



Greenwich
Village
Society for
Historic
Preservation

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TESTIMONY OF THE GREENWICH VILLAGE SOCIETY FOR HISTORIC PRESERVATION REGARDING THE PROPOSED HUDSON SQUARE REZONING February 12, 2013

Good morning. My name is Andrew Berman, and I am the Executive Director of the Greenwich Village Society for Historic Preservation. GVSHP is the largest membership organization in Greenwich Village, the East Village, NoHo and Hudson Square.

We urge the City Council, in the strongest of terms, NOT to approve the Hudson Square rezoning unless the City also agrees to move ahead with the long-promised landmarking of the adjacent proposed South Village Historic District.

We urge you to consider the following about the South Village and the effect the rezoning would have upon it:

- **The South Village is one of the most historically significant areas of New York City and State.** New York State has declared the South Village eligible for the State and National Registers of Historic Places, and the city's Landmarks Preservation Commission has determined the South Village "landmark-eligible" in the EIS for both the Hudson Square rezoning and the recent NYU rezoning (see attached).
- **The South Village is in imminent danger of destruction due to increasing demolitions and out-of-character new construction.** In 2012 the South Village was named one of the seven most endangered historically significant sites statewide by the Preservation League of NY State (see attached), and as you can see from the attached map, there are currently six active demolition/development sites just that we know of in this small neighborhood.
- **The South Village's destruction will be accelerated by the Hudson Square rezoning if the neighborhood is not landmarked.** Demolition and development have already increased in the South Village in anticipation of the rezoning. Changing Hudson Square from a somewhat sleepy backwater to Manhattan's new "it" neighborhood with luxury high-rises and expanded retail will increase development pressure upon the South Village, its historic, low-rise neighbor. Don't just take our word for it – the EIS for the Hudson Square rezoning clearly says that the proposed South Village Historic District will suffer "significant adverse impacts" if the rezoning passes without landmark protections for the neighborhood (see attached).

After years of lobbying the Landmarks Preservation Commission, in 2009 its Chair finally promised to soon consider the entire area for landmark designation. Four years later, by far the majority of this “landmark-eligible” neighborhood remains without landmark protections. Two-hundred year old houses and beloved cultural landmarks such as the Provincetown Playhouse and Apartments, the Circle in the Square Theater, and the Sullivan Street Playhouse have all succumbed to the wrecking ball (see attached).

We hope Speaker Quinn and the Council can compel City Hall to keep its word and to finally move ahead with landmark designation. If you cannot, and you vote to rezone Hudson Square without the City landmarking the South Village, it will ensure this neighborhood’s irreversible destruction. A rezoning application for Hudson Square can return without prejudice in six months or a year or however long it takes to get the City to move ahead with South Village landmarking. But if the South Village suffers irreversible destruction following the rezoning, it will not get a second chance to be saved.

GVSHP also strongly urges that the proposed bulk limits in the Hudson Square rezoning be substantially reduced. The proposed maximum allowable bulk of 12 FAR is the same as for much of Midtown Manhattan, and we believe is much too high for this area.

One of the greatest concerns expressed about the rezoning has been its impact upon infrastructure in the area, including worsening the already intolerable traffic and the lack of green and recreational space to accommodate the planned influx of residents. Reducing the maximum allowable FAR would not only help ensure that new development is visually in keeping with the character of the neighborhood, but reduce the additional burden upon the limited and already overtaxed infrastructure of the area and surrounding neighborhoods.

We urge the Council to keep in mind that the current maximum allowable FAR for residential uses in Hudson Square is zero. Allowing any as-of-right residential development, which is by far the most desirable and profitable type of development in this area, will clearly be a great windfall to property owners. For this reason among others, reducing the overall maximum allowable FAR from 12 to 9 would not, we believe, constitute any sort of hardship or taking for owners, and would still offer extremely lucrative opportunities for development.

Further, GVSHP strongly urges that the proposed height limits be reduced for new development in Hudson Square, especially for Subdistrict A and for wide avenues.

The proposed height limit of 430 feet for Subdistrict A is roughly the same as the much-despised Trump SoHo, the grossly out-of-scale development which inspired a

new wave of calls for rezoning the area. We urge that this height cap be substantially reduced.

The proposed height cap for wider avenues in the proposed rezoning should also be revised downward substantially. Most of the handsome, larger loft buildings which define Hudson Square's character are no more than 200 feet or so in height. Additionally, the currently proposed 290 foot height limit is greatly in excess of what is necessary for the construction of 9 to 12 FAR buildings, as the current zoning proposal would allow. This greater height limit therefore appears designed to encourage the transfer of development rights so that buildings which actually exceed the allowable base FAR can be constructed.

Instead, we strongly urge that a maximum height limit of 210 feet be imposed for new construction on the wider avenues. Other existing contextual zoning districts which allow the same proposed 12 FAR, such as C6-4A, C4-6A, C4-7A, C5-1A, C5-2A, and R10A all have a maximum height limit of 210 feet, which would be much more appropriate for Hudson Square.

In recent months, the City Council has passed large-scale rezonings of the Central Village for NYU and the West Village for the Rudin organization over the overwhelming objections of neighborhood residents and the Community Board. We hope that the Council will not ignore our input this time. We urge you not to approve the Hudson Square rezoning unless the City also agrees to landmark the South Village, and the proposed height and bulk limits are brought down to a more appropriate and contextual level.

Thank you.



New York State Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation

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Eliot Spitzer
Governor

Carol Ash
Commissioner

RESOURCE EVALUATION

DATE: May 1, 2007

STAFF: Kathy Howe

PROPERTY: South Village Historic District

MCD: Manhattan

ADDRESS: (see attached district map)

COUNTY: New York Co.

USN: 06101.016146

- I. Property is individually listed on SR/NR:
name of listing:
- Property is a contributing component of a SR/NR district:
name of district:
- II. Property meets eligibility criteria.
- Property contributes to a district which appears to meet eligibility criteria.
- Pre SRB: Post SRB: SRB date

Criteria for Inclusion in the National Register:

- A. Associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history;
- B. Associated with the lives of persons significant in our past;
- C. Embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period or method of construction; or represents the work of a master; or possess high artistic values; or represents a significant and distinguishable entity whose components may lack individual distinction;
- D. Have yielded, or may be likely to yield information important in prehistory or history.

STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE:

The South Village Historic District encompasses approximately 800 buildings in the neighborhood situated south of Washington Square Park. The proposed district abuts three National Register listed districts: the large Greenwich Village Historic District to the north; the compact Charlton-King-Vandam Historic District on the west; and the SoHo Cast-Iron Historic District on the east. The boundaries of the South Village Historic District are indicated on the attached district map.

The streets of the district are lined with a rich array of buildings of architectural, historical, and cultural significance. While late-19th and early-20th century tenements are the dominant building type in the district, its converted early-19th century row houses, churches, reform housing, institutional and civic

buildings, back buildings, garages, and lofts also reflect the working-class and immigrant communities of the South Village. Overall the buildings in the district possess integrity of location, design, setting, materials, workmanship, feeling, and association.

The neighborhood served as the center of New York's African-American community in the mid-19th century. By the late-19th century many Italian immigrants lived and worked here as well as Germans and Irish. Beginning in the early decades of the twentieth century and continuing beyond the post-World War II era the South Village has been the setting of important counter-cultural movements, institutions, and trends including the bohemian era, jazz clubs, gay bars, off-Broadway theater, Beat culture, and the folk music revival.

The district's period of significance - ca. 1820 to the mid-1960s - incorporates the architectural, historical, and cultural evolution of the neighborhood. The district meets Criterion A in the areas of social history and ethnic heritage. Additional areas of significance may be identified as research on the district continues. It also meets Criterion C, most notably for its collection of pre-law, old law, and new law tenements in a range of popular styles including Neo-Grec, Italianate, Romanesque Revival, and Beaux Arts. Many of these retain their historic wood and glass storefronts. Row houses (many transformed to commercial and multi-family uses), churches, institutional and ecclesiastical buildings, and other structures also add to the architectural significance of the district. The South Village Historic District retains an extraordinary collection of buildings and structures that reflects the physical and historical development of this working-class neighborhood.



South Village Historic District

Boundaries indicate
State/National Registers eligible district



Hudson Sq. Rezoning Environmental
Impact Statement.

Chapter 7: Historic and Cultural Resources

Proposed South Village Historic District (D)

The South Village Historic District (NYCHD-eligible, S/NR-eligible), proposed by the Greenwich Village Society for Historic Preservation and determined to appear to meet the criteria for listing on the S/NR by OPRHP, is located east of the proposed Rezoning Area. The district is roughly bounded by West Fourth Street to the north, West Broadway to the east, Watts Street to the south, and Avenue of the Americas to the west. A portion of the southwestern section of the historic district is located within the study area, roughly bound by Prince Street to the north, Thompson and West Broadway Streets to the east, Watts Street to the south, and Avenue of the Americas to the west. Within the historic district, including the section located within the study area, the dominant building type is the tenement from the late 19th and early 20th centuries. As written in OPRHP's *South Village Historic District Resource Evaluation* (May 2007), "The district's period of significance—ca. 1820 to the mid-1960s—incorporates the architectural, historical, and cultural evolution of the neighborhood. The district meets Criterion A in the areas of social history and ethnic heritage.... It also meets Criterion C, most notably for its collection of pre-law, old law, and new law tenements in a range of popular styles including Neo-Grec, Italianate, Romanesque Revival, and Beaux Arts.... Row houses (many transformed to commercial and multi-family uses), churches, institutional and ecclesiastical buildings, and other structures also add to the architectural significance of the district." Historic district buildings in the study area typically range from three to eight stories and include tenements, apartment buildings, and loft buildings (see image 17 of **Figure 7-13**). Many of these buildings are missing their original cornices and have altered ground floors. Also located within the portion of the historic district in the study area are some modern apartment buildings with ground-floor retail. In 2009, LPC determined that the proposed South Village Historic District also appears eligible for NYCHD designation.



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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Preservation League adds South Village to Seven to Save list of endangered places for 2012-13

ALBANY, March 21, 2012 – The Preservation League of New York State has named Manhattan’s South Village to its list of the Empire State’s most threatened historic resources, *Seven to Save*.

According to a survey completed by architectural historian Andrew Dolkart and funded in part by the League’s Preserve New York grant program, the South Village contains a wealth of architecturally and historically significant buildings and sites constructed between the 1820s and 1930s. This 35-block area boasts sites associated with the immigrant experience, bohemian and artistic achievements (especially in music) and counter-cultural movements. As a neighborhood comprised predominantly of tenement housing, the South Village is one of the few remaining intact Manhattan neighborhoods that reflect the immigrant experience.

“Since 1999, Seven to Save has mobilized community leaders and decision-makers to take action when historic resources are threatened,” said Jay DiLorenzo, President of the Preservation League. “A Seven to Save designation from the League delivers invaluable technical assistance, fosters increased media coverage and public awareness, and opens the door to grant assistance for endangered properties.”

This neighborhood faces threats from demolition, development pressure, and loss of visual and architectural integrity. The Greenwich Village Society for Historic Preservation (GVSHP) has led the effort to document and advocate for the preservation of the South Village. They are seeking the League’s assistance in urging the NYC Landmarks Preservation

(more)

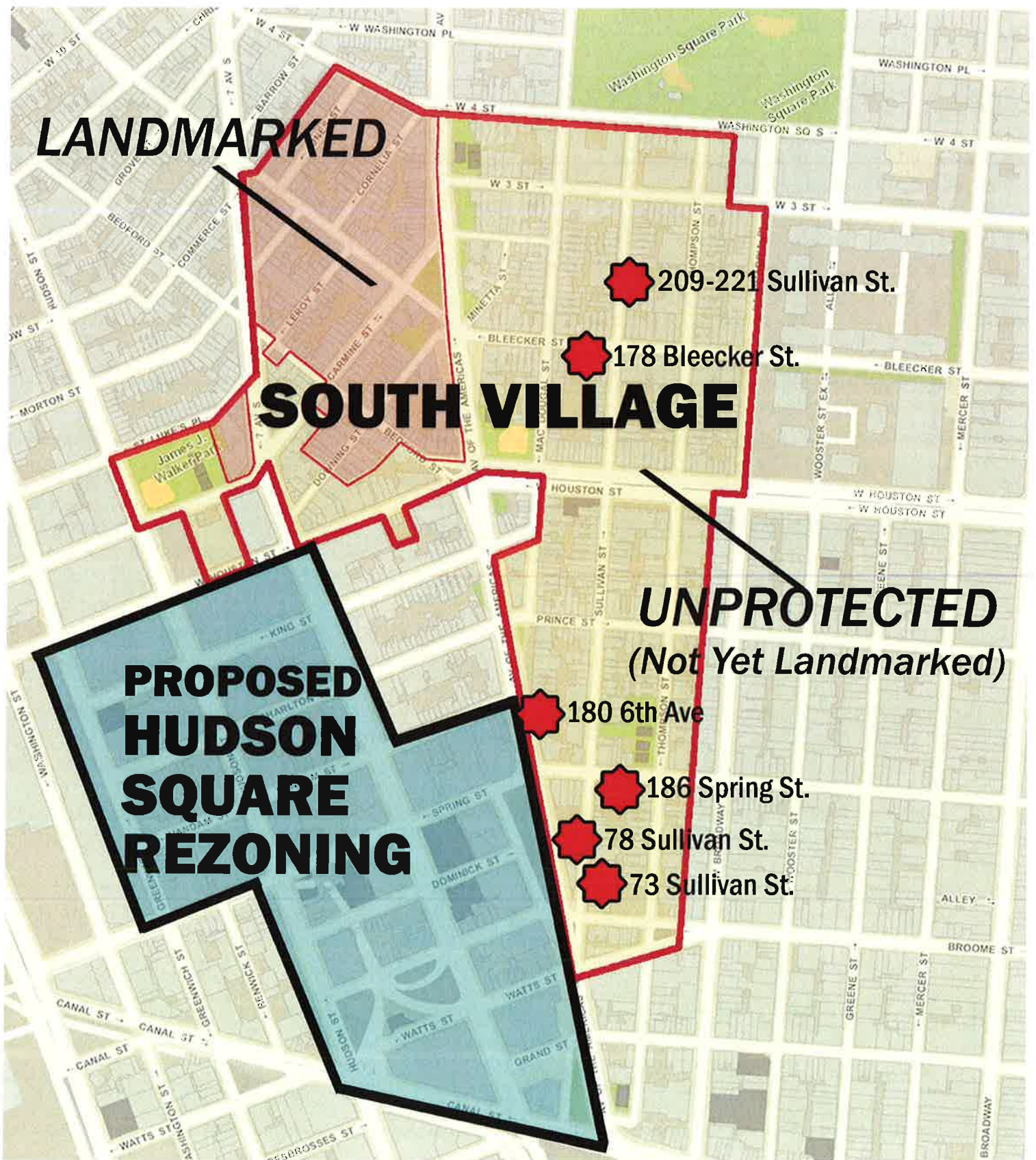
Commission to recognize the significance of the entire neighborhood with a historic district designation, which would also help protect the neighborhood's architectural integrity.

“We are incredibly grateful to the League for recognizing the grave danger facing the South Village and the need to preserve this wonderful neighborhood,” said Andrew Berman, Executive Director of the Greenwich Village Society for Historic Preservation. “The South Village embodies so many layers of New York’s history, from its intact early 19th century merchants’ houses to its turn-of-the-last-century tenements, churches – and from schools which served waves of immigrants, to the coffeehouses, theaters, and performance spaces that nurtured some of the most influential artists, writers, and musicians of the 20th century. Without landmark designation, more and more of this authentic fabric is being lost every day. We need the City to act now to save one of New York’s great historic neighborhoods, and are glad to have the Preservation League on our side.”

The inclusion of the South Village on the *Seven to Save* list provides the opportunity for the League to work with local advocates to protect the neighborhood. “With this program, we provide targeted support to seven of New York’s most important and endangered historic resources,” said Erin Tobin, the Preservation League’s eastern regional director for technical and grant programs. “Whether sites are threatened by insensitive, ineffective or insufficient public policies, general neglect, and, in some cases, outright demolition, we have a proven record of working with community advocates to save a number of significant properties.”

Since 1999, publicity and advocacy resulting from Seven to Save designation has led to the rehabilitation and reopening of the **Oswego City Public Library**, the rebirth of **Montauk Manor** on Long Island, and the rededication of the once-abandoned **George Harvey Justice Building** in Binghamton along with successes at several other locations.

The Preservation League of New York State is a not-for-profit membership organization founded in 1974. The League invests in people and projects that champion the essential role of preservation in community revitalization, sustainable economic growth, and the protection of New York’s historic buildings and landscapes. It leads advocacy, economic development, and education programs all across the state.



Current known development sites in the South Village.

Hudson Sq. Rezoning Environmental Impact Statement

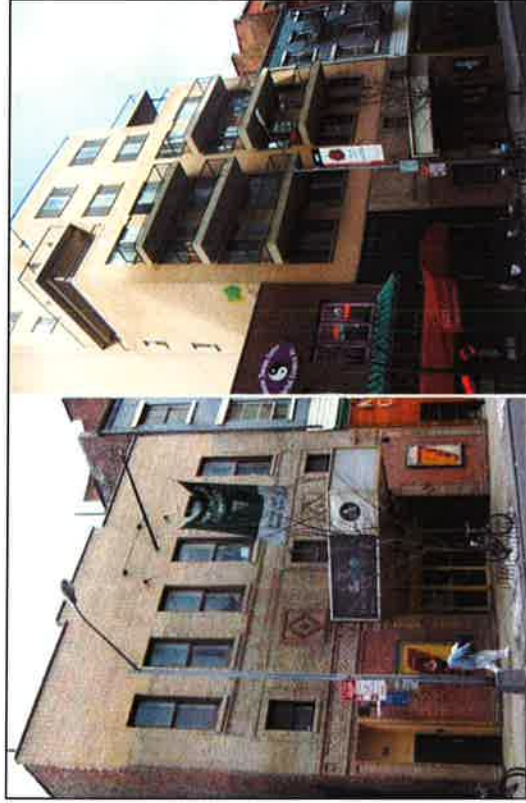
Chapter 7: Historic and Cultural Resources

**Table 7-6
Known and Potential Architectural Resources Potentially Affected
by Construction Under the Proposed Action**

Map Ref. #	Address	Rezoning Area/Study Area	Development/Enlargement Sites Affecting the Resource	Significant Adverse Impact
Known Architectural Resources				
1-3	32-36 Dominick Street	Rezoning Area	Projected Development Sites 12 and 15; Potential Development Site 23; Potential Enlargement Site on B578, L70	No (protected by TPPN #10/88)
A	Charlton-King-Vandam Historic District	Study Area	Projected Development Site 16; Potential Enlargement Site on B505, L26	No (protected by TPPN #10/88)
D	Proposed South Village Historic District	Study Area	Projected Development Site 13; Potential Enlargement Site on B505, L26	Yes
13	310 Spring Street	Study Area	Projected Development Site 9; Potential Enlargement Site on B597, L32 and 33	No (protected by TPPN #10/88)
Potential Architectural Resources				
5	278 Spring Street	Rezoning Area	Projected Development Sites 3*, 10, 11, 12 Projected Enlargement Site on B579, L47	Yes
6	341 Hudson Street	Rezoning Area	Projected Development Site 4*; Projected Enlargement Site on B597, L45; Potential Development Site 20; Potential Enlargement Site on B597, L50, 51, and 52	Yes
7	189 Varick Street	Rezoning Area	Projected Development Site 6; Potential Development Site 24	Yes
8	180 Varick Street	Rezoning Area	Projected Development Site 7; Potential Development Site 24	Yes
9	78 Vandam Street	Rezoning Area	Projected Development Sites 8, 9, 17; Potential Development Site 21; Projected Enlargement Site on B579, L47*; Potential Enlargement Sites on B597, L32 and 33	Yes
10	431 Canal Street	Rezoning Area	Projected Development Sites 1* and 5	Yes

Notes: * No significant adverse impacts would occur to historic resources as a result of the development of these sites because they are owned by the Applicant and CPPs would be implemented to protect nearby resources from adverse construction-related effects.

Demolished, Destroyed or Altered Historic Buildings in the South Village Since Proposal for Historic District Designation Submitted in 2006



CIRCLE IN THE SQUARE THEATRE

Destroyed: 2004

Circle in the Square, New York's first non-profit theatre, moved to this building in 1959, the site of a former 1917 theatre. Dustin Hoffman, James Earl Jones and others performed on its stage.

Nearly the entire building was demolished and replaced with an 8-story residential building.



SULLIVAN STREET PLAYHOUSE

Destroyed: 2005

This 1831 building became famous as home to New York's (and, by reputation, the world's) longest running play, *The Fantasticks*, which was performed here continuously for more than 40 years.

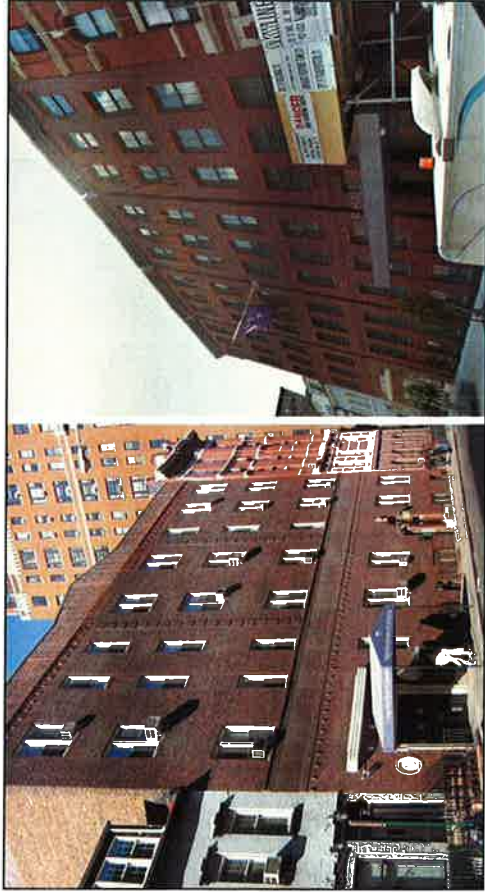
The building was stripped to its bones and unrecognizably altered for conversion to luxury condominiums.



TUNNEL GARAGE
State/National Register of Historic Places eligible
Demolished: 2006

This stunning Art Deco building was built in 1922 at the dawn of the automobile age and was named for the nearby Holland Tunnel, which was under construction at that time.

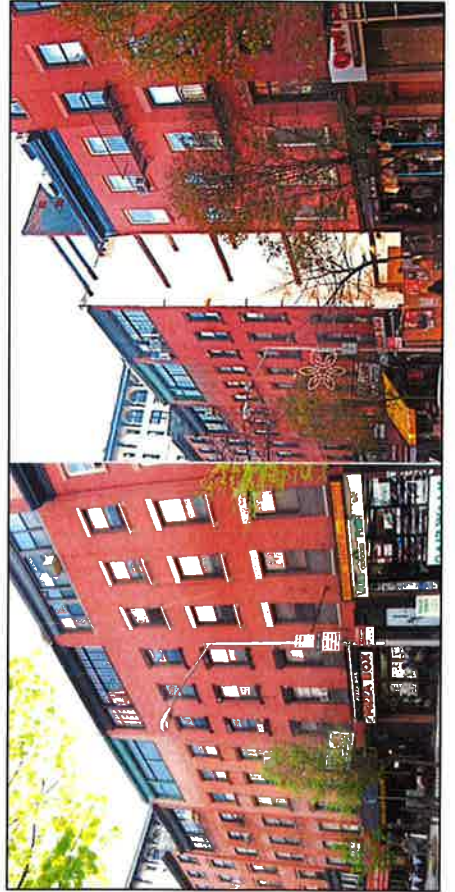
It was demolished to make way for a 10-story condominium.



PROVINCETOWN PLAYHOUSE AND APARTMENTS
State/National Register of Historic Places eligible
Demolished: 2009

Called “the cornerstone of bohemia”, the playhouse and apartments drew legendary talent, such as Eugene O’Neill and Edna St. Vincent Millay.

All but a tiny portion of the building, including the portion which housed the original Provincetown Playhouse, was demolished by NYU to make way for law school offices.



178 BLEECKER STREET
Demolished: 2010

This 1861 row house was part of a cohesive row constructed when Bleeker Street was an elegant residential thoroughfare for the upper middle class. Iconic artist studio windows were added to the entire row in the 1920s.

The building was demolished for a new mixed-use building, which is yet to be built, that will rise well above its neighbors.



**186 SPRING STREET
Demolished: 2012**

This 1824 Federal row house served as the residence of key activists at the dawn of the Gay Rights Movement in the 1970s, including Bruce Voeller, Jim Owles, and Arnie Kantrowitz.

A developer demolished the building for a new condo development.



**CHILDREN'S AID SOCIETY
Threatened**

Designed by noted architect Calvert Vaux, this 1891 Victorian Gothic building housed the Children's Aid Society, one of the earliest social service organizations in the South Village formed to serve the area's immigrant children.

The building was sold for development in 2011.