



**Greenwich
Village
Society for
Historic
Preservation**

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January 16, 2013

Hon. Robert Tierney, Chair
New York City Landmarks Preservation Commission
One Centre Street, 9th floor
New York, NY 10007

**Re: Recognizing and Protecting Sites of Significance to Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual,
and Transgender (LGBT) History**

Dear Chair Tierney:

I write to urge the New York City Landmarks Preservation Commission (LPC) to take steps to recognize and protect key New York City sites of significance to Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender (LGBT) history. Some of the most important LGBT history sites in the world are located in our city, and many of them are located in Greenwich Village and the immediately surrounding neighborhoods. Yet few if any of the most important of these sites are explicitly recognized or protected by the LPC for their LGBT history.

In recent years, the LPC has begun to include references to LGBT history in designation reports for new historic districts in Greenwich Village and the East Village, as well as some individual landmarks. The designation report for the just-designated South Village Historic District contains, for the first time, a section specifically dedicated to the LGBT history of the district -- a welcome development.

However, this is not the case for our city's older historic district designation reports, which contain some of the most important sites in New York City and the world in connection to LGBT history. As a result, these incredibly important sites enjoy no formal recognition or protection from the LPC on the basis of their LGBT history. And in spite of some very important historic designations made at the State and Federal level specifically around LGBT history, no individual sites in New York City have been granted landmark or historic district designation on the basis of their significance to the struggle for LGBT rights, though some tremendously important LGBT history sites have been allowed to be demolished, such as 186 Spring Street and the Provincetown Playhouse and Apartments.

There are some very important steps the LPC could take right away to correct these conspicuous omissions.

The Stonewall Inn, the site of the Stonewall riots which are internationally recognized as the catalyst of the modern LGBT rights movement, was [listed on the State and National Registers of Historic Places in 1999](#) (co-nominated by GVSHP) and designated a National Historic Landmark in 2000. However, Stonewall is not currently formally

recognized by the LPC for its highly significant role in relation to LGBT history. While the site is located within the Greenwich Village Historic District, and thus any changes to the existing building are subject to the approval of the LPC, the existing designation report for the Greenwich Village Historic District, which dates to two months prior to the riots, makes no mention of these incredibly important historic events and the impact they had and continue to have across the city, country, and world. Thus the LPC is not currently obligated to acknowledge or recognize this history in considering how to regulate, preserve and protect this singularly important building, leaving the site open to potential future changes which could compromise or erase that history.

Similarly, [at GVSHP's request in 2012](#), the New York State Historic Preservation Office found Julius' Bar at 159 West 10th Street, the oldest gay bar in New York, eligible for the State and National Registers of Historic Places. This finding was made on the basis of the 1966 Mattachine Society "Sip-In" held there and the subsequent successful lawsuit overturning the New York State ban on serving alcohol to "known homosexuals" (which had made gay bars, and any gay gathering space which served alcohol, in effect illegal). Like the Stonewall Inn, Julius' is one of a handful of sites in the country determined eligible for the State and National Registers of Historic Places based upon their connection to LGBT history. While this site is also located within the Greenwich Village Historic District, like the Stonewall Inn the designation report makes no mention of these highly significant historic events. Thus the LPC has given no official recognition to this important layer of this site's history, and is under no obligation to recognize that history in considering how to regulate, preserve and protect this building.

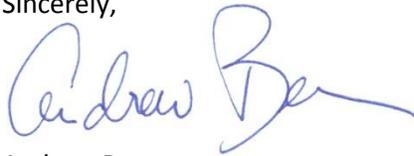
The LPC's designation reports are the documents which guide the regulation of landmarked properties, and reflect the Commission's official findings of significance for designated sites. Through these reports, the LPC can and should formally recognize the Stonewall Inn and Julius' Bar, among other sites, to ensure that their LGBT history is protected. There are several ways this could be done:

- ***The designation report for the Greenwich Village Historic District could be amended to include information and details about the events which took place at and around the Stonewall Inn and Julius' and their roles in relation to LGBT history***
- ***Either or both of these sites could be considered for individual landmark designation, focusing on their LGBT history as a basis for designation***
- ***The designation report for the Greenwich Village Historic District could be amended more broadly to include the larger social history connected to the Village, including its LGBT history. This could include not only the Stonewall Inn and Julius', but other sites of significance to LGBT history which are also not currently called out in the designation report***

It would seem reasonable for the LPC to consider similar steps for the Gay Activists' Alliance Firehouse at 99 Wooster Street – a site of equal importance to LGBT history. However, as the building lies just outside of our catchment area, we would recommend bringing additional organizations and stakeholders into a conversation about actions regarding that site.

Across the country, municipalities, states, and the federal government are taking steps to ensure that our nation's LGBT history, and critical sites connected to it, are recognized and preserved. I urge the New York City Landmarks Preservation Commission to take similar action, and believe that formally recognizing the significance of the aforementioned sites would be an important and necessary step toward doing so.

Sincerely,



Andrew Berman
Executive Director

cc: Mayor Bill de Blasio
Public Advocate Letitia James
Manhattan Borough President Gale Brewer
State Senator Brad Hoylman
State Senator Daniel Squadron
State Assemblymember Deborah Glick
New York City Councilmember Corey Johnson
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Municipal Art Society
New York Landmarks Conservancy
Historic Districts Council
Empire State Pride Agenda
Gay and Lesbian Independent Democrats

Stonewall Democratic Club
Jim Owles Liberal Democratic Club
Village Independent Democrats
Village Reform Democratic Club
Downtown Independent Democrats
SoHo Alliance
New York City LGBT Community Services Center
New York City AIDS Memorial