



Greenwich
Village
Society for
Historic
Preservation

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January 25, 2011

Public Design Commission of the City of New York
City Hall, Third Floor
New York, NY 10007

Re: Proposed Street Reconstruction of Astor Place & Cooper Square

To whom it may concern,

I write to you regarding DOT's proposed reconstruction of the streets along Astor Place and Cooper Square.

The Greenwich Village Society is supportive of efforts to make city streets more pedestrian-friendly and to extend green spaces. However, we believe that any changes to Astor Place and Stuyvesant Street should respect and preserve the significant history of these streets as they converge at this location. In its current iteration, DOT's plan would erase these street patterns as well as how they reflect the early development of Manhattan Island.

Astor Place follows the path of an old Native American trail that appears on maps of Manhattan at least as early as 1639 - only a decade or so after the Dutch first settled on the island. In its early days, the trail was used to connect the present-day Bowery to a trading post on West 14th Street. When John Jacob Astor officially opened Astor Place as a street in 1836, he maintained its connection with Stuyvesant Street (see Figure 1), another remnant from Dutch Manhattan. Stuyvesant Street was originally a lane stretching across the holdings that Peter Stuyvesant purchased from the Dutch West India Company in 1651. Today, Astor Place along with Stuyvesant Street and its crown jewel - St. Marks Church-in-the-Bowery, the second oldest church in Manhattan - are some of the only reminders of the Native American settlement and Dutch New York (the church, which dates from 1799, was commissioned by Stuyvesant's grandson Petrus to be constructed on the site of the original chapel that once stood in its place and under which Peter Stuyvesant is buried).

We are concerned about DOT's proposed enlargements to the curb at points around Astor Place and Stuyvesant Street, as can be seen in Figure 2. Given the historical significance of these streets, we feel it is critical that one continue to be able to look at these two streets and see that they were once part of the remaining Astor Place and Stuyvesant Streets. Their former routes should be made plainly clear in the design, and their paths should continue to be distinct. One way to accomplish this would be to maintain the difference in grade between what is now street and what is now sidewalk (the streetbed could be redone in a different material). Signage which includes diagrams of the street patterns and historical information could add further clarity. We also ask that

there be a permanent commitment that the memorialization of these highly-significant historic roadbeds be maintained in perpetuity.

Thank you for your attention this matter.

Sincerely,



Andrew Berman, Executive Director

cc: Councilmember Rosie Mendez
State Senator Tom Duane
Assemblymember Deborah Glick
Manhattan Community Board 2
Manhattan Community Board 3

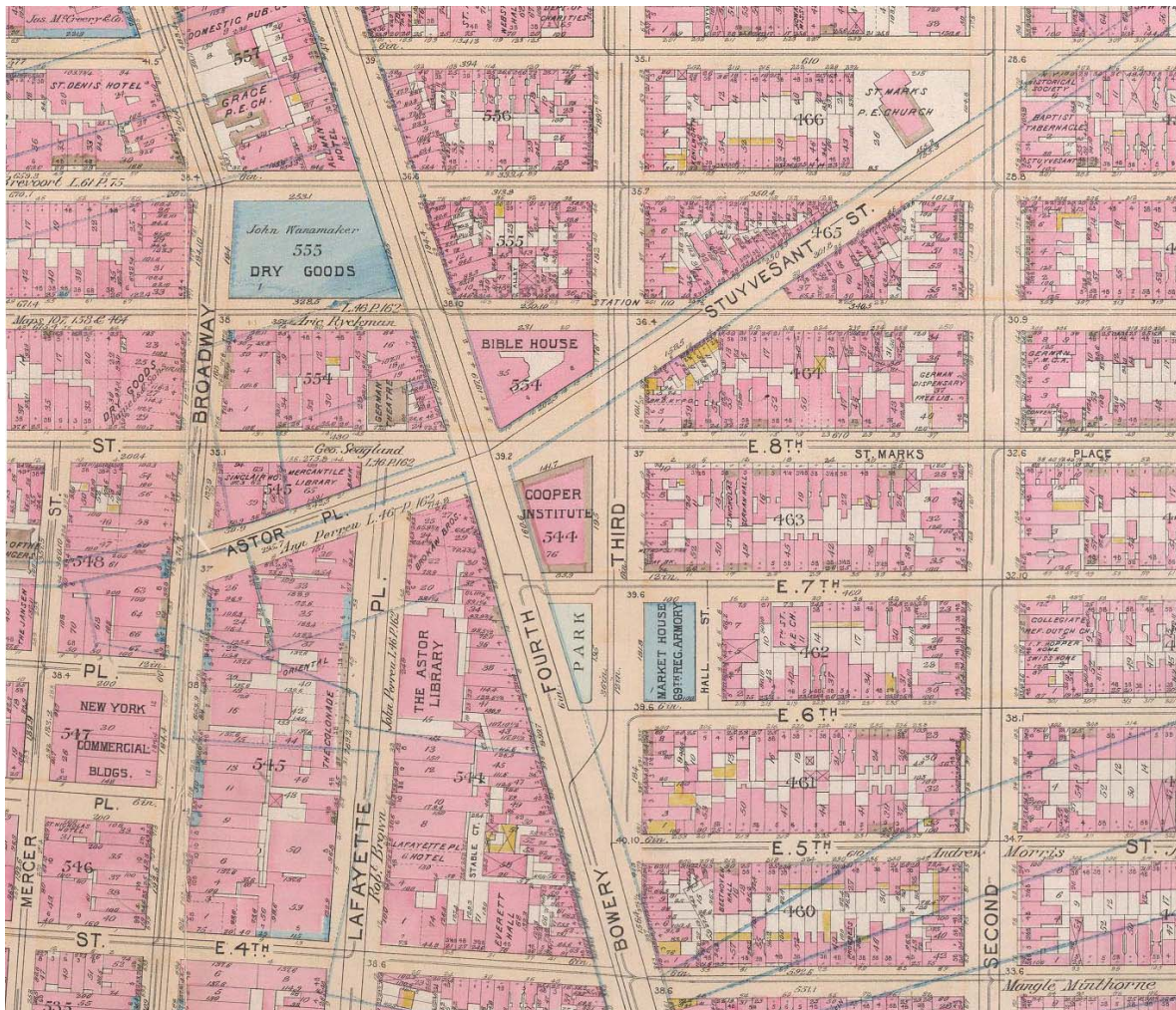


Figure 1: 1897 Fire Insurance Map, courtesy New York Public Library

Map clearly delineates the original link between Stuyvesant Street and Astor Place.

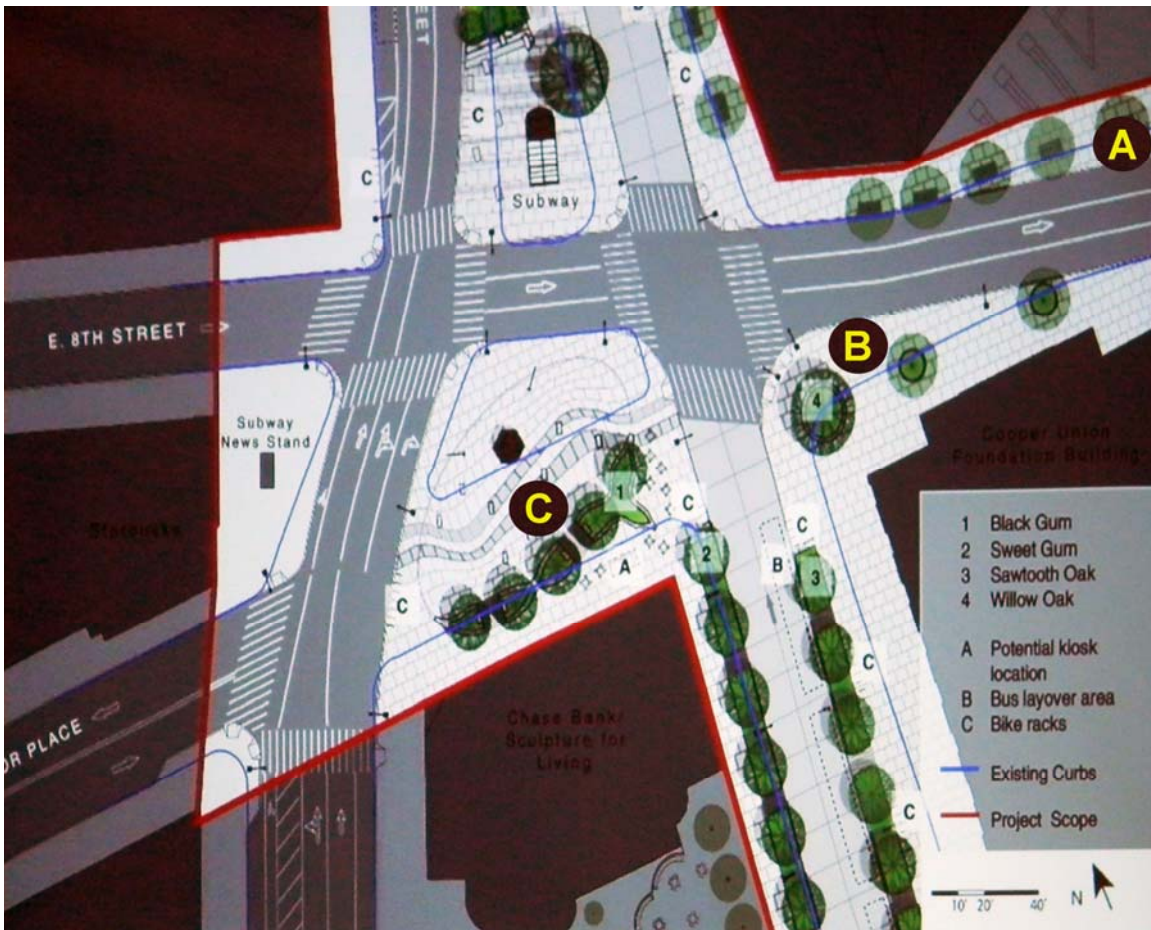


Figure 2: DOT Proposal, as presented at joint CB2/3 meeting on January 6th, 2011

DOT's current proposal would remove evidence of the historic street pattern. At point A, the proposed extension of the curb would erase any reference to the former connection between Astor Place and Stuyvesant Street. Enlarging the curb at point B and de-mapping the street at point C would further obliterate any notion of this important history.