kellerman (l.), Verna Small (c.), and Margot Gayle (r.).

archipelago of eighteen smaller ones City Hall originally proposed. The long-time chair of Community Board 2's Landmarks Committee and an early GVSHP Trustee, Verna was known as a woman of gentility, humor, and an iron will. A homeowner in the South Village, she long championed landmark designation of that area, which is now finally under consideration by the City.

Margot Gayle died this fall shortly after turning 100. Margot was a legend of the New York preservation movement, and is credited with almost single-handedly achieving landmark designation for SoHo, a neighborhood which just a few years earlier Robert Moses had proposed to wipe off the map with his Lower Manhattan Expressway. Her devotion to cast-iron architecture spread beyond the boundaries of SoHo, having co-written in 1974 *Cast Iron Architecture in New York* (and later *Cast Iron Architecture in America*), which changed the way these structures, formerly considered obsolete, were viewed by the public. Margot spearheaded the effort to save Jefferson Market, one of the key early battles of the preservation movement in New York, and founded Friends of Cast Iron Architecture

and the Victorian Society in America. She was also a long-time member of the GVSHP Board of Advisors.

GVSHP is able to memorialize the incredible work of Verna Small and Margot Gayle, and several other pioneers of the Village preservation movement, through oral histories we conducted with them where they tell the story in their own words of their work and the work they witnessed. The transcripts of those oral histories are now for the first time available on our website, and the recordings can be accessed by contacting our office. Gina Kellerman left GVSHP a rich legacy in terms of her research and writings from her time with us, and in the donation of her papers to our archives, which can also be viewed by contacting the GVSHP office. To honor her incredible contributions, this year GVSHP permanently renamed our annual "Front Stoop Award," for excellence in restoration of a historic property, in her honor.

For more information, see gvshp.org/resources/memorial and gvshp.org/resources/oral_his

Landmarked Properties In Danger

GVSHP Fights Possible 'Demolition By Neglect'

Landmark designation does not always mean a historic property is safe forever. Unscrupulous or irresponsible owners may intentionally or through neglect allow a historic building to deteriorate to the point where it is in danger of being lost. GVSHP regularly fights such cases.

One such case is 43 MacDougal Street, a landmarked house on King Street in the King-Charlton-Vandam Historic District. Neglected and abandoned for years by the owner, it has become a breeding ground for rats and been left open to the elements for months at a time, creating a physical danger to the building and its neighbors. GVSHP has consistently pushed the city's Health, Sanitation, Fire, Buildings, Housing, and Landmarks agencies to take action against the owner; this has helped result in some violations being issued, a scaffolding being erected to prevent dangerous falling debris, and the City coming in and sealing up the building to prevent further deterioration. But we continue to push the City to repair the building and bill the owner, and to pursue a "demolition by neglect" case against the owner in court.

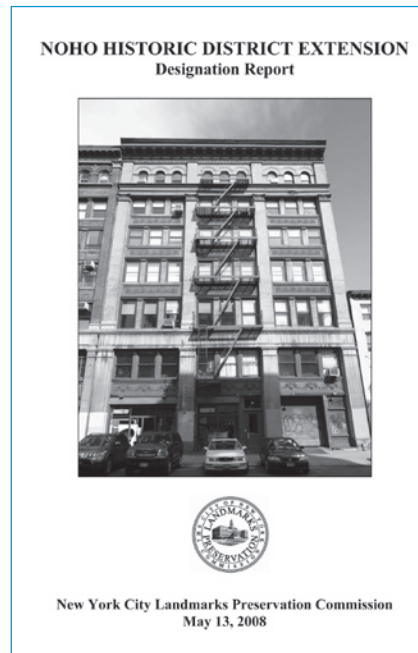
GVSHP has taken similar actions with two landmarked federal houses at 502 and 504 Canal Street, where the owner has also allowed the buildings to seriously deteriorate. GVSHP has worked with neighbors to get "failure to maintain" violations issued and the City to take the owner to court; the owner has been a no-show, so we are pushing to get stronger penalties from the City. At the landmarked former P.S. 64 at 605 East 9th Street, an unscrupulous developer has been

quite public about his intention to let the building deteriorate. He lost his court case to overturn the building's landmark status, and GVSHP is supporting efforts to get the City to take him to court to force repairs.

NoHo Historic District Expanded

Almost 10 Years Later, Designation Completed

In 1999, the NoHo Historic District was designated, covering a little over half this historic neighborhood. At the time, the City promised to follow up with consideration of the remaining undesignated portion of the neighborhood, largely east of Lafayette Street and south of 4th Street.



Years went by without action, however, and an increasing amount of the neighborhood's historic fabric was compromised through demolition and new construction. GVSHP and several local community groups continued to push more NoHo landmark protections, and in 2003 the NoHo East Historic District, covering the Bleecker Street corridor, was designated.

But a large chunk of the neighborhood along the critical Bowery and Bond and Great Jones Street corridors remained unprotected, and the speed of demolition and inappropriate new development increased. Perseverance paid off, however, as early this year the LPC put forward a proposed NoHo Historic District expansion including most, but not all, of the remaining areas of NoHo. GVSHP and other groups and elected officials then pushed to have the boundaries expanded even further, which they ultimately were.

At the City Council, GVSHP successfully fought a hotel developer's efforts to carve the White House Hotel on the Bowery out of the district, and the entire proposed historic district expansion was approved in September. For more info, see gvshp.org/NoHoNews.



The NoHo Historic District was finally extended (l.); 43 MacDougal Street continues to deteriorate despite its landmark status (r.).

New School New Building

GVSHP has been on the front lines in response to plans by the New School for an enormous new “signature building” on 5th Avenue between 13th and 14th Streets. While outside of the Greenwich Village Historic District, the proposed new 350 ft. tall building would require zoning variances to allow it to rise straight up on its site. GVSHP has raised serious concerns regarding the size of the proposed new building, as well as its original all-glass design. The New School initially announced they would file for the variance early this year, later moving that back to the fall. As we go to press the current building on the site has largely been emptied, but no applications for the new building have been filed and the New School says they are waiting for financing to come together, leading some to speculate the plan might be on hold. See gvshp.org/newschooldev.

75 Morton Street

Earlier this year, GVSHP gave strong support to efforts to preserve 75 Morton Street, a 90 year old former warehouse now used as a State office building, for re-use as a school. Earlier this year the State announced its intentions to sell the building, potentially to the highest bidder with no public benefit. GVSHP reached out to the State to urge the building be converted to a local public school, as neighborhood parents groups and elected officials had urged. While the State ultimately did not choose to sell the building to a developer, it will also not be converted to a school, because the City never came forward with an offer to buy the building for that purpose. See gvshp.org/75MortonStreet.

*in
brief*

Pier 40

GVSHP was delighted last spring when the Hudson River Park Trust rejected a plan for a mega-entertainment complex on Pier 40 by the Related Companies – a plan GVSHP strongly opposed. Unfortunately, however, this fall the Trust also rejected a plan by neighborhood parents and the Camp Group for a much lower-impact plan for the pier which would have included public amenities such as schools. This brings us back to square one, as the pier must, by law, support some development to pay for its restoration and for the construction and upkeep of the rest of the park. GVSHP will closely monitor the process to ensure that no plans for the pier overwhelm or threaten the character of the park or surrounding neighborhood. See gvshp.org/Pier40.

More Funding for Landmarks

GVSHP was part of a coalition which again this year successfully fought to secure additional money in the city’s budget for the Landmarks Preservation Commission. While the \$300,000 is only a tiny amount compared to the overall city budget, in recent years it has led to a marked increase in the rate of landmark designations, which is sorely needed. See gvshp.org/preservationfunding.

Preserving Small Businesses

This summer, GVSHP co-sponsored a forum on the plight of small businesses in our neighborhoods, to call attention to their rapid disappearance and to examine potential solutions. Currently, there is no mechanism like landmark designation to save a valued local small business from extinction the way there is for a beloved historic building. In the coming year, GVSHP will be focusing additional attention on this vexing and growing problem.



75 Morton Street—neither sold to the highest bidder nor converted into a school.

From the Director

A lot has certainly happened since our last newsletter. After a five-year campaign, Silver Towers has been landmarked, putting a serious crimp in NYU's plans for the Village's tallest building on at least part of that site. The NoHo Historic District has been expanded, and an attempt to carve a historic hotel out of the district thwarted. In the East Village, a dramatic rezoning preventing much new inappropriate development has passed, several threats to historic churches and synagogues have been blocked, and GVSHP has received a grant allowing us to do a historic resources survey of and make landmarking recommendations for the entire neighborhood. The plan for wholesale demolition of nine buildings in the Greenwich Village Historic District by Rudin and St. Vincent's was rejected. And new landmark designations continue in the Far West Village, fulfilling commitments GVSHP won in 2005.



Of course, not all the news has been good. Though we were able to get modifications to their plans, NYU is moving ahead with demolition of 94% of the Provincetown Playhouse and Apartments, violating commitments made to the community. The East Village rezoning left out the Bowery and 3rd and 4th Avenue corridors, leaving them vulnerable to further overdevelopment. The City granted St. Vincent's a hardship exemption that could set some potentially very troubling precedents, and the revised Rudin condo proposal, while a significant improvement over the original, still needs substantive changes. The City has been slow or unwilling to respond to calls for needed rezonings in the Far West Village and Hudson Square. And while bad development plans for Pier 40 and 75 Morton Street have been blocked, community-friendly plans for schools and other lower-impact uses at those locations have also been rejected, leaving their ultimate fates in doubt.

These are trying times for everyone, including non-profits like GVSHP. But it can also be a time of important opportunities. The City is taking a serious look at our South Village Historic District proposal, which would go a long way towards protecting the areas left out of the Greenwich Village Historic District since 1969. Over the next year and a half we will mark the 40th anniversary of the Greenwich Village Historic District and the 30th anniversary of GVSHP. With hard work and your continued strong support, I am hopeful that we will be able to also mark some historic new accomplishments as well.

Announcement Board

Want to help make GVSHP's 11th Annual Benefit House Tour possible, AND receive complimentary admission to the tour? If you're available Sunday, May 3, become a docent—contact docents@gvshp.org or 212/475-9585 x39.

Would you like to spread the word about GVSHP, and help us build a stronger preservation organization? Host a "friendraiser," inviting friends and neighbors to come hear from GVSHP representatives who will discuss our programs and latest initiatives, and how to get involved or help. To find out more or arrange one, contact gvshp@gvshp.org or 212/475-9585 x32, or go to gvshp.org/friendraiser.

GVSHP's Children's Education Program has expanded—new teachers, new materials, and new curricula! Children can now learn about the Village's immigrant history, and how Bleecker Street transformed from farmland to urban cityscape. If you want to find out more about the program, or how your child's class can enroll, go to gvshp.org/kidsed or call 212/475-9585 x34.

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Your support makes GVSHP a more effective preservation leader. Contribute \$500 or more, and receive an invitation to a special event at a unique Village location.

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