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SOCIETY FOR
HISTORIC PRESERVATION

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November 17, 2005

Hon. Amanda Burden
Chair, New York City Department of City Planning
22 Reade Street
New York, NY 10007

Re: Potential East Village Rezoning and mid-block sites between 3rd and 4th Avenues

Dear Chair Burden:

The Greenwich Village Society for Historic Preservation is extremely encouraged that the Department of City Planning has begun the process of discussing a possible contextual rezoning of the East Village. GVSHP feels strongly that such a rezoning is very necessary for this area, and that few neighborhoods present as clearly uniform a built character as the East Village, which so easily lends itself to such a rezoning. Given the growing pressure for out-of-scale development in this neighborhood and the lack of attention to this issue in past years, it would be a great tribute to the Department to address this long-overlooked planning need. A contextual rezoning would go a long way to preserve the character and scale of what is one of New York's and the world's most distinctive neighborhoods. GVSHP intends to work closely with Community Board #3, local community groups, and the Department on this effort, and we strongly encourage all parties to move ahead as quickly as possible.

I must, however, also note the Society's strong desire to see the 3rd and 4th Avenue corridors and the mid-block sites in between included in a rezoning action. While we recognize that the width of these streets and the existing built context might warrant a different response than some other areas of the East Village, there can be no doubt that the current zoning is inadequate for ensuring an appropriate size and scale of development. The recently announced plans for a 26-story dormitory at 110-124 East 12th Street is a perfect example. This building, as-of-right under the current zoning, would place the tallest building in the entire East Village in the middle of a block on a narrow side street, where it will tower over the handsome historic loft buildings on Fourth Avenue and even over the large and bulky NYU dormitories nearby on 3rd Avenue, to say nothing of the much more modestly-scaled 19th century row houses, stables, ecclesiastical buildings, and local landmarks like Webster Hall which face or abut this site.

I understand that the Department has expressed a reluctance to consider changing the zoning for Third and Fourth Avenues. While I would ask that you reconsider this, I would also ask that the Department consider at least a rezoning of those mid-block sites between these two avenues, which could be done with or without including the avenues. These mid-block sites from 9th to 13th Streets are distinguished by a handsome array of pleasingly-scaled historic buildings, the scale of which the zoning should, but currently does not, reinforce. In light of their current ill-fitting zoning, a rezoning of these sites is warranted and quite necessary, and would be consistent with any effort to maintain and reinforce the defining

character of the East Village. Thus I strongly urge the Department to consider including these sites in any possible rezoning plan that is considered.

Regardless, GVSHP looks forward to working closely with the Community Board, the Department, and other community groups on this rezoning effort, and remains very committed to that effort. We hope that a contextual rezoning for this neighborhood will move ahead as quickly as possible.

Sincerely,

Andrew Berman
Executive Director

Cc: State Senator Tom Duane
Councilmember Margarita Lopez
Assemblymember Deborah Glick
Councilmember-elect Rosie Mendez
Community Board #3
East Village Community Coalition
St. Ann's Committee

Greenwich
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July 14, 2006

Hon. Amanda Burden
Chair, New York City Planning Commission
22 Reade Street
New York, NY 10007

Re: Draft Rezoning Plan for East Village and Lower East Side

Dear Chair Burden:

After many months of working as part of a Community Board #3 Task Force with the Department of City Planning to formulate a rezoning plan for the East Village and Lower East Side, it was quite heartening to see a draft rezoning plan for the area finally released this Monday. Given the rapid pace of development in these neighborhoods – much of it woefully inappropriate in terms of scale, use, or both – a rezoning which can more effectively preserve neighborhood character is needed as soon as possible.

The draft rezoning appeared to take some very important steps in that direction, though there were several key details and areas about which members of the public had questions and concerns. However, one aspect of the plan about which there was near-universal dissatisfaction was the exclusion of the 3rd Avenue corridor and the blocks to the west, even though the Department of City Planning has heard overwhelmingly from neighborhood residents, community groups, the Community Board, and local elected officials such as Councilmember Mendez that they want this area to be included in the rezoning.

As you know, the current zoning for this area encourages grossly inappropriate development, perhaps best exemplified by NYU's plan for a 26-story dormitory tower. Other out-of-scale high-rises which set back behind plazas and destroy the fabric of this area will likely follow. And under current zoning, such development is more than likely to be hotels, dormitories, or other community facilities, further altering the predominantly residential character of these blocks.

I find it hard to believe that the Department of City Planning finds this type and scale of development appropriate for this area, and wishes to lock in place zoning that will perpetuate and encourage it. The Community Board #3 197A Task Force has made recommendations to the Department about potential rezoning for the area that showed remarkable flexibility and reasonableness, and a willingness to try to accommodate the City's desire to encourage reasonable growth while also addressing the community's concern about grossly out-of-scale development. I have no doubt that the community and its representatives would entertain other potential zoning changes for these blocks with equal flexibility and reasonableness.

-cont.-

Thus I strongly urge the Department to reconsider inclusion of these blocks in its rezoning plan, with an eye towards establishing appropriate height and bulk controls, maintaining streetwalls, and eliminating or reducing the vast preference currently given to hotel and community facility development in the area.

Sincerely,

Andrew Berman
Executive Director

Cc: Borough President Scott Stringer
City Councilmember Rosie Mendez
State Senator Tom Duane
Assemblymember Deborah Glick
Community Board #3, Manhattan
community groups

DEPARTMENT OF CITY PLANNING
CITY OF NEW YORK
OFFICE OF THE DIRECTOR

4 August, 2006

Dear Concerned Citizen:

Thank you for your recent letter regarding the Department's draft rezoning proposal for the East Village and Lower East Side.

Please be assured that I am aware of the desire to preserve neighborhood character throughout the East Village and Lower East Side as well as in other areas of the city which share such an established sense of place. We are working to preserve the predominantly mid-rise, continuous streetwall character of the buildings found throughout the 100 block rezoning area by introducing contextual zoning districts.

The area you describe between Third and Fourth Avenues has a distinctly different character from the East Village east of Third Avenue where our goal is to preserve an established and consistent built fabric. We look forward to continuing to work closely with Community Board 3 and other community stakeholders on this important initiative.

We very much appreciate your continued input and active participation. As we are unable to respond individually to each signatory, we trust that you will share this letter with them. Thank you again for sharing your concerns on this matter.

Very sincerely,

Amanda M. Burden

cc: Raymond Gastil
Edith Hsu-Chen
Arthur Huh

AMANDA M. BURDEN, AICP, DIRECTOR
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August 10, 2006

Hon. Amanda Burden
Chair, New York City Planning Commission
22 Reade Street
New York, NY 10007

Dear Chair ~~Burden~~, Amanda

Thank you for your August 4 response to my July 14 letter urging the Department of City Planning to include the Third Avenue corridor and the blocks to the west in the contemplated East Village rezoning. However, as your response did not address several of the key points in the July 14 letter I sent to you, I am reattaching that letter for your review and reconsideration.

Your August 4th letter points solely to differences in the built character of the blocks along Third Avenue and to the west as the reason for their not being included in the draft proposed East Village rezoning. While it is true that there are some relatively modest differences between this area and the area currently included in the draft proposed rezoning, this seems irrelevant in light of the fact that there is not any requirement that a rezoning area be entirely homogenous. Regardless, as we have made clear, we do not believe that these blocks require the exact same rezoning as the blocks to the east, where the Department has proposed a variety of new zoning districts anyway, clearly reflecting a belief that the area need not be treated in a homogenous manner.

What is of greatest concern to us, however – and what the Department has not yet addressed – is that whatever slight differences there may be between the Third Avenue/western blocks and those to the east pale in comparison to the vast difference between the predominant built environment and use pattern for those blocks and what the current zoning allows. As evidenced by NYU's recently filed plans for a 261 ft. tall dormitory set behind a plaza on East 12th Street, the current zoning encourages grossly out-of –scale development which is destructive to the character of this neighborhood.

In fact, the current zoning imposes no height limits whatsoever (other than those governed by the sky exposure plane) for new development in an area where by far the majority of buildings do not exceed 6 or 7 stories in height. It also strongly encourages towers set behind plazas, a universally discredited urban form which is particularly destructive in a predominantly residential neighborhood such as this that thrives on active street-life and a unified streetwall. The current zoning places no limits on air rights transfers, allowing for particularly grossly-out-of-scale towers. And it strongly encourages hotel, dormitory, and other community facility development in an area which is far and away predominantly residential, but which has an ever-growing number of dormitories. The community has made abundantly clear that it wishes to see this type of development curtailed before it does in fact become the predominant form in this area, and this is something we hope the Department of City Planning will listen to.

What is most critical is that we move ahead with in some way changing or improving an awful situation for these critical blocks that form the boundary between the Village and the East Village. This can only be done by changing the zoning to require appropriate height limits and streetwall maintenance for new development in the area, reducing or eliminating the current incentive for commercial and community facility development in the area, and/or reducing the allowable size of new development. There can be no rationale for denying that the current zoning for the area is horribly inadequate and promotes completely undesirable development.

Regardless of the degree of difference the Department may see between these blocks and those to the east, it is clear that now is the time to change their zoning. The current draft proposed rezoning of the East Village provides the opportunity to do so, and any delay on the part of the Department will further doom this area to more overwhelming and woefully inappropriate and destructive development.

Sincerely,

Andrew Berman
Executive Director

Cc: Mayor Michael Bloomberg
Manhattan Borough President Scott Stringer
City Council Speaker Christine Quinn
State Senator Tom Duane
City Councilmember Rosie Mendez
Assemblymember Deborah Glick
Community Board #3, Manhattan
The Villager
community groups and neighbors