



**Greenwich  
Village  
Society for  
Historic  
Preservation**

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**TESTIMONY AND MATERIALS SUBMISSION OF THE  
GREENWICH VILLAGE SOCIETY FOR HISTORIC  
PRESERVATION  
REGARDING THE PROPOSED DEMOLITION  
BY RUDIN MANAGEMENT AND ST. VINCENT'S HOSPITAL  
OF NINE BUILDINGS IN THE  
GREENWICH VILLAGE HISTORIC DISTRICT  
AND THEIR REPLACEMENT WITH MULTIPLE RESIDENTIAL  
BUILDINGS AND A NEW HOSPITAL  
April 1, 2008**

Thank you Commissioners for the opportunity to testify before you today. My name is Andrew Berman, and I am the Executive Director of the Greenwich Village Society for Historic Preservation. This is clearly the most significant proposed change ever in the Greenwich Village Historic District, and arguably ever in the history of New York City's landmarks law. As you know, we have some very serious objections to the proposal, which I and my colleagues will outline for you through our testimony, submissions which have been handed to you, and the boards we will present.

First I would like to say that those of us who have expressed concerns about this proposal have been accused of choosing "buildings over people;" you, the members of the Commission, know this is not so, but it is worth reiterating why. By law, the approvals being sought today are entirely based upon whether or not the proposed demolitions and new construction are "appropriate" to the protected character of the Greenwich Village Historic District. The charitable mission of the applicant or possible economic hardships are not and cannot be considered as part of this process; not because they are not important, but because there is an entirely separate process an applicant must go through, requiring them to open their books and prove their case, if they wish to seek exemptions from the landmarks law on those bases.

That is not what has happened. Instead, an application has been made for an unprecedented scope and scale of demolition and new development in a historic district which, if approved, can and likely will be cited by other applicants as a basis for allowing them to do the same in the future. And the scope and scale of what is being proposed is breathtaking. No one has ever, in the 43 year history of the landmarks law, applied for, much less gotten permission to, demolish nine buildings within a designated historic district. As you know, such approvals can only be granted for buildings if they are deemed not to contribute to the special history or character of their historic district.

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On its face, it is simply inconceivable that, when the Greenwich Village Historic District was designated in 1969, nine contiguous buildings near the edge of the district would have been included if the Commission thought that NONE of them contributed to its character, especially when two large non-contributing post-war apartment buildings nearby would have made a carve-out quite easy (see attached). To allow the wholesale demolition of nine buildings in a historic district would obviate the entire meaning of landmark protections.

The proposed replacement buildings are equally unprecedented and breathtaking in their scale. The hospital would be the largest and tallest building ever erected in Greenwich Village, and the largest and tallest ever approved in any of the city's 90 historic districts. The Rudin condo block would be the largest apartment building ever erected in the Greenwich Village Historic District, and would, we believe, be second only to the hospital in size and height of any building ever approved in a New York City landmark district. This is so important because, as you know, scale is one of most important defining elements of the Greenwich Village Historic District. In 1969, the Commission went to great lengths to cut buildings out whose scale or architecture did not relate to the character of the district (see attached); in fact, just a block away from the site in question, 101 and 79 West 12<sup>th</sup> Street were drawn out of the district, though both are considerably smaller than the two large buildings being proposed today.

We have heard time and again from the applicant that it is simply not feasible for older hospital buildings such as those on the St. Vincent's campus to be re-used for the planned residential development on the east side of the avenue. While feasibility is not the question before you today, there is simply no evidence to back up this claim, and the facts show otherwise. Just to the north of this site in Chelsea the old French Hospital now serves as apartments, Hell's Kitchen's Polyclinic Hospital is now residences, and the landmarked New York Cancer Center on Central Park West has also been converted to residential use. Entire landmarked neighborhoods such as SoHo, NoHo, and Tribeca would not exist were it not for the conversion of buildings designed for other purposes to residential use.

Several of the buildings on the east side of 7<sup>th</sup> Avenue proposed for demolition are clearly contributing buildings, and we would specifically call out the Smith, Raskob, Nurse's Residence, Reiss, and Spellman buildings as ones which the Commission should not allow to be demolished. All are described favorably in the historic district designation report, and all were clearly designed to not only relate to one another but to the character of the Greenwich Village Historic District. In fact, the designation report refers to the Smith-Raskob building as having "very much the same quality as some of the best of the Fifth Avenue apartment houses," and that in its "use of materials, window pattern, and details, generally conform(s) with the houses on the adjoining streets." Of the other 12<sup>th</sup> Street hospital buildings, it says "in their use of brick and individual window openings, they harmonize, as a group, remarkably well with their neighbors."

We would very much agree, and believe that the Spellman Pavilion on 11<sup>th</sup> Street, with its stone base with brick above, pedimental lintels decorated with stone rosettes, and late deco metal work at its base is equally integral to the fabric of the historic district. In fact, I would ask you to look both in the packets (see attached) that you have been given and at the boards we have to see comparisons

between these buildings and other noteworthy apartment buildings and other contributing structures within the Greenwich Village Historic District. As you can see, it is often hard to tell which is the hospital building, and which is not. As you can see from the photographs we have submitted (see attached), the materials, massing, details, and fenestrations of these buildings clearly relate to the character of the historic district of which they are, and should remain, a part.

By contrast, the applicants have repeatedly argued that only rowhouses are significant or contributing structures on sidestreets in the Greenwich Village Historic District; here again the facts do not bear this out. In reality, sidestreets in the Greenwich Village Historic District are full of small and medium-sized apartment buildings, institutions, houses of worship, and theaters, which the applicants' logic would say are entirely expendable and should be replaced with newly constructed rowhouses at the first opportunity. In fact, specifically regarding this block of West 12<sup>th</sup> Street and its combination of rowhouses, small apartment buildings, and hospital buildings, the designation report says "diversity is the **outstanding** quality of this street." By contrast, the report goes out of its way to note that it is the "high apartment houses" at either end of the block which strike the only note of "strident" incompatibility on the block; an incompatibility which, we believe, would be greatly exacerbated with the proposed additions..

The designation report cites nearby buildings like 175 West 13<sup>th</sup> Street as examples of out-of-scale and out-of-context additions to the district. On the other hand, the applicant has compared their proposed new gigantic apartment block on 7<sup>th</sup> Avenue to the classic Bing & Bing apartment buildings of Greenwich Village. But an actual comparison of the scale of these buildings (see attached) shows that the proposed new building actually makes both the out-of-scale post-war building and the Bing & Bing buildings look like toys by comparison. It should be noted that the proposed new hospital building is actually even larger than the proposed new apartment block. By contrast, the Greenwich Village Historic District designation report comments specifically on the appropriateness of the scale of St. Vincent's current buildings on both sides of 7<sup>th</sup> Avenue, saying that "scale plays such an important part, and these buildings have good scale relative to the width of the avenue."

I would also direct you to the DVD in your packet, which contains a 360° massing animation of the proposed new buildings in the context of their surroundings, which we believe speaks volumes to the profound difference between the proposed buildings and the existing scale and fabric of the Greenwich Village Historic District (see attached).

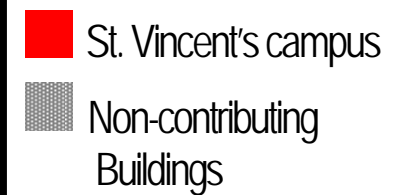
Not only is the size and scale of the proposed new developments inappropriate, but the designs are as well. In addition to bearing no relationship to the character of the Greenwich Village Historic District, the two gargantuan buildings do not even relate to one another. The Rudin condo complex is about as generic a design as one could imagine, and the cookie-cutter pseudo townhouses on the sidestreets are an improvement over the massive apartment block only in their diminished scale. All the proposed new residential buildings look as though they could have been plucked out of Donald Trump's Riverside South or Battery Park City, with no sense of relationship to the special character of the Greenwich Village Historic District. The proposed hospital building's cavernous entrance would merely repeat the mistakes made at the hospital's 1980's buildings which they are now seeking to demolish.

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Additionally, we have as of yet so far seen little or no detail of the plans for renovation of the Triangle site's open space or its facilities building. These have long been an eyesore in the neighborhood, and commitments to make the space a well-designed and usable amenity have never been kept. Until more particulars are provided for the proposed design of this space, we would urge the Commission not to approve the proposed changes.

In conclusion, the Greenwich Village Society for Historic Preservation strongly urges the Commission not to make a historic and precedent-setting mistake with this application. The scale of demolition and new development proposed here has never been proposed before in a New York City historic district, and with good reason. There is really little or no argument that can be made for the "appropriateness" of this application. If Rudin and the hospital want to argue that economic hardship and the need to fulfill a charitable mission require them to be relieved of those requirements, then the law gives them that right. But until and unless that case has been made and proven, there is no reason find this application anything other than inappropriate for the Greenwich Village Historic District, and therefore it should be rejected.

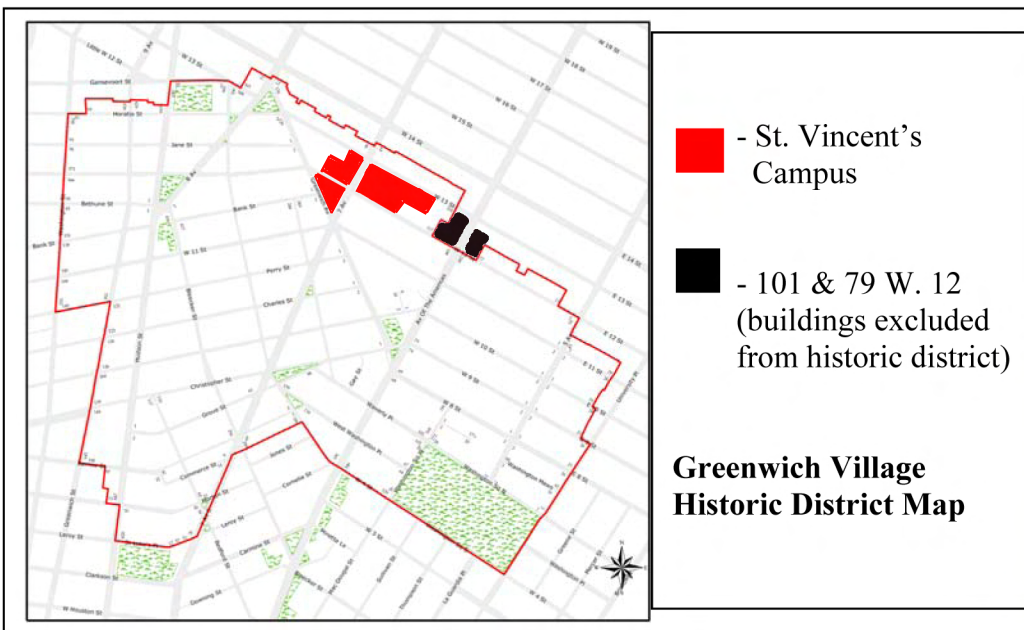
# Greenwich Village Historic District (designated 1969)



The Greenwich Village Society  
for Historic Preservation  
[www.gvshp.org](http://www.gvshp.org)







101 West 12<sup>th</sup> Street

## Buildings Excluded from the Greenwich Village Historic District

79 West 12<sup>th</sup> Street





## Comparisons: St. Vincent's Buildings vs. other buildings in Greenwich Village Historic District



45 Fifth Avenue



Spellman Pavillion



# Comparisons: St. Vincent's Buildings vs. other buildings in Greenwich Village Historic District



Washington Square Hotel (top) , Nurse's Residence (bottom)



**Comparisons: St. Vincent's Buildings vs. other buildings  
in Greenwich Village Historic District**



Spellman Pavilion (top), 1 Fifth Avenue (bottom)

# **Comparisons: St. Vincent's Buildings vs. other buildings in Greenwich Village Historic District**



1 Fifth Avenue



Spellman Pavilion



**Comparisons: St. Vincent's Buildings vs. other buildings  
in Greenwich Village Historic District**



51 Fifth Avenue (top), Reiss Pavilion (bottom)



**Comparisons: St. Vincent's Buildings vs. other buildings  
in Greenwich Village Historic District**



59 West 12<sup>th</sup> Street (Bing & Bing) (top), Smith/Raskob Building (bottom)



**Comparisons: St. Vincent's Buildings vs. other buildings  
in Greenwich Village Historic District**



Reiss Pavilion (top), 59 West 12<sup>th</sup> Street (Bing & Bing) (bottom)



# Reiss





## Nurse's Residence





## Nurse's Residence (con't.)





## Smith-Raskob





# Spellman





# **Size of Proposed Rudin Building Compared to a Bing & Bing Building**



**Proposed Rudin Building, with outline  
of 45 Christopher St.**



**45 Christopher St.**



# **Size of Proposed Rudin Building Compared to Nearby Post-War Apartment Building**



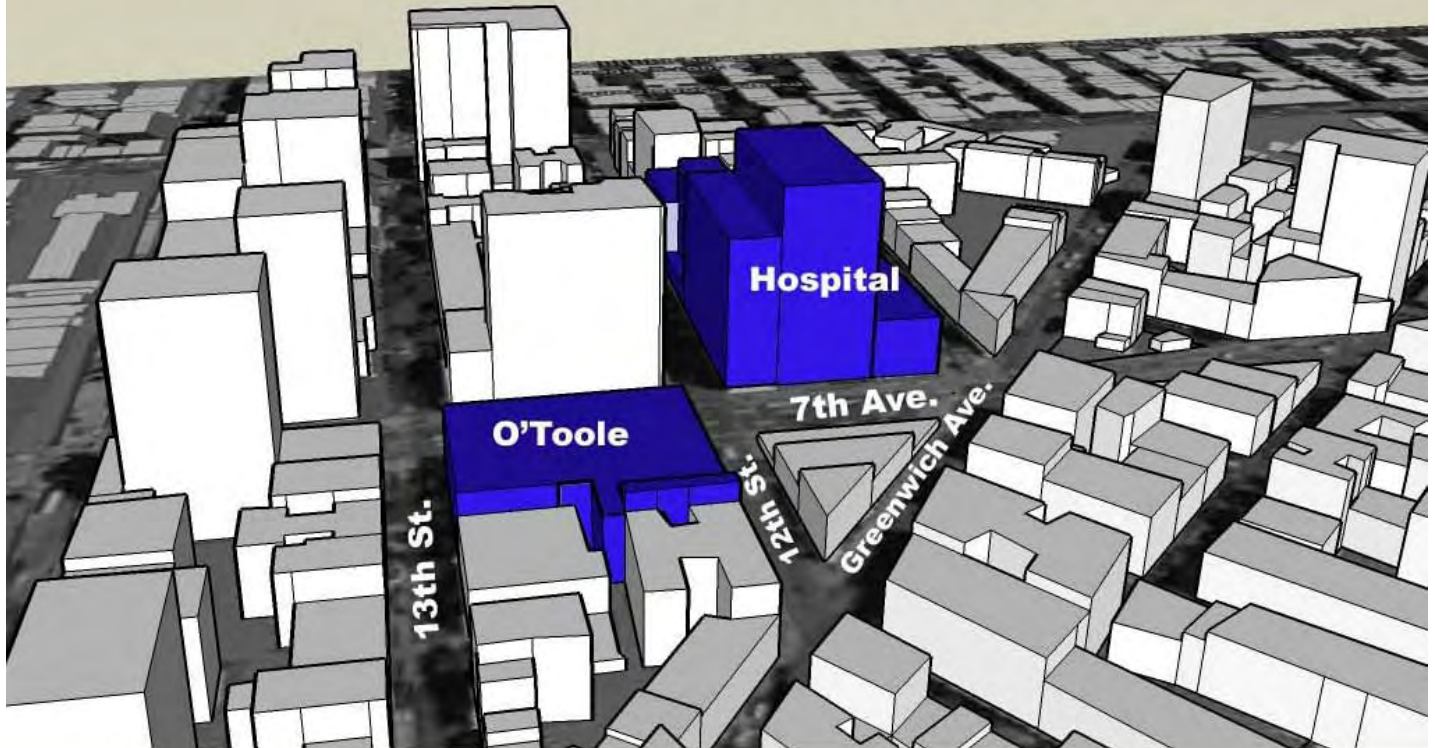
**Proposed Rudin Building, with outline of 175 W. 13th St.**

**175 W. 13th St.**



**Still from Massing Animation Showing Relative Size  
of Proposed New Developments in Context  
To view entire animation, visit <http://www.youtube.com/gvshp>**

**View East - Existing**



**View East - Proposed**

