



GVSHP Executive Director Andrew Berman leading a rally to call for the Tunnel Garage to be saved.

PRESS RELEASE

For Immediate Release

March 24, 2006

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"SAVE THE HISTORIC TUNNEL GARAGE!" DEMAND NEIGHBORS & PRESERVATIONISTS FROM ACROSS CITY AND COUNTRY

Building About to be Demolished Even as Recent Billboard Removal Reveals Garage's Model-T Ford Medallion & Other Historic Ornament Hidden From Public For Years

Manhattan -- The Greenwich Village Society for Historic Preservation, the SoHo Alliance, and the Historic Districts Council were joined today by dozens of neighbors and representatives of Borough President Scott Stringer and Assemblymember Deborah Glick for a rally and press conference to save the

historic Tunnel Garage. The 85-year old building is one of the oldest operating garages in New York, but more importantly is a highly unusual early Art Deco building known and beloved by neighbors and lovers of historic architecture across the country. The owner has begun to move toward demolishing the building to make way for a luxury apartment development. In preparation for demolition, the owner has removed billboards from the building that for nearly a quarter century hid much of the building's unique colorful art deco ornamentation, including a medallion in the building's crown depicting a Model-T Ford emerging from the nearby Holland Tunnel ([CLICK HERE](#)). Though named for the Holland Tunnel, the garage was built 5 years before the opening of its namesake, which was the first vehicular connection between New York City and the North American mainland, and at the time the longest tunnel in the world.

"This is an 11th hour plea to the owner to save this wonderful building which could so easily be re-used and restored rather than demolished," said Andrew Berman, Executive Director of the Greenwich Village Society for Historic Preservation, which has been fighting to save this building. "The City's Landmarks Preservation Commission has been deluged with hundreds of letters in support of landmarking this building, and preservationists from across the city and country have called upon them to do the same. It's got a medallion representing a Model-T Ford traveling through the city's first tunnel connecting New York City to the U.S. mainland – how much more historic can you get than that?" added Berman.

"To demolish an unprotected historic building in a neighborhood renowned for its landmarked buildings is unconscionable," said Sean Sweeney, Executive Director of the SoHo Alliance, a neighborhood group also fighting to preserve the building.

"Demolishing the Tunnel Garage for yet another glass monolith to wealth and avarice would be tragic. This building is useful, beautiful and historically significant; why can't the City do the right thing and save this neighborhood landmark rather than allow another block-buster," said Simeon Bankoff, Executive Director of the Historic Districts Council, a citywide historic preservation organization.

In October of 2005 the Greenwich Village Society for Historic Preservation asked the New York City Landmarks Preservation Commission to landmark the endangered building ([CLICK HERE](#)). Later that month, the State of New York determined that the Tunnel Garage was eligible for listing on the State and National Register of Historic Places due to its significant architecture and history. Several preservation organizations from New York City and from as far away as California and Florida have also requested that the New York City Landmarks Preservation Commission landmark the building ([CLICK HERE](#)). Thus far, the Commission has refused to act.

A photo of the building from 1939 displayed at the demonstration shows that the Tunnel Garage now looks virtually the same as it did nearly 70 years ago ([CLICK HERE](#)). "What a loss to our city it would be if a unique and irreplaceable building like this were

allowed to be demolished for another faceless, anonymous high-rise. Can't we do better than that?" asked Berman.

In 2004, the City changed the zoning in Soho allowing residential development on parking lots for the first time. As a result, parking lots have virtually disappeared from the neighborhood, making this garage uniquely valuable and potentially profitable. However, the zoning for this site only allows parking garages or other light industrial or commercial uses; the owner of the Tunnel Garage is therefore seeking a variance, or special exemption from the zoning, in order to build a 10-story apartment tower here, claiming that 'economic hardship' prevents him from maintaining the building or a parking business here. The owner of the garage also claims that the building is in disrepair and cannot be saved – a claim neighbors and preservationists dispute.

Berman noted that the determination of eligibility for the building for listing on the State and National Registers of Historic Places actually qualifies the owner for many grants and loans to maintain and restore the building, further belying his 'hardship' claim. "This owner could continue to make a handsome profit preserving the building and operating the garage. Clearly, his only reason for wanting to demolish the building and replace it with an apartment tower is that he simply believes he can make even more money that way," stated Berman.







Gregg Levine, Friends of the Tunnel Garage (left); Sean Sweeney, SoHo Alliance (center); Andrew Berman, Greenwich Village Society for Historic Preservation (right).

PRESS RELEASE

For Immediate Release December 18, 2005
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NEIGHBORS AND PRESERVATIONISTS DEMONSTRATE TO SAVE

SOHO'S HISTORIC TUNNEL GARAGE;

Owner Empties Building, But Garage Supporters Call 'Economic Hardship' Case for Demolition and Redevelopment of Site a Ruse

Manhattan -- The Greenwich Village Society for Historic Preservation, the Friends of the Tunnel Garage, and the Soho Alliance joined for a demonstration today to save the endangered, historic Tunnel Garage from demolition. The owner of the building is seeking special permission from the City to develop an apartment tower on the site, claiming it is economically unfeasible to continue to operate a parking garage there. Demonstrators called for landmarking the garage on the basis of its historic and architectural significance, and also argued that the owner's hardship claim is false. A recent rezoning of the area has resulted in the disappearance of nearly all parking lots and garages in Soho, making this rare remaining garage extremely valuable and potentially profitable. The demonstration was held on the day the garage's owners had ordered long-term customers to remove their vehicles by, an indication that the owner's plans to demolish the building may be imminent.

The Tunnel Garage was built in 1922 and was named for the impending construction of the nearby Holland Tunnel, the first automobile tunnel to cross the Hudson. A neighborhood landmark and an icon of the early automobile age, it is also one of the oldest extant parking garages in New York. The Tunnel Garage is distinguished by unique proto-Art Deco terra-cotta ornament on its façade, and underneath the current "24 Hour Parking" sign is a medallion with an image of a Model-T Ford. Earlier this year, the Greenwich Village Society for Historic Preservation asked the NYC Landmarks Preservation Commission to landmark the building (the commission has not acted - [CLICK HERE](#)) and asked New York State to declare the building eligible for listing on the State and National Register of Historic Places (which they did – [CLICK HERE](#) for more information). City Councilmember Christine Quinn, Assemblymember Deborah Glick, the Historic Districts Council, the Art Deco Society of New York, and others have joined the call to save the building.

“This owner is not only seeking to destroy a beautiful local landmark, but to eliminate an incredibly valuable amenity that local residents need and desire,” stated Andrew Berman, Executive Director of the Greenwich Village Society for Historic Preservation. “This early Art Deco monument to the automobile age should be landmarked by the City. And with the virtual disappearance of parking lots and garages in this neighborhood over the last several years, the claim of ‘hardship’ by the owner for maintaining the garage and seeking a special exemption from the zoning to build an apartment tower rings incredibly false. The owner’s argument that the building is unstable just does not seem credible, as the conditions he describes are common in older buildings which are restored every day,” added Berman, referring to the owner’s claim that rotting support beams warrant demolition of the building.

Berman also noted that the recent determination of eligibility for the building for listing on the State and National Registers of Historic Places actually qualifies the owner for many grants and loans to maintain and restore the building, further belying his claim. “This owner could continue to make a handsome profit preserving the building and operating the garage. Clearly, his only reason for wanting to demolish the building and replace it with an apartment tower is that he simply believes he can make even more money that way,” stated Berman.

Last year, the City changed the zoning in Soho allowing residential development on parking lots for the first time. As a result, parking lots have virtually disappeared from the neighborhood, making this garage uniquely valuable and potentially profitable. The zoning for this site only allows parking garages or other light industrial or commercial uses; the owner of the Tunnel Garage is seeking a variance, or special exemption from the zoning, in order to build a 10-story apartment tower here, claiming that ‘economic hardship’ prevents him from maintaining the building or a parking business here. Local residents called this argument a lie.

“To take a beautiful link to this neighborhood's historic past and replace it with a ten-story glass tower that will cast a shadow over an entire block is a disgrace. To close down a very profitable business that provides a very necessary service, and replace it with a luxury high-rise just so developers can wring every last dollar out of this piece of real estate is a crime,” stated Gregg Levine of Friends of the Tunnel Garage. “The developers don't live here – we do. It is high time that the City government and the Landmarks Preservation Commission put the aesthetic beauty of a neighborhood, the quality of life of its residents, and the economic well-being of local businesses above the naked greed of carpet-bagging developers,” he added.

GVSHP and Friends of the Tunnel Garage have gathered hundreds of letters and petition signatures to the Landmarks Preservation Commission urging they save this building. The Tunnel Garage is also located at the southern end of GVSHP's South Village Historic District Study Area, an area the organization is examining for a potential proposal to the City for historic district protections ([CLICK HERE](#) for a map of the area).



