



**Greenwich  
Village  
Society for  
Historic  
Preservation**

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March 12, 2007

President John Sexton  
New York University  
70 Washington Square South, rm. 1216  
New York, NY 10012-1019

Dear President Sexton,

We write because we were very disturbed to read the March 9 letter by Alicia Hurley to Andrew Berman of the Greenwich Village Society for Historic Preservation indicating that NYU will not be maintaining its commitment, made four years ago, to support designation of a South Village Historic District (see attached). As we or our organizations were all present at a series of meetings in which Ms. Hurley's predecessor, Michael Haberman, explicitly expressed NYU's commitment to support a South Village Historic District with the boundaries which have currently been presented to the Landmarks Preservation Commission, we found this letter a deeply disturbing violation of the University's word not only to us, but to several other community leaders who were present for those discussions. Perhaps even more disturbingly, several of us have spoken to University representatives, including Ms. Hurley, over the intervening four years, as recently as in the last few weeks, and we understood that commitment to have remained firm.

Such a letter will no doubt be seen as a clear reversal of the University's public commitment and a flagrant attempt to undermine local preservation efforts. The timing would seem particularly odd given NYU's recent efforts to try to rehabilitate its reputation in the community and to put forward what it says will be a community-inclusive planning process which will make preservation a high priority. In fact, it would fly completely in the face of such efforts.

Some of the specifics of Ms. Hurley's letter were especially disconcerting and confounding. The suggestion that certain sections of the proposed historic district, such as "portions of Sixth and Seventh [*sic*] Avenues" (*the proposal actually does not include any part of Seventh Avenue, but does include Seventh Avenue South*) "would not necessarily merit incorporation within a historic district," unfortunately seemed solely aimed at undermining community efforts to ensure the preservation of their neighborhood, in addition to being factually incorrect. Additionally, the suggestion that nearby historic districts such as the SoHo Cast-Iron Historic District could be expanded to include parts of the South Village was particularly bizarre and misguided, given that the SoHo district is characterized by industrial, cast-iron architecture in which the South Village is almost entirely lacking.

Furthermore, Ms. Hurley's evaluation that the South Village Historic District proposal (a proposal which NYU was consulted about well in advance of its submission) does not "weave together as a single cohesive historic district" seems particularly confounding in light of the fact that the proposal was written by Andrew Dolkart, one of the most respected architectural historians in New

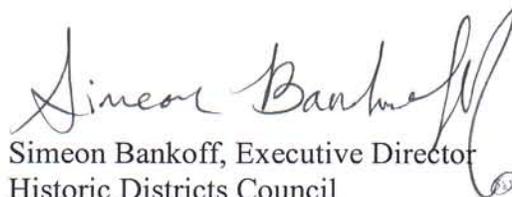
York, and has been endorsed by, among others, the National Trust for Historic Preservation, the Preservation League of New York State, Congressman Jerrold Nadler, State Senator Tom Duane, and Assemblymember Deborah Glick. We cannot imagine that NYU, with its troubling record on historic preservation issues, would put Ms. Hurley's judgment ahead of these esteemed leaders and institutions. Additionally, as you know, a broad cross-section of community groups and leaders, business and property owners, and residents of the South Village have stated their strong support for this proposal.

It would be a shame for NYU to yet again be working against the wishes of the community and against a neighborhood preservation effort with broad support such as this. For NYU to now not maintain this long-standing commitment would also squander an opportunity to build good will with the surrounding community with which NYU has had increasingly poor relations, by yet again showing the University's word to be meaningless. I hope this letter will be retracted and a new letter issued which is more in keeping with the University's prior commitment from four years ago to support a South Village Historic District with the boundaries as proposed.

Sincerely,



Andrew Berman, Executive Director  
Greenwich Village Society for Historic Preservation



Simeon Bankoff, Executive Director  
Historic Districts Council



David Gruber  
Carmine Street Block Association and  
South Village Landmark Association



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March 16, 2007

President John Sexton  
New York University  
70 Washington Square South, rm. 1216  
New York, NY 10012-1019

Dear President Sexton:

We write to express our profound disappointment and outrage that New York University is not supporting the designation of the proposed South Village Historic District, in spite of explicit promises made by the University four years ago and in the intervening time to do so. The University's failure to maintain its word and support this proposal is deeply disturbing and terribly damaging to the University's already severely compromised standing in this community.

Four years ago when community groups began to first plan towards submitting a proposal to the Landmarks Preservation Commission for designation of a South Village Historic District, New York University was invited to the table to participate in the discussion and provide input, in spite of serious misgivings about including the University due to its poor past record on neighborhood planning and preservation efforts. Either we or the groups we represent were at those meetings, where NYU Director of Government and Community Relations Michael Haberman explicitly pledged that the University would support designation of a South Village Historic District with the boundaries which have now been submitted to the Landmarks Preservation Commission. Over the next four years, NYU's pledge to support such a designation has been repeatedly touted to the public and repeatedly reiterated in conversation with NYU representatives.

That is why the March 9<sup>th</sup> and March 13<sup>th</sup> letters by NYU Vice-President Alicia Hurley, Mr. Haberman's successor, are so disturbing. In those letters, Ms. Hurley makes clear that NYU does *not* in fact support such a designation or the particular boundaries proposed, instead stating that the proposal "does not necessarily demonstrate that the entire area weaves together as a single cohesive historic district" and specifically undercutting the proposal to include certain areas, stating that "portions of Sixth and Seventh Avenues... would not necessarily merit incorporation within a historic district."

After this serious violation of the University's commitment was brought to your attention, Ms. Hurley followed with a second March 13<sup>th</sup> letter "to confirm New York University's position," which in no way retracted or contradicted any of the statements from the prior letter. Instead, it merely stated that "[t]he University supports a full review of the proposed study area in accordance with the procedures of the Landmarks Preservation Commission," which is in fact what the Commission does whenever they receive a proposal for designation, regardless of whether or not NYU supports such a review. As you well know, support for a "review" of a landmark proposal is in no way the equivalent of support for *designation of a landmark district*, much less designation of the

specific buildings and boundaries which NYU pledged to support. A proposal for a historic district can receive a “full review” and then be turned down, thus making such support meaningless, especially when coupled with explicit statements challenging the proposed district’s integrity and claiming that key areas are not deserving of designation. Thus while NYU may support a “full review” of the proposal, it would apparently only support *designation* of a considerably compromised and reduced district, in spite of the University’s specific prior commitments to the contrary.

NYU received considerable recognition for having made the pledge to support *designation* of this district four years ago – recognition which was apparently based upon falsehoods. While no one is terribly surprised to find NYU yet again working against a broadly-supported neighborhood preservation effort, what is shocking and disturbing is how flagrantly the University is willing to go back on its own explicit promises. Unfortunately this appears to prove that the public is no better off trying to include NYU in community planning discussions or seeking its input, as was done in this case, than in simply trying to work around the University. It is hard to imagine how NYU expects to be “part of the dialogue” on issues such as this, as Ms. Hurley states, when they cannot even be trusted to keep their word.

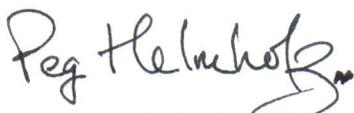
Sincerely,



Andrew Berman, Executive Director  
Greenwich Village Society  
for Historic Preservation



Simeon Bankoff, Executive Director  
Historic Districts Council



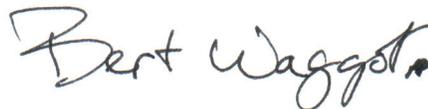
Peg Helmholz, President  
Central Village Block Association  
Historic South Village Advisory Board



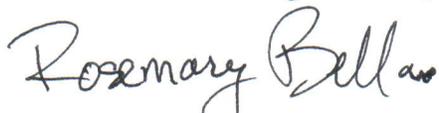
Livvie Mann, President  
Bedford Downing Block Association  
Historic South Village Advisory Board



Jonathan Geballe, President  
West Houston Street Block Association  
Historic South Village Advisory Board



Bert Waggot  
Central Village Block Association  
Historic South Village Advisory Board



Rosemary Bella  
Central Village Block Association  
Historic South Village Advisory Board



Stu Waldman



## NEW YORK UNIVERSITY

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### Government and Community Affairs

University Relations and Public Affairs  
70 Washington Square South, Room 1107  
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telephone: 212 998 6859  
fax: 212 995 4849  
alicia.hurley@nyu.edu

**Alicia D. Hurley, Ph.D.** *Associate Vice-President*

March 9, 2007

Mr. Andrew Berman  
Executive Director  
Greenwich Village Society  
for Historic Preservation  
232 East 11<sup>th</sup> Street  
New York, NY 10003

Dear Andrew,

I wanted to follow up on our conversations regarding the proposed South Village Historic District and the possibility of New York University (NYU) being represented on the assembled Historic South Village Preservation Project Advisory Board. As I have previously indicated, NYU supports the study of this general area to investigate a possible historic district. Typically NYU remains agnostic on rezonings and historic districts unless they directly affect our properties. The study area for the South Village Historic District does include a number of our properties and thus we are interested in being part of the discussion regarding this proposal.

The NYU Planning Team has reviewed the report prepared by Mr. Dolkart which proposes the South Village Historic District and they have some general observations. First, the report is obviously extensive and provides valuable information for discussion; however, the document does not necessarily demonstrate that the entire area weaves together as a single cohesive historic district. The proposed historic district abuts three existing districts and subsumes one existing district (Sullivan Street Historic District). Given the four other historic districts in this area, it seems worth considering whether it is more appropriate to seek expansions of existing districts that share characteristics with the proposed area and create a smaller South Village Historic District that embodies the working class and immigrant neighborhood outlined in the report. Additionally, the relatively large area, 40 blocks, covered by the proposal may include certain areas, such as portions of Sixth and Seventh Avenues, which would not necessarily merit incorporation within a historic district.

With the study completed and the South Village Historic District proposal submitted to the Landmarks Commission, we look forward to being a part of the dialogue around the establishment of this new historic district or expansion of existing

districts. When I first approached you about our being represented on the advisory council, I presumed that this group was being gathered to have a broad discussion on the merits of the proposal, the boundaries and the properties within those boundaries, and that the final outcome of such a discussion had not been predetermined. If that is the case, the University would like to participate as a member of the Advisory Board. If that is not the case, as you seemed to indicate in your comment that board membership required a letter in support of the district, we look forward to participating in the public process as this important preservation effort takes place.

Please do not hesitate to contact me with any questions.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Alicia D. Hurley". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, stylized initial "A".

Alicia D. Hurley, Ph.D.

cc: Commissioner Robert Tierney



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70 Washington Square South, Room 1107  
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alicia.hurley@nyu.edu

**Alicia D. Hurley, Ph.D.** *Associate Vice-President*

March 13, 2007

The Honorable Robert Tierney  
Chair, NYC Landmarks Preservation Commission  
One Centre Street, 9th Floor  
New York, NY 10007

Dear Chairman Tierney:

I am writing to confirm New York University's position with respect to the proposal for study of a South Village Historic District. The University supports a full review of the proposed study area in accordance with the procedures of the Landmarks Preservation Commission, with an eye toward eventual designation. The University is eager to work with our neighbors and community members in this critical effort to preserve our wonderful neighborhood.

Please do not hesitate to call on us if you have any questions.

Sincerely,



Alicia D. Hurley, Ph.D.