



**Greenwich
Village
Society for
Historic
Preservation**

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November 30, 2006

Council Member Erik Martin Dilan
Chair, Committee on Housing and Buildings
387 Arlington Avenue
Brooklyn, NY 11208

Council Member Jessica Lappin
Chair, Subcommittee on Landmarks, Public Siting and Maritime Uses
336 East 73rd Street, Suite C
New York, NY 10021

Dear Council Members Dilan and Lappin,

I write to bring your attention to a major problem regarding the proper identification of landmarked buildings in the Department of Buildings' Building Information System (BIS). The Greenwich Village Society for Historic Preservation (GVSHP) has found that hundreds of landmarked buildings in Greenwich Village alone were not identified as landmarks in BIS. As a result, the Department of Buildings (DOB) could easily issue permits for demolition or major alteration of landmarked buildings without the consent of the Landmarks Preservation Commission (LPC), and we know of some cases where permits were incorrectly issued by DOB because of this flaw in the system. Based on our experience, we believe this problem may be citywide, which could put hundreds of other landmarked buildings at risk.

Because all properties that are either individual landmarks or located within one of the city's historic districts require permits from both the LPC and the DOB whenever work is being done, these buildings are supposed to be marked as landmarks in BIS. In the system, landmarks are marked with an "L" under "Landmark Status." This method is suppose to ensure that if an applicant applies to DOB for construction permits, the property is flagged, and DOB will not issue permits until the work has been approved by the LPC. However, when landmarked buildings are not correctly flagged in BIS, DOB can issue, and has issued, permits for inappropriate work.

When GVSHP recently checked BIS to ensure that all of our landmarked buildings were properly identified, we found something quite shocking. Among the approximately 2,035 buildings in the Greenwich Village Historic District, 337 buildings, or 17%, were not properly marked as landmarks. In addition, there were seventeen buildings, or 10%, not marked as landmarks within the Gansevoort Market Historic District, the Weehawken Street Historic District, and the Greenwich Village Historic District Extension. We sent a list of all of these buildings to the City to correct the mistakes in BIS. However, even after we were told that the problem had been "fixed," we found that there were still seventy-eight buildings not properly marked as landmarks, and twenty-nine buildings which were actually originally correctly labeled as landmarks, but were somehow "unmarked" as such after the agencies "fixed" the others.

GVSHIP is fortunate to have the time and the staff to investigate such matters and double check the work of the city agencies. However, to be sure, other historic neighborhoods throughout the city have not had the time to undertake such a project and are probably entirely unaware of this problem. In all likelihood our experience with BIS is not isolated, and there may similar situations throughout New York City.

As a result, I strongly urge you to hold oversight hearings to further examine this issue and to ensure that designated landmarks in New York City are being properly protected by the Department of Buildings and do not slip through the cracks of the City's bureaucracy.

I thank you for your attention in this matter.

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: City Council Speaker Christine Quinn
Manhattan Borough President Scott Stringer
State Senator Tom Duane
State Senator Martin Connor
Assemblymember Deborah Glick
Council Member Alan Gerson
Council Member Rosie Mendez
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Manhattan Community Board 4
Manhattan Community Board 5
Manhattan Community Board 6
Municipal Art Society
New York Landmarks Conservancy
Historic Districts Council
Society for the Architecture of the City
Four Borough Neighborhood Preservation Alliance
Landmark West!
Friends of the Upper East Side Historic Districts
Defenders of the Historic Upper East Side
Greenwich Village Community Task Force
Federation to Preserve the Greenwich Village Waterfront and Great Port
Greenwich Village Block Associations