



THE ADVOCATE FOR NEW YORK CITY'S HISTORIC NEIGHBORHOODS

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Statement to Community Board Two
Regarding the Provincetown Playhouse & Apartments, 133-139 MacDougal Street

The Historic Districts Council has long been a supporter of a proposed South Village Historic District. We first officially requested the Landmarks Preservation Commission to consider this area for designation in July 2000, specifically calling out the Provincetown Playhouse & Apartments in our request and saying “the continued expansion of New York University threatens the future of these and many other architecturally and historically significant buildings in the South Village.” That request was occasioned by NYU’s demolition of the Poe & Judson Houses for the construction of the new NYU Law School Building. Many people on the Community Board were involved with that campaign and HDC took legal action to gain some concessions. Unfortunately, and time has been the judge of this, the solution we agreed to was not, in the long run, satisfactory. The real triumph was the lowering of the height of the new building and saving some sky behind the campanile of Judson Church. The reconstruction of Judson House isn’t awful, the proportions are essentially correct but no one would mistake it for a historic building. The homage to the Poe House is frankly sad. What we learned from that experience is something we should have known but probably chose to forget for our own sakes, demolition is forever. Once you lose the original building, all conversations about preservation are meaningless.

But now we are being asked to make the exact same concessions for the Provincetown Playhouse. The new design, while admittedly attractive and, unlike the NYU Law School building, within the contextual scale of the neighborhood, is a completely new building. Saying the word “preservation” when discussing the building doesn’t mean anything. This is a new building and the university is proposing to retain some elements of the playhouse in it. It will not be the Provincetown Playhouse and Apartments. It will not be the building that helped launch the careers of Eugene O’Neill, David Mamet, Sam Shepherd and Edward Albee. It will not be the building that was a vital part of what helped define the Village as an international center of the arts, drawing in generation after generation of artists and performers. It will not be a cornerstone of a potential South Village Historic District. It will just be one more NYU building in a neighborhood that is rapidly becoming a monoculture campus. It will just be a better designed example of *more of the same*.