



# GREENWICH VILLAGE SOCIETY FOR HISTORIC PRESERVATION

## South Village Landmarking Moves Ahead, Slowly

*Losses Continue As Timeframe for  
Designation Remains in Doubt*

In late 2009 we moved closer to securing landmark protections for the South Village, and the largest expansion of landmark protections downtown since 1969. But the slow pace of progress by the city and a willingness to approve oversized new developments meant further serious losses could precede any advances.

In late 2006, GVSHP submitted a formal proposal to the city for landmark designation of 38 blocks and about 750 buildings in the South Village. In early 2008 the city's Landmarks Preservation Commission (LPC) committed to GVSHP to start this process by reviewing the first third of our proposed district, the area west of 6th Avenue. This summer, the LPC 'calendared,' or began formal consideration of a proposed district which included about 85% of the area we urged be landmarked in that first third west of 6th Avenue.

In November of this year, the LPC held a hearing on the proposed district. GVSHP and its members turned out in force; the hearing lasted for several hours, with by far the majority of speakers calling for the LPC

to not only move on landmarking the proposed area right away, but to also consider and landmark the remaining two-thirds of GVSHP's proposed South Village Historic District as soon as possible.

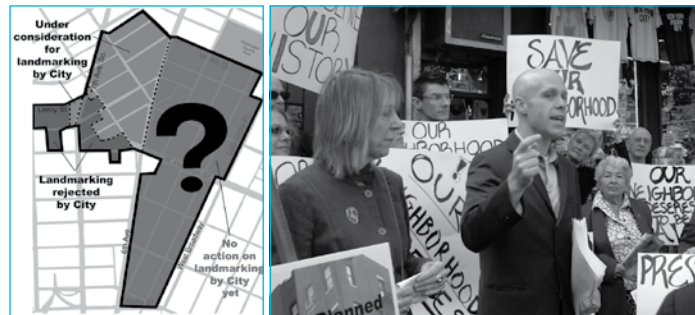
However, the LPC chair said that he did not expect a vote on the proposal until the spring, many months after the hearing. He also said that the LPC had begun to survey part of the South Village not yet being considered. Unfortunately this only applied to part of the South Village, with the remainder needing to wait for a later "stage," with no time frame yet provided. GVSHP called upon the LPC to survey and act upon the entire remaining two-thirds of the South Village right away, and has asked our local elected officials to do the same.

While some progress is heartening, there is

also deep concern about the ongoing destruction of historic sites in the South Village, and more which may happen without action by the city. At 178 Bleecker Street, one of a row of 1861 houses, the city not only refused to prevent a new owner from demolishing the structure, but also approved plans for an oversized 8-story building on the site which GVSHP contended violated zoning restrictions (GVSHP has called upon the Mayor to reverse this decision, and asked local elected officials to do the same). The city also refused to move the proposed South Village landmark designations ahead quickly enough to prevent a developer from getting approvals for a new 7-story building adjacent to a row of 3-story, nearly-200 year old houses.

This came on the heels of a series of demolitions and alterations throughout the South Vil-

lage in recent months, which seem to have accelerated since the city announced it was considering landmark designation in the South Village without taking any action to prevent them. In response, GVSHP held a press conference in front of 178 Bleecker Street calling upon the city to take swifter action to protect the neighborhood, and called attention to buildings that had been lost or compromised while the city has waited on landmarking. See [gvshp.org/sv](http://gvshp.org/sv).



**Only part of the South Village is currently being considered for landmark designation by the city (l.); GVSHP Exec. Dir. Andrew Berman led a demonstration decrying the increasing rate of loss in the South Village without action by the city, including the demolition of 178 Bleecker Street (r.).**

## NYU Breaks Promises, Hedges on “2031” Plan

*GVSHP Continues to Push for More Accountability, Less Expansion from University*

GVSHP continues to lead the effort to push NYU to reduce or eliminate planned expansion in our neighborhoods, and to abide by commitments it made to us and other community groups in early 2008 to seek locations outside our neighborhoods for future developments and to “prioritize re-use before new development.”

This summer GVSHP, Greenwich Village Block Associations, and a dozen other community groups co-sponsored a Town Hall meeting on NYU’s development and expansion plans. Over 250 people attended to learn more about how NYU’s projected growth in our neighborhoods would be roughly double the rate of the last several decades (a fact which NYU’s draft “2031” plan failed to mention). The meeting also covered how NYU has been consistently ignoring promises they made with recent development proposals by failing to “prioritize re-use [of existing buildings] before new development” and “cultivating locations outside of” the Village, East Village, and NoHo for future development.

Following the Town Hall, GVSHP collected and delivered several hundred letters to members of the Borough President’s NYU Community Task Force, with whom NYU made these agreements (and of which GVSHP is a member). The letters urged the Task Force to insist that NYU keep its promise to look outside of our neighborhoods if it is to expand, and preserve rather than demolish buildings in our neighborhood. Unfortunately,

the university has been doing exactly the opposite.

Three years after they were supposed to, NYU has still not released its final “2031” plan, though they now say they expect to in early 2010.

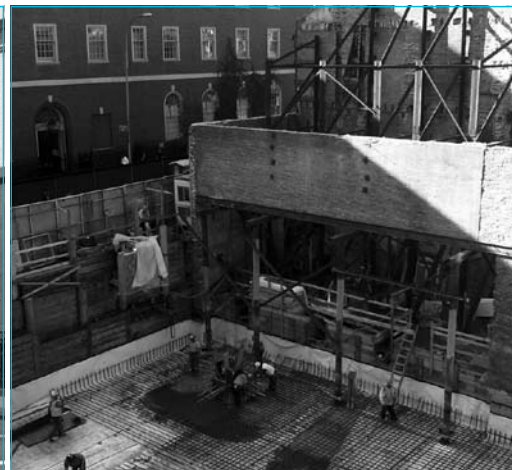
GVSHP also exposed a startling example of NYU’s failure to maintain its commitments this summer when we found that, hidden behind construction walls, NYU had demolished parts of the tiny shell of the Provincetown Playhouse theater which it had promised to preserve.

GVSHP had not supported NYU’s plan to demolish 95% of the historic Provincetown Playhouse and Apartments building, as the entire building was of tremendous historic significance. Furthermore, we were skeptical of NYU’s promises to preserve just the four bare walls and entryway of the tiny theater section of the building. This promise was compelling to those who did support the plan, however, including the Community Board and

the Borough President. GVSHP’s revelation of the broken promise sparked a firestorm of condemnation of the university.

In the fall, NYU revealed plans for a new ‘Academic and Spiritual Center’ on the site of the recently demolished NYU Catholic Center on Washington Square South. GVSHP raised several concerns about the design, including how the building would overshadow narrow adjacent Thompson and West 3rd Streets in the South Village. But the Society also raised more fundamental concerns about the university putting forward yet another plan for replacing an existing building with a new and larger one without any real discussion of re-use or why the new facility could not be located elsewhere, as the “planning principles” indicated they should. The proposed new building would require several zoning variances. As we go to print, the public hearing process for the needed variances had not yet begun.

For more information, see [gvshp.org/nyu](http://gvshp.org/nyu).



**GVSHP exposed that behind construction walls (l.), NYU had destroyed parts of the walls of the Provincetown Playhouse Theater it promised to preserve (r.).**

## Spotlight On: The Far West Village

**Westbeth:** For nearly 100 years, Bell Telephone had their labs in the Far West Village, in a complex of buildings at West and



**GVSHP successfully nominated Westbeth for the State and National Register of Historic Places (photo by Barry Munger).**

Bethune Streets. Many great technological innovations were invented there, such as the transistor radio, the transatlantic telephone, and the first motion picture with sound.

But by 1965 Bell moved to New Jersey, and the enormous complex lay fallow. Thanks to some visionary planners, funders, arts advocates, and a young unknown architect named Richard Meier, however, the complex eventually took on a new life as Westbeth, the country's first subsidized affordable housing for artists and the first large-scale conversion of an industrial building for residential use. Westbeth began a revolution in adaptive re-use that not only transformed the Far West Village, but the life of post-industrial neighborhoods and cities throughout the world.

The story of how this daring project came to be had really not been fully told, nor its impact fully recognized. Thus in 2006, with a grant from the J.M. Kaplan Fund, a key player in Westbeth's founding, GVSHP set about to thoroughly document the story, through research and interviews with central figures in the project, including Merce Cunningham and Richard Meier. The research also became the basis for our successful nomination this fall of Westbeth to the State and National Register of Historic Places, which will qualify the complex for grants and loans for preservation and restoration work.

GVSHP has also long advocated for landmark designation for the complex, which the city promised to do in 2004 but never implemented. Following GVSHP's State and National Register success, however, the city finally acted, and 'calendared,' or began the formal process of considering, the complex for landmark designation.



**The city cut down but ultimately approved variances for the planned glass tower at 437 W. 13th Street.**

See [gvshp.org/westbeth](http://gvshp.org/westbeth) for more info, the full Westbeth history, and audio or text of the interviews.

**437 West 13th Street:** GVSHP led the battle against proposed variances for a 250 ft. tall glass tower with a huge 3-story "big-box" retail space in its base – 66% larger than allowed by zoning and with triple

the allowable retail space. We argued that the oversized building and retail space would hurt neighborhood character and increase traffic. As we fought, the developer gradually reduced the size of the requested variance from 66% to 24%, and the retail space from triple to double the allowable size. While GVSHP remained steadfast in its opposition to any variances

(or zoning exemptions) for the size of the building or its retail space, in November the city's Board of Standards and Appeals approved the smaller plan. See [gvshp.org/437w13](http://gvshp.org/437w13).

### Far West Village

**Rezoning:** For more than a year and a half, GVSHP and allied community groups waged a campaign to get the city to change the zoning for a 'C6-1' district in a 6-block area between Washington, Greenwich, West 10th and West 12th Streets which encourages out-of-scale commercial development.

While initially spurred by a plan for a 100 ft. tall hotel at Perry and Washington Streets (which has since been reduced to a smaller hotel/residential townhouse project, the fate of which is unclear), a survey performed by GVSHP found at least a dozen other potential future development sites in the six block zone. After initially turning a deaf ear, in November the city finally agreed to make the zoning change GVSHP and community groups had long requested; the review and approval process for the change will likely not be completed until late 2010. See [gvshp.org/fwvz](http://gvshp.org/fwvz).



**The C6-1 zone the city has now agreed to rezone, with GVSHP's analysis of potential development sites.**

## Spotlight On: West and Central Village

**St. Vincent's:** From the beginning, GVSHP has sought to educate the public and government officials about the implications of the massive St. Vincent's/Rudin project, and to ensure that the need for preservation, respect for the landmarks law, and sound neighborhood planning were balanced with plans for a modernized hospital. GVSHP has called for many changes to the hospital and condo development plan, such as re-using many of the hospital's buildings rather than demolishing them, and reducing the size and improving the design of the proposed new buildings. Through the Landmarks Preservation Commission approval process, some of the changes we called for were implemented, while others were not.

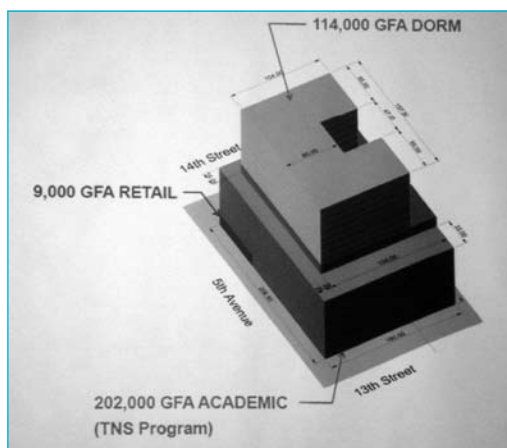
But GVSHP fundamentally disagreed with the LPC's basis for finding a 'hardship' to exempt St. Vincent's O'Toole building from landmarks requirements and allow its demolition. While GVSHP did not find the O'Toole building to be of special significance, the LPC did, and no building determined by the LPC to be significant within a designated historic district can be demolished unless there is a finding of 'hardship.' GVSHP and many other preservation groups felt that the LPC determined a 'hardship' in this case based on criteria which contradicts the law and prior court cases (incl. Supreme Court cases), potentially opening the door to other non-profits or institutions in similar circumstances being given a way around landmarks requirements and demolishing buildings.

The LPC's hardship finding is being challenged by a lawsuit. In November,

GVSHP signed on to an amicus brief filed in the case arguing that the LPC was incorrect in its basis for finding a hardship, and that the criteria used would undermine the efficacy of the landmarks law. The case is expected to take some time before it is decided.

As we go to press, the second phase of the approval process for the St. Vincent's Hospital/Rudin Condo project, the required zoning changes, was just beginning. Over the next several months, public hearings and votes on the application will be held by the Community Board, Borough President, City Planning Commission, and City Council. See [gvshp.org/stv](http://gvshp.org/stv).

**New School:** After dropping plans criticized by GVSHP and many neighbors for a massive, all-glass, 350 ft. tall building with no setbacks on 5th Avenue between 13th and 14th Streets, this fall The New School, at the request of Councilmember Mendez, gave a very preliminary glimpse at their new thinking for a much more modestly-scaled building for the site. The new plan was considerably shorter and less massive, with setbacks above the 7th



**Preliminary massing diagram of new version of New School plan for 5th Avenue and 13th Street.**

floor allowing more light and air to filter down. The new building would also be part dorm, part classrooms. Final plans and a design were not yet decided, and The New School committed to present such details to the public in the coming months as soon as they were available. See [gvshp.org/NS](http://gvshp.org/NS).



**One version of the MTA's proposed Emergency Ventilation Shaft structure for Mulry Square.**

**Mulry Square:** This summer the MTA put forward several versions of a plan to build a new 4-story 'Emergency Ventilation Shaft' on their open lot at Greenwich Avenue and 7th Avenue South. GVSHP has been a consistent critic of the plan, for reasons including the lack of consideration of other locations, the elimination of a "below-ground" option for the structure, and the poor quality of the design, which is intended to not only house the structure but the 9-11 memorial tiles currently hung along the fence surrounding the site.

While the project was supposed to move ahead this fall, the plan appears to be in a holding pattern, with funding unsure during the current fiscal crisis. GVSHP will continue to monitor the situation and push for changes to the plan. See [gvshp.org/mtams](http://gvshp.org/mtams).



## Spotlight On: East Village

**Zoning Protection Progress:** GVSHP was a key player in the successful push for a rezoning of the East Village last year, which for the first time reduced the size and height of allowable new development and eliminated the zoning bonus for dorms and hotels throughout much of the neighborhood. But we also criticized the city for not including the 3rd and 4th Avenue corridors and the Bowery in the rezoning plan, and for keeping outdated zoning which encourages out-of-scale and out-of-character development in these areas, including a recent spate of 20+ story dorms and hotels.

GVSHP worked with neighbors, Community Board 3, and Councilmember Rosie Mendez to formulate an alternative rezoning plan for the 3rd and 4th Avenue corridors. Councilmember Mendez got the city to meet with us about the plan, and to eventually agree to some of the changes we had all called for. New zoning for these four blocks between 9th and 13th Streets which the city agreed to implement would impose some height caps for the first time, eliminate the hotel and dorm bonus, and require new development to better fit the character of the neighborhood. We expect the new zoning to be implemented by mid-2010. GVSHP continues to call for similar changes for the Bowery, which the city has not yet agreed to. See [gvshp.org/evz](http://gvshp.org/evz).

### Landmarks Progress, and Frustration:

Several important buildings were landmarked in the East Village in 2009, including several GVSHP led the charge to save.

In October, the city began formal consideration of landmark designation of the 1891 Russian Orthodox Cathedral at 59 East 2nd Street, a building which GVSHP, the East Village

Community Coalition and Councilmember Mendez successfully fought to prevent an 8-story condo from being erected atop. We had also asked the city to landmark the beautiful and historic structure; a hearing should be scheduled for early 2010.

The city also landmarked the Isaac T. Hopper House at 110 2nd Avenue (at 7th Street), a rare surviving 1838 Greek Revival home from the earliest stages of the East Village's urban development. The building also has a remarkable history as home for over a century to the Women's Prison Association, an

building's impressive architecture, as well as its cultural significance from the late 19th century through the present.

Unfortunately there was no progress from the city on landmark designation for three other East Village sites proposed by GVSHP: 101 Avenue A, a model tenement which early on housed German social clubs and later the groundbreaking Pyramid Club; 128 East 13th Street, the city's last surviving horse auction mart building, former studio of artist Frank Stella, and World War II women's assembly-line training center; and Congregation



**LaMaMa Experimental Theater, formerly the Aschenbroedel Verein (l.) landmarked; Russian Orthodox Cathedral (m.) calendared for landmarking (photo by Barry Munger); Mezritch Synagogue (r.) not yet being considered for landmarking (photo by Barry Munger).**

organization with Quaker/Abolitionist origins and a groundbreaking progressive social agenda. GVSHP gave the house a "Village Award" in early 2009 to highlight this impressive history and the landmarking proposal.

In late 2009 the city landmarked the LaMaMa Experimental Theatre at 74 East 4th Street, built in 1873 for the Aschenbroedel Verein, a German cultural organization, at a time when the Lower East Side was dominated by German immigrants. GVSHP strongly supported landmark designation, which recognizes the

Mezritch Synagogue at 415 East 6th Street, the East Village's last operating tenement synagogue. Plans to demolish Mezritch were shelved after protests by GVSHP and others in 2008; 101 Avenue A fortunately faces no known immediate threats; and 128 E. 13th Street appears to have been renovated for a permanent new use as a dance studio following GVSHP's successful efforts to get the city to block demolition plans. But only landmark status, which we continue to pursue for each, will help ensure these buildings' permanent preservation. See [gvshp.org/ev](http://gvshp.org/ev).

## Federal Houses Progress

Preservation of federal-era (1790-1835) houses in Lower Manhattan has long been a priority for GVSHP, and since 2003 we have worked with the NY Landmarks Conservancy to seek landmark designation for 13 such houses. Over five years, seven have been designated, on MacDougal Street, St. Mark's Place, and Greenwich Street. There was more progress in 2009, as another of our 13 houses at 94 Greenwich Street near Ground Zero was designated, a hearing on another at 57 Sullivan Street at the southern end of the South Village/SoHo was held, and yet another, 7 Leroy Street was included in the city's proposed South Village extension of the Greenwich Village Historic District. See [gvshp.org/fed](http://gvshp.org/fed).



Federal House at 7 Leroy Street, under consideration for landmark designation.

## Seeking Restoration of 43 MacDougal

It's hard to describe any news as good when it's about 43 MacDougal Street, the decaying, vermin-infested landmarked 1846 house GVSHP and neighbors have spent years pushing the owner and city to repair. But there is some progress to report. After many months of pressure by GVSHP, this summer the city agreed to begin to initiate a "demolition by neglect" case against the owner – the strongest legal tool the city has to compel an owner of a landmarked property to restore and repair their building. And the city finally got the owner to respond to a request we had been making for months – to clean out the building of years of accumulated refuse which threatened not only the safety of the building but the health of neighbors as well. GVSHP is continuing to push for full restoration of the building and payment of the more than \$120,000 in fines owed to the city. See [gvshp.org/43macd](http://gvshp.org/43macd).

## Preserving Small Businesses

In the last several years, GVSHP has made a priority of trying to address the problem of disappearing small businesses in our neighborhoods. This fall we held three panel discussions on the issue, one focusing on 8th Street, one on potential legislative remedies to address the problems faced by small businesses, and one looking at the 'art' of the small business storefront. GVSHP has included small business owners, legislators, and community leaders in these discussions, and has been working with a citywide coalition of groups looking for ways to preserve and promote small businesses in our neighborhoods. Look for more such programming, or contact [smb@gvshp.org](mailto:smb@gvshp.org) for further info.

*in  
brief*

## League of Preservation Voters

For the first time in 2009 GVSHP participated in this effort to educate the public and candidates for office about preservation issues, co-hosting a series of City Council candidate forums and Mayoral candidate breakfasts. We also helped create a candidate questionnaire which was made available to the public through our website, and which provided candidates' answers and positions on key preservation issues. The response from the public was huge and participation by Mayoral and Council candidates was strong, with just a few incumbents declining to take part. See [gvshp.org/vote](http://gvshp.org/vote).

## Fighting Illegal Billboards

GVSHP continued to successfully target illegal billboards throughout our neighborhoods. This fall and summer we helped secure removal of billboards (some up to 4 stories in height) in the West, South, and East Village and Meatpacking District. For more info or to report an illegal billboard, see [gvshp.org/blbd](http://gvshp.org/blbd).

## Legislative Roundup

GVSHP strongly supported a bill introduced by Councilmember Rosie Mendez which would close a loophole in the landmarks law allowing demolition or alteration of landmarked properties with pre-existing building permits. After a fierce outcry led by GVSHP following hearings in the spring, no vote was held on a City Council bill to allow billboards on scaffoldings – a measure we contended would encourage the proliferation of both types of eyesores. With the sponsor of the bill leaving the Council at the end of the year, the bill dies unless re-introduced in the new session.

## From the Director

Anyone who thought the economic slowdown would mean less work for GVSHP in 2009 was sadly mistaken.

In spite of the challenging economic circumstances, we have had to face big new development plans in the Meatpacking District, a spate of demolitions in the South Village, and long-range expansion plans by NYU, St. Vincent's, and the New School. In part because of the tough economic times, demand for our free or low cost programs, including our children's education program, has skyrocketed.

But somehow, GVSHP is managing, doing more with less and working on more fronts than ever. We now conduct about 50 lectures, walking tours, panel discussions and other programs a year – more than five times the number we did just a few years ago. Our children's education program is serving students from all five boroughs with an expanded range of curricula dealing with topics from immigration to urban development. And in spite of uphill battles, we have had some impressive successes in just the last few months, getting the city to agree to much-needed zoning changes they previously ignored in the Far West and East Village, starting progress on our South Village Historic District proposal, and adding new landmark protections in the West and East Villages.

All this bodes well as we enter 2010, our 30th anniversary year. GVSHP will be marking three decades of educating about and advocating for what makes our historic neighborhoods so special. I hope you'll join the celebration!



## Acknowledgements

GVSHP gratefully acknowledges the following for grants supporting our work: The Kaplen Foundation; the New York City Department of Cultural Affairs; the Norcross Wildlife Foundation; and TD Bank and the TD Charitable Foundation.

We also wish to acknowledge the generous support of: State Senator Tomas K. Duane and Assemblymember Deborah Glick through the NYS Office of Parks, Recreation, and Historic Preservation; City Council Speaker Christine Quinn through the NYC Department of Cultural Affairs; Manhattan Borough President Scott Stringer through the NYC Department of Education; and City Councilmember Rosie Mendez through the NYC Department of Youth and Community Development.

## GVSHP Bulletin Board

**Save The Date: Sunday, May 2, 2010** is **GVSHP's 11th Annual Benefit House Tour**. Would you like to offer your home for this or future tours? Would you like to serve as a volunteer docent, helping to make this annual fundraiser possible and gaining free admission to the tour? Contact [tour@gvshp.org](mailto:tour@gvshp.org).

**Want to 'give back' to GVSHP?** We are looking for volunteers for everything from envelope stuffing to research to public relations, videotaping, and graphic design. If you have some time or a special skill you'd like to share with GVSHP, see [gvshp.org/vol](http://gvshp.org/vol) or contact [gvshp@gvshp.org](mailto:gvshp@gvshp.org). Or host a "friendraiser" for GVSHP – invite your friends and neighbors to a casual event in your home to hear from the Society about the work we do, and allow us to answer their questions and hear their concerns. See [gvshp.org/fr](http://gvshp.org/fr) or contact [gvshp@gvshp.org](mailto:gvshp@gvshp.org).

**Missed a GVSHP Program?** Photos, transcripts, and even audio of most recent GVSHP programs are now on-line at [gvshp.org/pastprog](http://gvshp.org/pastprog).

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OUR 30TH ANNIVERSARY YEAR 1980-2010



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