



## 133 – 139 MacDougal Rebuilding the Provincetown Playhouse and Honoring a Cultural Institution

- NYU Will Rebuild the Provincetown Playhouse Theatre in the Building
- NYU Will Preserve and Restore the 1940's Playhouse Façade
- NYU Will Build a Smaller Building than Allowed by Zoning
- New Construction to Be Low-Scale, Contextual, Brick Building for Law Faculty and Student Research

Existing



Proposed



NYU has recently begun discussions with local community groups about a construction project on the site of 133-139 MacDougal Street that would provide space for legal research centers for the NYU School of Law.

133-139 MacDougal, currently an office and apartment building which houses the Provincetown Playhouse, occupies an important cultural spot in the history of the American theatre. However, the actual building that exists at 133 MacDougal today looks nothing like the building occupied by the Provincetown Players, most famous for launching the career of Eugene O'Neill among many others of his contemporary writers, actors and artists.

The existing building is the result of a major renovation in the 1940s when four separate houses (133-139 MacDougal) were converted into one apartment building. This conversion included the complete renovation of the interiors of the buildings and the construction of a single façade that you see today.



After reviewing many options for the site (see Options Section), NYU has come up with a sensitive and contextual plan that respects the cultural history of the site.

- The University plans to preserve and restore the portion of the 133 MacDougal façade that contains the theatre in a way that reflects the 1940s Playhouse. The façade of the Provincetown Playhouse from the era when the Provincetown Players were there was demolished in the 1940s conversion.
- The façade of the 1940s Theatre will be protected during the construction and then cleaned and restored.
- A new theatre will be constructed, and the University is exploring how it can integrate aspects of the rich history of the pre 1940s and post 1940s theatre.
- The new building is of low scale and is designed and detailed to be harmonious with the existing streetscape. It will be a low-scale, contextual, brick building which will house NYU Law faculty and student research centers.

Pre-1940s renovation



NYU 2008 Proposal



### Background and History of 133-139 MacDougal

Historical and physical evidence show that 133-139 MacDougal Street was constructed in three major building campaigns.

1. The site was originally occupied by four three-and-a-half story brick rowhouses constructed in the 1830s. These were 133, 135, 137 and 139 MacDougal Street.
2. During the 1870s and 1880s, all four were increased in height and had major façade alterations. 133 MacDougal was converted to a stable at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century and later to a bottling plant.

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3. In 1941-42, the four buildings were combined into one structure and refaced, giving the building its current appearance. The 1941 plans filed at the Department of Buildings show a radical alteration including the unified façade and removal of the interior fabric including walls, stairs and finishes. It is not clear whether the theatre at 133 MacDougal was altered during the 1940s; however, based on historical descriptions and physical evidence it is likely that the volume of the theatre was retained, while all finishes and furnishings have been updated, most recently in 1997.

The entry of the existing theatre was designed and built as part of the 1940s renovation, it is not reminiscent of the building façade that the Provincetown Players knew.

**No. 133 MacDougal 1935-36**



**No. 133 MacDougal 1945**



### **The Provincetown Players (1915 – 1929)**

The Provincetown Players was an experimental, amateur theatre company which, between 1915 and 1922, was highly influential in American theatre, and best known for introducing the works of Eugene O'Neill. The group came together in the summer of 1915 in Provincetown, Massachusetts and gave performances over the next year, which were so well received that it inspired them to establish a theatre in New York City in the fall of 1916.

In 1916, the Players opened a theatre in Greenwich Village, which was at the time the heart of bohemian intellectualism and artistic expression. They rented the parlor floor of No. 139 MacDougal Street, which they converted for the theatre. The Provincetown Players debuted on November 3, 1916 with O'Neill's *Bound East for Cardiff*.

In 1918, the Players moved to No. 133 MacDougal and renovated that space for the new Playwright's Theatre.

The end of the 1921-1922 theatrical season marked the end of the Provincetown Players, as a result of internal struggle among the various managers, playwrights and actors.

By 1925, the group that remained called itself Experimental Theatre, Inc., which was directed by James Light. The group staged plays over four seasons. But by 1929, the group was in search of a better venue and raised money to move uptown to the Shubert's Garrick Theatre, located at 35<sup>th</sup> Street. With the stock market crash of 1929, subscriptions and financing went unfulfilled, and the company was forced to close. After two bills of the season, the "Provincetown Playhouse at the Garrick Theatre" closed on December 14, 1929.

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## Later History

Although between 1929 and 1940 the theatre continued at 133 MacDougal, little of note was produced there.

In 1940 the building was refaced and the upper stories were completely reorganized and renovated. The theatre space in 133 MacDougal was retained, but the façade was demolished and completely redesigned.

In the 1960s, the theatre enjoyed a revival when it was used to produce Samuel Beckett's *Krapp's Last Tape* and Edward Albee's one act, *The Zoo Story*. Other significant playwrights also staged their work at the Playhouse, including John Guare (*Muzeeka*, 1968; New York premiere), Sam Shepherd (*Red Cross*, 1968); and David Mamet (*Edmond*, 1982; New York premiere).

NYU purchased the building in 1984. The University continued the use of the theatre, and Charles Busch's *Vampire Lesbians of Sodom* ran there from 1985 – 1990.

The theatre was dark between 1992 and 1998, and a major renovation of the theatre space was undertaken between 1996-1998.

Re-opened in 1998, the theatre is operated by NYU's Steinhardt School of Culture, Education and Human Development, which uses it for a myriad of activities including theatre productions and art performances, the majority of which are free or low cost to the public. Shows include chamber opera, musical theatre and regular running programming like *Storytelling at the Provincetown Playhouse*, which runs monthly during the academic year. Tickets are only \$5. During the summer, the Playhouse offers programming for high school students. The Shakespeare Youth Ensemble runs theatre classes during the day. In the evening, the *New Plays for Young Audiences* series offers family friendly productions with free tickets to high school students. Additionally, for the last 10 years the Annual O'Neill Festival has been held Provincetown Playhouse.

These programs will continue in the new Provincetown Playhouse Theatre.

### NYU's Review of Options for 133-139 MacDougal

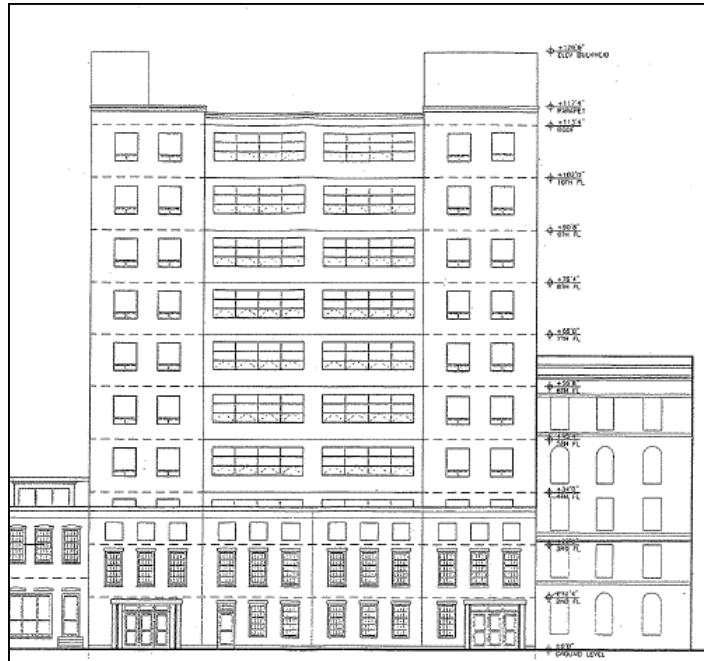
**Concept 1: In January 2007, the NYU Law School was working on a proposal for the site that called for a demolition of the entire building.**

The Law School worked on different schemes including looking at whether capacity/load could be added to the existing building. At the time, it was decided that the building could not bear any additional structure without significant shoring up, and a plan for a new 8 to 10 story was proposed. This plan maximized FAR/square footage.

The University then began to work with the Law School to come up with a better solution for the site that would be in keeping with the principles that were being established with the community task force. The first step was to dedicate an existing NYU building (22 Washington Square North, which served as the home of the Undergraduate Admissions Office) to the Law School, allowing the Law School to preserve some of the square footage that would be lost by creating a smaller, more contextual building.



## Image of Original Plan (Concept 1)



## Concept 2: Renovate Existing Building, Add Rear Additions, and Add 3 floors above; Full Façade and Playhouse Façade to Remain

A thorough structural engineering report was commissioned which revealed that:

- The existing structure could not support additional floors and the existing pressure on the bearing wall footings was not adequate for the additional load required.
- Significant reinforcement would be required, including new columns and bracing in all sections of the building, including the Provincetown Playhouse.
- The additional bracing and columns would severely hamper layout of the building.
- At that point, a preferred option could be a full demolition of the site behind the façade and a preservation of the full façade.

## Existing Façade with 3-story Addition (Concept 2)



The question for the MacDougal site became: was the full façade worth saving? Was this a building that had architectural distinction?

After much analysis and consultation with historians and architects, the answer led to an exploration of a new building and preservation of ONLY the Playhouse façade.

**Proposal: New building with existing Playhouse Façade to remain**

The University’s proposal is one that:

- builds an architecturally attractive and contextual building on the site
- preserves the existing façade of the Provincetown Playhouse
- rebuilds a working theatre with the same capacity and volume as the one that currently exists
- allows a similar amount of square footage as the second concept but in a shorter, more attractive and contextual building

***New Proposed Building***



**COMPARISON OF OPTIONS**

|                                    | <b>Existing</b> | <b>Concept 1</b> | <b>Concept 2</b> | <b>Proposal</b> |
|------------------------------------|-----------------|------------------|------------------|-----------------|
| Total Zoning Area (Square Footage) | 27,245 SF       | 53,222 SF        | 44,123 SF        | 44,362          |
| FAR                                | 3.23            | 6.31             | 5.23             | 5.26            |
| Street Height                      | 57 ft           | 31 ft            | 57 ft            | 60 ft           |
| Total Height                       | 57 ft           | 117 ft           | 85 ft            | 70 ft           |
| Total Floors                       | 5 floors        | 10 floors        | 8 floors         | 7 floors        |

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## 133 – 139 MacDougal – Provincetown Playhouse: Q & A

### **What is the current use of 133-137 MacDougal?**

133-137 MacDougal is a vacated residential building, with some office space as well as the home of the Provincetown Playhouse. The Playhouse is a working theatre for NYU's Steinhardt music and performance departments.

### **What is NYU proposing to build there?**

The site is owned by NYU's Law School, and is the final building in the Law School's master plan. In addition to the new Provincetown Playhouse, the building will house the Law School's new and existing Research Centers which have outgrown their current space and awaiting a permanent home.

### **Why can't NYU use this building as housing, and leave the site alone?**

The University has spent the past year engaged in an exercise to project and prioritize its projected growth needs. This has called for a prioritization of what types of uses should be in the "Core" area. The conversion of this building into an academic one is important as one of the only available academic sites for the Law School.

### **How will this space be used?**

This site is the final site in the NYU Law School's master planning and has been slated for conversion to academic uses. It will house Faculty Research Centers which need to be proximate to the other Law School buildings. Steinhardt will return to the Provincetown Playhouse Theatre once the building project is complete.

### **Will there still be a Provincetown Playhouse Theatre?**

Yes, Steinhardt's Department of Music and Performing Arts Professions currently utilizes the space and will be the main tenant in the new Provincetown Playhouse Theatre which runs programming that is open to the public.

### **Will the new Provincetown Playhouse Theatre be in the same physical space as the existing one?**

Yes. The new Provincetown Playhouse Theatre will be located in the southern most quarter of the building.

### **Will there be an acknowledgement of the history of the Provincetown Playhouse and its Players?**

Yes. A visual history of the Provincetown Playhouse and its Players will be documented and displayed in the lobby of the new Playhouse. The University is endeavoring to ensure that any historical aspects of the current theatre are able to be brought forward in the rebuilding.

### **With whom has NYU been in dialogue with about the project?**

The University has made presentations to the NYU Community Task Force about the project as well as other identified stakeholders. The University will continue to offer informational briefings and are slated for a Community Board 2 Institutions Committee meeting on May 28.

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**A couple of months ago, NYU signed those Planning Principles; how is this project consistent with those?**

The University has explored various options and believes this is the best solution for the site, which follows the principles which call for "contextual development that is sensitive to building heights, densities and materials"; and "thoughtful urban and architectural design".

NYU is committed to a public review even though this is an "as-of-right" project. In addition, the building is not being built to the full FAR (available square footage).

Furthermore, this proposal adheres to the principle of community sustainability through the continuation a working theatre for all to enjoy. Finally, with this project the University has prioritized utilizing space within its existing footprint.

**There's a proposal being made for a South Village Historic District -- is this project consistent with that proposal? Does NYU support that the Historic District proposal?**

NYU is on record in support of the designation of the South Village Historic District. The University believes that the proposed building preserves the cultural aspects of the MacDougal site and the sensitive, low scale design is very much in keeping with the principles of historic districts.

**Will this count towards the projected need for 6 million square feet?**

The difference in gained square footage between what is currently on the site and the new building will be counted toward the 6 million square feet.