



GVSHHP
GREENWICH VILLAGE
SOCIETY FOR
HISTORIC PRESERVATION

TESTIMONY OF THE GREENWICH VILLAGE SOCIETY
FOR HISTORIC PRESERVATION
REGARDING PROPOSED COMMUNITY FACILITY
ZONING TEXT AMMENDMENT

June 9, 2004

Executive Director
Andrew Berman

President
E. Anthony Zunino III

Vice-Presidents
Elizabeth Ely
Arthur Levin
Arbie Thalacker

Secretary/Treasurer
Katherine Schoonover

Trustees
Mary Ann Arisman
Penelope Bateau
Meredith Bergmann
Jo Hamilton
Jan Hasbey
Robin J. H. Maxwell
Ruth McCoy
Andrew S. Paul
Jonathan Russo
Judith Stonehill
George Vellonakis
Vicki Weiner
Fred Wistow
Linda Yowell

Advisors
Kent Barwick
Joan K. Davidson
Christopher Forbes
Margaret Halsey Gardiner
Margot Gayle
Elizabeth Gilmore
Carol Greitzer
Tony Hiss
Martin Hutter
Regina M. Kellerman
James Ortenzio
James Stewart Polshek
Elinor Ratner
Henry Hope Reed
Alice B. Sandler
Calvin Trillin
Jean-Claude van Itallie
Anne-Marie Wiener-Summer
Anthony C. Wood

Thank you, Commissioners, for the opportunity to testify before you today. The Greenwich Village Society for Historic Preservation is the largest membership organization in Greenwich Village, dedicated to preserving the character and architectural and cultural history of Greenwich Village and the East Village. The need for reform of community facility zoning regulations has been a major concern of our organization, and of the communities we represent, for some time. In 2002, our organization issued a report, "After the Kimmel Center," named for a newly constructed community facility on Washington Square South that, by virtue of its additional bulk as allowed under current community facility zoning regulations, eliminated the century-old view down Fifth Avenue and through Washington Square Arch. The report identified several of the most serious problems in the zoning code as they impact our neighborhoods, especially regarding community facilities, and recommended changes to address them. The report was forwarded to the members of the City Planning Commission, and to key staff at the Department of City Planning, as well as the City Council and the Mayor.

We are disappointed that the proposed amendment before you today does not include any of our recommendations – from the report, the scooping process, or any communications in between -- or address any of the community facility issues we have raised as most urgently needing reform. We do recognize that not all reforms may be undertaken right away. However, we had hoped for, and continue to hope for, these issues being addressed soon, as the need is increasingly urgent in our communities, where the bulk and density of institutional development threatens to change the character of entire neighborhoods. The proposed text amendment is clearly not aimed at addressing these issues, but rather, at addressing a different set of issues facing other areas of the City. Other speakers will no doubt address whether or not they feel the amendment does indeed adequately address the issues it is aimed at affecting in their neighborhoods; we have heard from many of them that they feel it does not, and therefore see little reason to support the amendment on the basis of it being a helpful first step in taking on a larger set of issues.

Beyond the lack of relief the amendment would offer us, we do also have concerns about the potentially negative impact the amendment could have on M zones in the areas we represent, possibly worsening our problems. Specifically, GVSHHP has very serious concerns about the provision introducing as-of-right location of houses of worship in M1 zones. Of particular concern to us is the possibility of uses such as classrooms, catering halls, events spaces, dormitories, or other auxiliary uses being introduced into our M1 zones under this allowance if they are operated by a

religious institution or include a house of worship within the facility. We have attempted, without success, to get clarification regarding exactly what sort of facilities would be allowed under this provision. Barring substantiated assurances that such uses would not be allowed in M1 zones under this provision, we must assume that the amendment actually has the potential to worsen issues of concentration and bulk of community facilities in our neighborhoods.

Additionally, GVSHIP is disappointed by the exclusion of uses such as hospitals and colleges and universities from the proposed extension of prohibitions upon rear-yard construction. With such exclusions, the one area in which the proposed amendment might have some slight beneficial effect in our communities is more or less nullified, offering virtually no relief.

Finally, we will reiterate that we strongly believe that it is the bulk and concentration of community facilities that the City must address. In just the central section of Greenwich Village from 1985 to the present, one institution, NYU, added a stunning 15 high-rise buildings to this area. Nearly all were built with the full additional community facility allowance afforded to them by law, which in much of our neighborhood allows an approximately 90% increase in bulk. On top of that, several high-rises have been built by other institutions in the area in recent years, including the New School, Cooper Union, and St. Vincent's Hospital, and several more are planned. Large sections of Greenwich Village and the East Village are threatened with a dramatic change in their entire scale, and a change in their character from residential or mixed residential/commercial districts to areas that primarily serve the university or a university-related population. The additional bulk allowed community facilities gives these very large and wealthy institutions an unfair advantage in the acquisition of property, and continues to tip the balance of our neighborhoods in their favor.

Along with our testimony I am resubmitting a copy of GVSHIP's 2002 report and recommendations regarding community facilities and other zoning reforms, as well as a summary of some of the specific reforms we have proposed to address community facility bulk and concentration issues. These include reducing or eliminating the additional community facility bulk allowance in R6 and 7 zones; having the City assist institutions to establish locations for auxiliary or secondary campuses to avoid saturation in certain communities and encourage appropriate development in others; and attaching bulk, height, and massing requirements to community facility development, in order to ensure compatibility with the existing built environment and neighborhood character. We strongly urge the Commission to examine and address these issues, and make them a part of any community facility zoning reform package that you put forward. Unfortunately, we cannot endorse the one that has been put forward today.