



# GREENWICH VILLAGE SOCIETY FOR HISTORIC PRESERVATION

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## St. Vincent's/Rudin Condo & Hospital Plan Goes to Landmarks

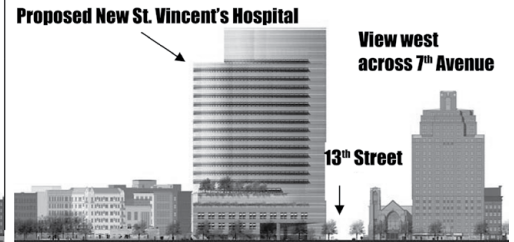
*Precedent-Setting 1.3 mil. sq. ft.  
Proposal Faces Stiff Opposition*

On April 2nd, GVSHP and its members were among several hundred people who turned out for an all-day hearing by the Landmarks Preservation Commission (LPC) on the proposal by the Rudin Company and St. Vincent's Hospital to demolish nine buildings in the Greenwich Village Historic District. The proposal would replace the eight hospital buildings east of 7th Avenue with luxury condos, and the one hospital building west of 7th Avenue with a new hospital tower. The condo plan includes a 265 ft. tall building on 7th Avenue, while the new hospital would be 330 feet tall. If approved, these would be two of the largest buildings ever erected in Greenwich Village, and the two largest buildings ever approved by the LPC for any of New York City's 90 historic districts, including those in Midtown and the Financial



District. Never in the 43 year history of New York City's landmarks law has anyone ever asked for—much less received—permission to demolish nine buildings of this size and age in a landmark district (only buildings found not to contribute to the special character of a historic district can be demolished, unless there is a finding of “economic hardship”).

Because of the precedent-setting nature of this proposal, GVSHP has been on the front lines of this battle, and has reached out across the city to garner support from other neighborhood groups and preservationists. The effort has been extremely successful; in addition to the hundreds who came to the LPC hearing, GVSHP played a key role in turning out over a thousand people to two Community Board hearings, including leaders from other neighborhood groups who recognize the huge precedent this plan could set for their neighborhoods if approved. At each of these three hearings, by far the majority of those in attendance expressed opposition to the proposal. GVSHP has also provided materials



to the public to give an accurate picture of what the proposed new buildings would look like in context, including a 360° animated model of the planned buildings and their surroundings, which can be viewed at [www.youtube.com/gvshp](http://www.youtube.com/gvshp).

It may be some time before the LPC comes to a decision on this very complicated proposal; they may reject or accept it entirely, or accept some parts and ask for modifications to others. If the LPC rejects all or part of the plan, Rudin and St. Vincent's can amend the plan and reapply, or file a hardship case and seek to prove that either financial need or fulfillment of their charitable mission requires that they be relieved of landmarks requirements. However, anything approved by the LPC or granted hardship exemptions will still require zoning changes. This means public hearings and a vote of approval by the City Council and the City Planning Commission will be required, giving the public a continued opportunity to have an impact on the outcome.

See [www.gvshp.org/StVincents.htm](http://www.gvshp.org/StVincents.htm)

## South Village Landmarking Plan Progresses

### City Takes First Steps As Threats To Neighborhood Grow

GVSHP got some very encouraging news earlier this year when the Landmarks Preservation Commission (LPC) informed us they would begin the process of considering our proposal for a South Village Historic District by surveying the area west of 6th Avenue this spring and summer for potential historic district designation. This is especially encouraging news given that the landmark proposal had only been submitted a little over a year earlier (such proposals often take several years or even decades before the City considers them, if at all), and that the current LPC has already designated two historic districts, one historic district extension, and more than a half dozen individual landmarks in Greenwich Village in the last five years—among the most (if not the most) of any neighborhood in the city.

A survey is a first step the LPC takes before considering landmarking an area, but it does not guarantee an outcome. And while the LPC has committed to examine the area west of 6th Avenue, they have not yet made any commitment for the remaining 2/3 of the proposed South Village Historic District (due to the LPC's limited resources, they typically consider large proposals like the South Village in stages rather than all at once). GVSHP responded by urging the Commission to conduct the survey of the area west of 6th Avenue and landmark it as quickly as possible, and to survey and designate the remainder of the district as soon as possible as well. Special thanks go to State Senator Tom Duane for joining us in this request. GVSHP also submitted the historic research

we have compiled on each of the proposed historic district's 750 buildings to the LPC, which will make their survey work and review of the area for landmark status easier and, we hope, quicker.

Action cannot come too soon, as threats to the area continue to grow. New developments are being planned along 6th Avenue near Vandam and between Broome and Spring Streets, and we are very concerned that such developments may be grossly out-of-character for the area. Additionally, several wonderful 19th and early 20th century buildings remain under threat throughout the proposed district, and we do not want them to meet the same fate as the Circle in the Square Theatre, Poe House, Sullivan Street Playhouse, or Tunnel Garage—all historic South Village buildings GVSHP fought to save which were lost in the last several years. For more information or to help, see [www.gvshp.org/southvillage.htm](http://www.gvshp.org/southvillage.htm)

GVSHP also continues to battle against the development at 159 Bleecker Street, the site of the former Circle in the Square Theatre in the South Village. This outsized and inappropriate building was given a zoning bonus to build larger than normally allowed by the City because the developer claimed it would contain a "community facility"—in this case, a dorm. But GVSHP exposed the



Funding for GVSHP's South Village report was provided by Preserve New York, a grant program of the Preservation League of NY State and the NY State Council on the Arts.

supposed dorm as an apparent sham and charged that the building as constructed didn't match filed plans and had illegally large balconies. The City has forced some changes to be made to the building, and four years after it was built it has still been denied a permanent certificate of occupancy. But GVSHP continues to push to get the development to conform to the neighborhood's zoning limits.

See [www.gvshp.org/Circletheater.htm](http://www.gvshp.org/Circletheater.htm)

## Continuing to Push for Limits on NYU Growth in Neighborhood

*'Planning Principles,' Silver Towers Landmarking Restrict University's Expansion*

Earlier this year NYU agreed to a series of “planning principles” which grew out of negotiations with Borough President Scott Stringer’s NYU Community Task Force, of which GVSHP is a member. The principles put a priority on finding sites outside of our neighborhoods to accommodate the university’s future growth (which GVSHP worked very hard to ensure was among the most important principles), re-using buildings before considering new development, and supporting efforts to sustain local retail. The good news is that this seems to have already had a positive effect—a new NYU graduate dorm will be located in Brooklyn and an undergraduate dorm will be located on East 23rd Street. This stands in marked contrast to NYU’s most recent dorm project, located on the site of the demolished historic St. Ann’s church on East 12th Street over community protests.

In another very positive development, the City is finally moving forward on GVSHP’s proposal to landmark the NYU-owned, I.M. Pei-designed Silver Towers complex, including the Picasso sculpture “Sylvette.” This will not only honor and protect this watershed design, but will likely make NYU’s plans to add large new developments to the complex’s central plaza and green spaces difficult or impossible. The City does not intend to include the Coles Gym and supermarket site in the designation (which GVSHP originally proposed), thus leaving development on these sites a possibility. But we believe that the likely landmarking of the Silver Towers complex will provide leverage to

insist that any new development on adjacent sites not overwhelm or disrespect its design. A hearing on the landmarking proposal is expected in June. For more information, see [www.gvshp.org/SilverTowers.htm](http://www.gvshp.org/SilverTowers.htm)

Of course there are many other unsettled issues with NYU. The university’s 2031 plan envisions the addition of 6 million square feet of space in the next 25 years, of which President Sexton originally said as much as half might “need” to be in and around their main campus. GVSHP protested this, pointing out that it amounted to the equivalent of 17 more of NYU’s recently-built 26-story dorms on East 12th Street. However, in recent presentations of its 2031 plan, NYU has revised that number up to as much as 3.5 million square feet, which research conducted by GVSHP shows is actually the equivalent of all the new NYU buildings constructed in our

neighborhood over the last 40 years. This shows that while the university has tried to give the impression that its growth will slow significantly over the next 23 years, they may actually plan to accelerate, not slow down, their growth in our neighborhood. Additionally, there have been recent indications that NYU may be considering demolishing the Provincetown Playhouse and evicting a neighborhood supermarket on 2nd Avenue, which would seem to directly contradict the “principles” they have agreed to.

GVSHP will be working hard to promote our primary principle when it comes to NYU’s development—that the university should stay within its existing footprint and building envelope, and look outside our already-saturated neighborhood if it needs to grow. For more information or to help, see [www.gvshp.org/NYUexpansion.htm](http://www.gvshp.org/NYUexpansion.htm)



**The Silver Towers complex, now being considered for landmark designation.**

## Trump Battle Hits Court As Scandals Rock Project

*City Ignores Community Rezoning Request, But Supports Developer's Rezoning Plan*

On February 28th GVSHP rallied dozens of business groups, community boards, and civic and neighborhood groups to converge on the Board of Standards and Appeals (BSA) to support a legal challenge of the City's approval of the 45-story Trump SoHo 'Condo-Hotel' at Spring and Varick Streets. GVSHP has long contended that the project violates zoning prohibitions on residential and residential hotel uses at this location, and that allowing the project was tantamount to sidestepping all required public input and granting a rezoning without any environmental review. The case, filed by the SoHo Alliance, will likely be decided this spring or summer by the BSA, which consists of five mayoral appointees.

The sad backdrop for this case is a series of accidents at the site, one of which was fatal, and a slew of complaints about illegal or unsafe work. This has led the City to shut down all work on the site at least three times, including once after an inspection in the wake of the fatal East Side crane collapse found fractures in the Trump crane. However each time the City has allowed work to resume after a short period of time.

The scandals don't end there. Late last year a *New York Times* investigation found a member of the team behind the Trump project had a hidden criminal record, while a *New York Magazine* undercover investigation this spring found prospective buyers at the Trump project being coached on how to get around the prohibitions on illegal residential uses, buttressing GVSHP's long-time claim that the agreement the city signed with the developer

supposedly to prevent such illegal uses was a sham. GVSHP was consulted extensively on both investigations prior to their completion and publication. Meanwhile the City continues to spend taxpayer dollars and use City lawyers to defend the Trump project in court.

See [www.gvshp.org/trump.htm](http://www.gvshp.org/trump.htm)

While the zoning for the area around the Trump project prohibits residences and residential hotels (as we believe the Trump project to actually be), it unfortunately does allow 45-story towers. Thus GVSHP has joined other community groups in requesting a rezoning of the area to prevent similarly-scaled developments in the future (such a rezoning

requires the support of the City Council and the City Planning Commission). Unfortunately, there has been no movement on this request. However, the City has given support to a developer-requested rezoning of the area just a few blocks directly north, between Barrow and Clarkson Streets, for which there was very little community support and considerable community opposition. GVSHP strongly opposed this proposed rezoning, which would allow additional large-scale development previously prohibited in this area, and urged the City not to approve a developer-initiated rezoning while ignoring the long-standing community-requested rezoning. See [www.gvshp.org/FWVzoning.htm](http://www.gvshp.org/FWVzoning.htm)



**GVSHP Exec. Dir. Andrew Berman at the press conference before the Trump BSA hearing, showing materials GVSHP submitted for the legal challenge.**

## Preserving the East Village's Cultural Heritage and Identity

*Webster Hall Landmarked, Other Sites Proposed As GVSHP Surveys Neighborhood*

East Village preservation efforts took a tremendous leap forward in March when the City landmarked Webster Hall on East 11th Street. Designation not only preserves the building's rich history, but prevents the construction of another 20-story dorm or hotel in an area where such construction has replaced so many historic buildings.

GVSHP spent years researching Webster Hall's unique history, shared this extensive research with the Landmarks Preservation Commission, and mobilized our members to enthusiastically support designation. As a hall-for-hire starting in the late 19th century, Webster Hall embodies much of the social, political, and cultural history that defined the East Village. In its early years it was the scene of pivotal labor rallies, early drag balls, and costume bacchanals. After World War II it became a performance venue for emerging Latin artists, and then a recording studio used by Elvis Presley, Frank Sinatra, Julie Andrews, and Louis Armstrong (among others) where the soundtracks for *Hello Dolly* and *Fiddler on the Roof* were recorded. By the 1980s, it was a concert venue for some of the most influential artists of the last 25 years.

As part of our East Village preservation efforts, GVSHP is conducting research on the history of every building in the East Village. This research has shown wonderful patterns exemplified by buildings like Webster Hall, reflecting the East Village's intersection of immigrant history, the labor movement, radical politics, sexual liberation, and artistic innovation.



**Webster Hall (l.), 101 Avenue A (center), 128 East 13th Street (r.)**

Another less well known but equally important site identified by GVSHP's research is 101 Avenue A, an unusually ornate 1876 tenement with a continuously operating ground floor gathering hall. A center for German-American life and the labor movement for its first 50 years, the hall at 101 Avenue A hosted historic events marking the opening of Tompkins Square Park, the death of 1,000 people (mostly German-American) in the General Slocum Ferry disaster, the rise of the American Federation of Labor, and early efforts to mandate shorter workdays for laborers. While such popular halls were commonplace in the East Village 100 years ago, almost none still exist or retain a continuous common use as does 101 Avenue A. By the 1960s the hall housed a series of performance spaces and cultural centers, with Warhol superstar Nico living upstairs during her tenure with the Velvet Underground. In 1979 the Pyramid Club opened there and became central to the downtown countercultural scene, hosting performances by up-and-coming artists and playing a key role in the emergence of 'performance art' and a new wave of political and socially-conscious drag performance, which led to the founding of the Wigstock Festival.

The Pyramid Club's peers were performance venues that had an unusually broad impact upon the larger cultural landscape, including CBGB's, the Mudd Club, Area, and Danceteria, of which Pyramid is the sole present-day survivor. GVSHP has nominated the site for landmark designation and listing on the State and National Register of Historic Places.

GVSHP also continues to push for landmark designation of 128 East 13th Street, a one-time horse auction mart and World War II women's assembly-line training school which served as the studio of artist Frank Stella for 30 years. GVSHP uncovered plans to demolish the building and called for immediate landmarking of the property; the City intervened to prevent demolition, but has not yet approved the building's proposed landmark status. The owner has listed the property on the National Register of Historic Places and granted a preservation easement, seemingly indicating a safe future for the building. However, we continue to seek landmark status for 128 East 13th Street to ensure its permanent preservation. For more information, see [www.gvshp.org/EVil.htm](http://www.gvshp.org/EVil.htm)



The original "Vegas-on-the-Hudson" plan for Pier 40.

## "Vegas-on-the-Hudson" Sunk at Pier 40

In a critical but temporary reprieve, this March the Hudson River Park Trust (HRPT) rejected Related Companies' massive development proposal for Pier 40 and gave the lower-impact plans of the Pier 40 Partnership (P40P), a coalition of neighborhood parents, a chance to move ahead. While this was a tremendous victory for all who opposed Related's plans, the battle is far from over, as HRPT has given P40P just 90 days to submit a proposal, and Related can still come back with a revised plan. GVSHHP has written to the Trust urging them to work with P40P and community groups to make appropriate development and restoration of the pier possible.

See [www.gvshp.org/Pier40.htm](http://www.gvshp.org/Pier40.htm)

## New School 14th & 5th Building Plans

The New Schools (TNS) plans a new main building at 14th Street and 5th Avenue that will rise 300 feet straight up on all sides with a 50 ft. tall enclosed mechanical penthouse set back above that, making it one of the tallest and most massive buildings in the Village and about twice the height of many of its nearest neighbors. While GVSHHP has no objection to

the current TNS building being demolished, and zoning for the site does allow for a large new building, we do have objections to the proposed all-glass design (which TNS has said it is considering changing) and the building's mass. TNS needs zoning variances to make the building as bulky as planned without setbacks, as opposed to a more slender setback (but potentially taller) building. The size of the building is partly dictated by air rights purchases and TNS' plans for a series of enclosed interior atrium spaces. Hearings on the variance request are expected this fall.

See [www.gvshp.org/NewSchool.htm](http://www.gvshp.org/NewSchool.htm)

## NoHo Landmarking Expansion

This spring the City held hearings on an expansion of the NoHo Historic District, which GVSHHP and many others have long called for. The proposed expansion is too late to stop some woefully inappropriate recent development, but will cover much of the non-landmarked areas of NoHo along Bond, Great Jones, East 4th, and Lafayette Streets. However, the proposal still leaves some of the eastern and southern edges of NoHo unprotected, so GVSHHP called for expanding the proposed boundaries further, and for quick approval of the new district.

See [www.gvshp.org/NoHoNews.htm](http://www.gvshp.org/NoHoNews.htm)

## East Village Rezoning

A proposed 114-block rezoning of the East Village/Lower East Side is in the early stages of formal city review. The rezoning, which GVSHHP and other local groups, Community Board 3, Councilmember Mendez, Borough President Stringer, and others pushed for

will reduce the size and height of allowable development in most of the area, eliminate dorm and hotel zoning bonuses, and encourage the retention and creation of affordable housing. At the same time the rezoning would also increase the size of allowable development on a few major streets, with bonuses for inclusion of affordable housing. Formal hearings and review are expected to begin later this year.

GVSHHP continues to work with the same coalition to advance a community-initiated rezoning of the Bowery and 3rd/4th Avenue corridors (which the City refused to include in the rezoning) in order to restrict the size and height of new development and eliminate the dorm and hotel zoning bonuses there as well.

See [www.gvshp.org/EVcorridor.htm](http://www.gvshp.org/EVcorridor.htm)

## Proposed Washington Street Developments in Historic District

This spring saw two rare new building proposals in the Greenwich Village Historic District just a block apart on Washington Street. At 145 Charles, a developer proposed to replace two 1-story buildings with a garish new 9-story mixed-use structure. Fortunately GVSHHP had successfully fought to include this site in the expanded historic district in 2006, thus making the design subject to landmarks review. The oversized, out-of-character design was rejected, but may be revised and resubmitted at a later date. At 145 Perry, a developer proposed demolition of a 2-story building to be replaced by a 9-story hotel. The LPC required some revisions to the design and some reduction in its size, but then approved the building. These developments highlighted how the underlying zoning on these blocks

*in  
brief*

in the Far West Village still allow large new development in spite of landmarks regulations, and offers big bonuses for hotel development—a situation GVSHP is working with neighbors to rectify.



**Landmarked former PS 64—saved from a dorm, but not yet from the elements.**

## 'Dorm-for-Hire' Doomed at Landmarked P.S. 64

This spring NY State's highest court upheld the City's ban on zoning bonuses for "dorms-for-hire" (dorms built speculatively without a school in place to occupy them); such 'dorms' are often just residences (which are ineligible for the zoning bonus) in disguise. This ruling effectively ended a developer's quest to build 19 stories on top of the now-landmarked former P.S. 64/Charas-El Bohio Cultural Center. But GVSHP is still fighting an oversized development at 159 Bleecker Street which got the dorm bonus before the "dorm-for-hire" ban went into effect (see South Village article), and we have called for an elimination of the dorm bonus altogether. While this scheme has been sunk, the owner of P.S. 64 continues to allow this landmark on 9th Street and Avenue B to deteriorate and remain open to the elements—another battle still being waged.

See [www.gvshp.org/Charas1.htm](http://www.gvshp.org/Charas1.htm)

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## From the Director

It's always great when hard work pays off. In the last few months, GVSHP has seen the groundbreaking landmarking of Webster Hall, movement on our South Village and Silver Towers landmarking proposals, NYU finally locating new facilities outside of our neighborhood (as we've long called for), a proposed NoHo Historic District extension, "Vegas-on-the-Hudson" rejected at Pier 40 (for now), "dorms-for-hire" struck down, and an East Village rezoning finally inching forward. Maybe that's why *The Real Deal* magazine calls GVSHP "among... the most powerful players in New York's real estate community," the Preservation League of New York State calls our efforts "an inspiration to other preservation organizations;" and the NY Landmarks Conservancy calls our work a "model of advocacy for other neighborhoods," and our achievements "unprecedented."

But we face huge hurdles as well. The proposed Rudin/St. Vincent's development plan would be the largest in the Village in generations and could set troubling precedents; the New School is looking to expand considerably in our neighborhood; the City stubbornly refuses to drop support for the Trump SoHo Condo-Hotel; inappropriate development is rampant on the Bowery; and there are still some big zoning battles left to fight in the Far West Village. At the same time our public programming has doubled in frequency over the last year, demand for our children's education program grows as we add new curricula based upon the Village's immigrant history, and we are performing unprecedented research on the unprotected areas of our neighborhood. All these efforts require considerable resources. If you like what GVSHP does, please be sure to support our efforts. As the largest membership-based organization in the Village, NoHo, and the East Village, it's the support of individuals like you that allows us to work so hard to preserve the neighborhoods we love.

## Support Preservation: Join GVSHP

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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