



GVSHP
GREENWICH VILLAGE
SOCIETY FOR
HISTORIC PRESERVATION

November 14, 2005

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

Re: 26-story dormitory plan for 110-124 East 12th Street

Dear President Sexton:

I write regarding the University's recently announced plans for a 26-story dormitory at the above-referenced location.

As you no doubt know, the Greenwich Village Society for Historic Preservation and neighbors of this site have been closely monitoring plans for development here. Prior to NYU's announcement, we have expressed very serious concerns about the potential size and scale of a development on this mid-block, side-street site, based upon statements by Hudson Companies of its intention to develop the site to the maximum bulk allowed by the underlying zoning and the purchase of development rights from the neighboring Cooper Station Post Office. As you also no doubt know, GVSHP has brought to the attention of the Post Office and federal and state officials the fact that the Post Office's development rights were sold without going through the appropriate review as required by Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act, and the Post Office is currently in negotiations with the federal Advisory Council on Historic Preservation to formulate a way to address this mistake in this case and to, in the future, ensure that such lapses do not occur again.

Because of the nature of the location, a 26-story development on this site is of great concern to us in terms of its size, scale, and relationship to its context and surroundings. As you know, this would be one of the tallest or possibly the tallest building in the East Village, and as opposed to being sited on a wide avenue it is on a mid-block site on a side street. The block and its immediate neighbors across the street are characterized by several distinguished historic structures, ranging from the larger, bulkier loft buildings at 111 and 113-119 4th Avenue, to Webster Hall, the former St. Ann's School, and the National Register-listed Cooper Station Post Office on East 11th Street, to various 19th century former rowhouse and industrial loft buildings on East 12th Street. The block is also distinguished by the remaining tower and façade of St. Ann's Church, which we are very happy to hear will remain in place under this plan, but we are very concerned about the appropriateness of a 26-story tower in relation to all of these structures. Even the larger loft buildings on 4th Avenue are significantly shorter than the proposed dorm, as are the NYU dorms on 3rd Avenue, which have long been criticized for the inappropriateness of their scale and design in relation to the surrounding area.

Which brings us to our other great concern, which is the choice of design, materials, massing, and detailing of the project. Given the tremendous visual impact such a development would have, and the strong existing character of the block and its surroundings, it is of the utmost importance that the design be sensitive in its relationship

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to its context. With this development, NYU has the opportunity to significantly and visibly add to the character of its surroundings, or to irreversibly detract from them, as some other past projects have. I am sure that you would agree that the latter serves NYU no better than it does the community, or the relationship between the two.

GVSHP expects to, along with neighbors of the site, meet with Hudson Companies soon regarding some of these issues. And while we recognize that Hudson owns the site and will be building the development, as the eventual leaseholder and owner of the property, NYU has a responsibility and an ability to shape the outcome of the development here. At the beginning of your tenure as President of NYU, you stated that you hoped to help preserve the “fragile ecosystem” of the Village, and that you hoped NYU would work more closely with its neighbors on planning and development issues. As the first major development by NYU initiated during your tenure, and as what will likely be the largest such development for some time to come, this project presents the single greatest opportunity so far for you to translate these words into action. However, I also believe that not living up to this commitment to work with the community and respect the special character of the surrounding neighborhood will also send a resoundingly chilling message about the university’s commitment to work with and be a part of this community.

I therefore strongly urge you to carefully weigh and consider issues such as the appropriateness of the size, scale, and design of this new development for the surrounding community, particularly in light of its location and the established short-comings in the process by which the United States Postal Service disposed of the development rights to be used for this site. While the commitment to maintain the tower of St. Ann’s Church on the site is a welcome and encouraging step in the right direction, it is these issues of design, height, and bulk which will ultimately determine the legacy of this project and of the University’s efforts to forge a closer working relationship with the community at this point in time.

On a related note, I will take this opportunity to renew GVSHP’s call to the University to provide greater clarity and information about its long-range building plans to us and the broader Greenwich Village/East Village/Noho community. About three years ago, you publicly pledged to expeditiously hire a planner to work with the community on exactly such issues. It is my understanding that this position was filled about six months ago, but GVSHP has not heard from the University about establishing any communication between us and the planner to facilitate discussion, in spite of our inquiries. I think that it would be extremely helpful if the University followed through on this pledge and began a dialogue with GVSHP and other community leaders about planning issues.

I look forward to hearing back from you about these pressing issues.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Andrew Berman", with a long horizontal line extending to the right.

Andrew Berman
Executive Director

cc: Advisory Council on Historic Preservation
State Senator Tom Duane
Assemblymember Deborah Glick
City Council Member Margarita Lopez
City Council Member Alan Gerson
City Council Member Christine Quinn
City Council Member-elect Rosie Mendez
Community Board #3
Community Board #2
St. Ann's Committee
Hudson Companies