

Greenwich Village Society for Historic Preservation
31st Annual Meeting & 21st Annual Awards
Andrew Berman, Executive Director
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Welcome everyone to GVSHP's 31st Annual Meeting and 21st Annual Awards. On a personal note this is my 10th Annual Meeting and Awards, and I can honestly say they just keep getting better and better. As always, it's wonderful to see so many old friends, and new, for what promises to be a wonderful evening. I would like to thank the Village Community School for hosting us tonight, our Awards Committee for their hard work in reviewing hundreds of nominations and selecting tonight's awardees, our photographer Bob Estremera, and our wonderful volunteers and staff for making tonight's event possible.

We have some business to attend to shortly, and of course some wonderful awards to give out to some brilliant and distinguished awardees. But my job, right now, is to recap the last year in the life of the Society, and to peer briefly into our future.

As likely comes as no surprise, the last year has been an exceedingly busy one for GVSHP. Massive developer-initiated rezoning plans, increasing demands for our free and low-cost programs, and the need to stay ahead of the curve on evolving communications technology has kept the Society very busy. Here are just some of the highlights:

Last summer, after Borough President Stringer's surprise dissolution of the long-running NYU Community Task Force, GVSHP helped organize a coalition of 30 community groups to fill the void and respond to and challenge NYU's massive 20 year expansion plan. GVSHP led the opposition to NYU's plans for a 40 story tower on Bleecker Street, which would have been the tallest ever in the Village, staging a well-attended rally on the site and spearheading a letter-writing campaign to elected officials and the Landmarks Preservation Commission. NYU then quickly withdrew the plan. As NYU begins the long public approval process for its request to allow them to shoehorn 2.5 million sq ft of space into the blocks south and east of Washington Square Park – the equivalent of the Empire State Building – GVSHP continues to educate the public about the plan and its approval process, and to call for alternatives NYU should be pursuing, such as the Financial District.

Over the past year we also saw the Far West Village rezoning we campaigned for finally enacted. GVSHP led an effort with local community groups and neighbors to get rid of an outdated and inappropriate zoning district in the Far West Village which encouraged out of scale commercial development. In spite of stiff initial opposition or indifference from the city and some elected officials, we not only finally got the plan approved, but got it done before several planned developments could move ahead, ensuring that they would have to conform to the new, more community-friendly zoning.

In the South Village we saw the long-awaited designation of the first third of GVSHP's proposed South Village Historic District. This 235 building addition to the Greenwich Village Historic District made it far and away the largest in New York

City, and this designation became the largest expansion of landmark protections in the Village since 1969. However, since then the city has stalled on its promise to consider the remaining two-thirds, even as more historic buildings such as the Children's Aid Society were threatened and other important links to the neighborhood's past were destroyed.

The East Village saw both preservation triumphs and tragedies. The City refused to landmark the 1825 house at 35 Cooper Square, in spite of historic links to both the Stuyvesant family and prominent beat poets, as well as 326 & 328 East 4th Street – miraculously preserved Greek Revival houses between Avenues C and D built by the creator of the first steamship to cross the Atlantic; houses which at various times housed shipbuilding merchants, immigrant families, a Hasidic Jewish synagogue, and a utopian arts collective. Lacking landmark protections, 35 Cooper was bulldozed, while 326 and 328 had an enormous hole ripped into them as part of a “renovation” process.

However, the city also announced their intention to, for the first time since the 1960s, consider new historic districts in the East Village. GVSHP quickly organized with fellow preservation groups and got the City to expand the boundaries of the contemplated districts to include several key buildings for which we had advocated landmark designation, including 101 Avenue A and the Russian Orthodox Cathedral on East 2nd Street. The proposed new districts, to be formally calendared at the end of this month, will include about 300 houses, tenements, houses of worship, and institutional buildings telling the East Village's story of immigrant struggle and artistic rebirth. We have also extracted from the city a promise that this is only the first step in their consideration of landmark protections across the East Village. We were also able, after years of resistance by the City, to get a rezoning of the 3rd and 4th Avenue corridors, where too many horribly out-of-scale dorms have been built, most notably by NYU. As a result of the new zoning, never again will a 20+ story dorm be built as-of-right in these blocks, which is a dramatic change. I should mention that with us every step of the way in these efforts was our good friend City Councilmember Rosie Mendez.

Moving to the Meatpacking District, GVSHP successfully fought off attempts to add a 6 ½ story addition to a 1 ½ story meatmarket building at 837 Washington Street; we not only thought the proposed addition as overwhelming for the building, but would set a dangerous precedent for many other similarly-scaled buildings in the neighborhood. And speaking of inappropriate additions, GVSHP joined with local groups to fight an attempt to rezone the Chelsea Market block to allow two enormous towers to be built atop the 9th and 10th avenue ends of the complex. That rezoning proposal will likely begin the formal review process sometime later this year.

As if the Chelsea market and NYU rezonings were not enough, two other large-scale rezonings with big implications began the journey down the pipeline. In Hudson Square, developer Trinity Realty announced their intentions to seek a rezoning for a 22-block area between Houston and Canal Streets west of 6th Avenue. While the rezoning would discourage hotel development, encourage preservation of some of the area's larger commercial buildings, and set height caps for new development, it

would also allow and encourage a broad range of new development in the area, and the height "caps" would, at least in one case, be as high as 430 feet. At the old St. Vincent's site, The Rudin Family and Long Island College Jewish Hospital are seeking a rezoning to allow preservation and re-use of some buildings, but large-scale new construction for condo development on the site of other former hospital buildings. Here too these rezonings are expected to wind their way through long public review and approval processes later this year, and GVSHP will be there to inform the public about the process and how they can be involved, and to fight to ensure that neighborhood preservation concerns are addressed.

This past year also saw the loss of two great Greenwich Village women and two great friends of GVSHP. Lucy Cecere, who graced our stages last year to accept a Village award, passed away this spring. Everyone knew and loved Lucy, who co-founded the Caring Community, helped save the Village Nursing Home, and was a member of GVSHP's South Village Advisory Board and a fierce advocate for historic preservation in her neighborhood. This winter we lost Suze Rotolo, author, artist, and activist. Suze was known throughout the world as the girl walking arm in arm with Bob Dylan on the cover of "The Freewheelin' Bob Dylan" and the author of "A Freewheelin' Time: A Memoir of Greenwich Village in the 1960s." But many of us were also lucky enough to know Suze as a wonderful teacher at the Parsons School of Design, a passionate advocate for economic and racial equality in our society, and someone who was incredibly generous with her time, whether it was to share memories of a remarkable period in our neighborhood's history, or to speak up for its preservation. Both will be missed greatly.

Along with these losses, however, there were new beginnings this year for GVSHP. We launched our new blog, Off the Grid, which quickly became known for its wit and insight about our neighborhood's history and current events, garnering over a thousand readers a day. Our revamped landmarks application webpage has become an indispensable tool for tracking and impacting proposed changes to landmarked buildings in our neighborhood, now with a "keep me informed" feature that allows you to get updates about any application of interest to you. We staged a huge range of new programs, from the first-of-its-kind Westbeth Artists Loft Tour, to jazz concerts, to incredibly well-attended lectures on Edward Hopper, Henry James, and McKim Mead and White. We staged our 13th and most successful yet Benefit House Tour, and last fall we were honored to have Malcolm Gladwell headline our 30th anniversary benefit fundraiser. Our Children's Education program celebrated its 20th anniversary, and continued to grow and evolve as we use the Village and East Village to tell the story of New York's development to school children across the city. And we added two new staff members – Andito Lloyd, our Director of East Village and Special Projects, and Dana Schulz, our Program and Administrative Associate.

So the future is bright but busy for GVSHP. Seemingly no matter what happens to the economy or the real estate market, our work is in high demand. So it is fortunate that support from our members also continues to grow, to arm us for any challenge which may lie ahead.

Thank you.