

News from VILLAGE PRESERVATION

GREENWICH
VILLAGE SOCIETY
FOR HISTORIC
PRESERVATION

WINTER 2022

DEVELOPER AND CITY COORDINATE ON PARTIAL DEMO OF NINE 1840S HOUSES

Landmarked MePa Structures Undone Under Questionable Circumstances

In 2020, Village Preservation staunchly opposed a plan to partially demolish nine landmarked 1840s houses at 44-54 9th Avenue/351-55 West 14th Street and build a huge office tower behind it. Pushback by us and others led to a significant reduction in the size of the proposed tower and far less dramatic changes approved for the land-marked buildings, with more of an emphasis on restoration than previously proposed.

But in late 2021, as work began on the project, the developer suddenly “discovered” that the structures, which had stood for 175 years and until recently had been safely occupied, were “compromised” and posed an “imminent danger” to the public. The city’s Department of Buildings (DOB) concurred, and after consultation with the Landmarks Preservation Commission (LPC), ordered the facades of the buildings to be taken down. During this period of supposed “imminent danger,” the buildings were left unsecured and open to the public; workers were seen enjoying leisurely lunch breaks inside the buildings; and there were no tell-tale signs of stress to the buildings visible to the public.

Village Preservation demanded answers, questioning the plausibility of the City and developer’s story, and raising the issue with fellow preservation organizations, the community board, and local elected officials. We held a press conference on the site questioning the story and the actions being taken, demanding to see proof of the safety issues that could not be otherwise addressed, questioning whether this wasn’t the result of work the developer performed or to make it easier to build the planned office tower behind, and calling out city agencies and the developer for not identifying these supposedly pre-existing structural flaws during the long public review and approval process for this work.

After much pressure, we got a meeting with the DOB Commissioner and staff, LPC, local elected officials, and fellow preservation organizations. The face-to-face meeting only reinforced our sense that less invasive alternatives to stabilizing and repairing the buildings had not been considered, and this was less about public safety and more about facilitating a development project. The LPC did agree



VILLAGE PRESERVATION LED A RALLY IN NOVEMBER DEMANDING ANSWERS TO WHY THESE 19TH-CENTURY BUILDINGS (UNDER SCAFFOLDING) HAD TO BE PARTIALLY DEMOLISHED.

to require dismantled bricks to be reused and replaced “whenever possible” — a fuzzy commitment and cold comfort — and to require the developer to return to the public hearing process to reconsider this now drastically changed application. We will closely monitor and continue to demand answers and accountability.

[MORE INFO villagepreservation.org/MePa](https://villagepreservation.org/MePa)

STATE RECOGNIZES SOUTH OF UNION SQUARE LANDMARKING EFFORT

*But Full Protections Still Elude,
As City and Rivera Withhold Support*

We scored a huge victory this fall when the New York State Historic Preservation Office ruled our proposed South of Union Square Historic District eligible for the National Register of Historic Places. The State cited the rich architecture, cultural history, and civil rights legacy of the neighborhood in making the determination.

We've been seeking landmark protections for this area between 14th and 9th Streets, 5th and 3rd Avenue for years, as increasing pressure for luxury condo and tech development has resulted in demolition of more and more historic structures, and out-of-scale, out-of-context new development.

And we've made progress, saving from demolition the former studio of Frank Stella at 128 East 13th Street, and that of Willem de Kooning and numerous other artists at 827-831 Broadway, in the latter case pre-

venting construction of a 300-ft.-tall office tower. We got the City to designate seven more buildings along Broadway as landmarks in 2018, and in 2021 secured landmark designation of 70 Fifth Avenue, a 1912 Beaux Arts building that housed not only the headquarters of the NAACP and *The Crisis Magazine*, but an unparalleled array of human rights and social justice organizations in the early 20th century. This honored and protected a long-overlooked history, and it prevented the very real possibility of construction of a supertall tower on the site — one of the few sites in our neighborhood where zoning actually allows massive construction of unlimited height.

Of course there have been losses as well.

In 2015 Bowlmor Lanes was demolished to make way for a bland, oversized tower. In 2018 the former St. Denis Hotel (1855) at 11th Street and Broadway was demolished to make way for a glassy tech office tower. And 64 University Place, former home of Agata & Valentina (and in the 1960s home of the revolutionary publisher Grove Press) is being demolished to make way for luxury condos.



This neighborhood, with its irreplaceable history connected to transformative social and artistic movements and impressive architecture, needs and deserves better. That's why we're fighting for a historic district covering about 200 buildings in this vulnerable area, made more at risk by the 2018 upzoning for a 14th Street Tech Hub near 4th Avenue thanks to then-Mayor de Blasio and City Councilmember Carlina Rivera.

We've received support for this proposal from prominent elected officials, civil rights organizations like the NAACP and the National LGBTQ Task Force, leading scholars, writers, and academics, and thousands of New Yorkers. The former Mayor refused to allow landmark designation to move ahead, however, and Councilmember Rivera, who represents most of the area, has refused to support the proposal.

We will be pushing this proposal front and center with the new Mayor and whoever the new Landmarks Preservation Commission chair will be. And we continue to engage thousands of people around this history and preservation efforts with our online interactive South of Union Square Map+Tours.



MAP SHOWING OUR PROPOSED SOUTH OF UNION SQUARE HISTORIC DISTRICT, WHICH YOU CAN ACCESS AT [VILLAGEPRESERVATION.ORG/SOUTHOFUNIONSQUAREMAP](https://villagepreservation.org/southofunionsquaremap).

CITY APPROVES SOHO/NOHO UPZONING + DISPLACEMENT PLAN

Stiff Opposition Pares Back Plan, Still a Huge Developer Giveaway

At the end of 2021, the City Council approved a modified version of Mayor de Blasio's parting gift to his real estate benefactors: the SoHo/NoHo/Chinatown Upzoning plan. Approval at the City Council was led by Councilmembers Margaret Chin, Carlina Rivera, and Corey Johnson. Under extreme pressure from groups like Village Preservation, the Council pared back some of the most damaging elements of the plan, but still approved a fundamentally flawed and misguided rezoning that not only will do great harm to these neighborhoods, but is also intended to serve as a model for more such rezonings in historic neighborhoods throughout NYC.

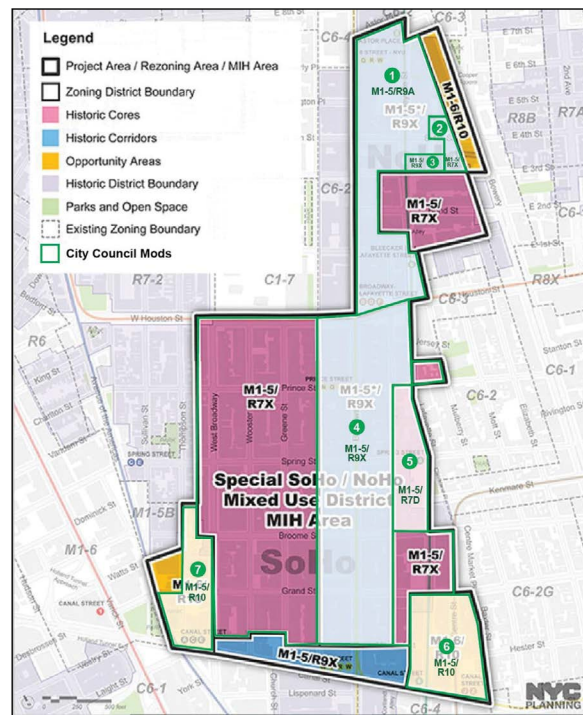
From 2019 when the Mayor, Councilmember Chin, and Borough President Gale Brewer first introduced the "process" for considering zoning changes to SoHo and NoHo, we called it out for what it was: a giant developer giveaway designed to dramatically increase the allowable size of new buildings, allow big-box chain stores of unlimited size, and introduce NYU and private university expansion to the area. We were ultimately proven correct, as these were cornerstones of the proposal. For our truth-telling, Village

Preservation was denied a seat on the project's "community advisory board," despite repeated requests by other stakeholders to include us.

Overwhelming sentiment expressed at public meetings against such measures was roundly ignored. The City argued they would result in the creation of needed affordable housing, which would be required in certain types of for-profit developments allowed under the rezoning, leading to greater diversity of neighborhood residents. Such developments would, however, include three times as many luxury condos.

Village Preservation released study after study showing the plan would in fact result in little if any affordable housing being built, due to numerous loopholes and lucrative alternatives to including them; would likely lead to the demolition of as many as hundreds of units of existing truly affordable rent regulated housing; would make the neighborhood less diverse and more expensive, even if the promised "affordable" units (for which income requirements would often be quite high) were built; would disproportionately target and harm lower-income Asian American residents of the Chinatown section of the rezoning; and displace artists, seniors, small businesses, and arts-related entities. Our contentions were supported by leading housing, tenant, environmental, labor, social justice, Chinatown, arts, and preservation groups, including state and national groups.

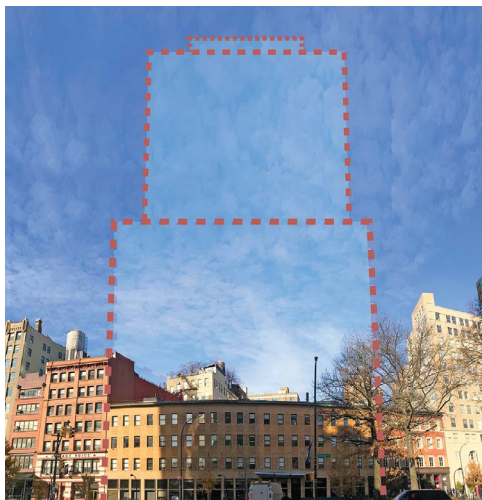
AT 46 COOPER SQUARE, THE COUNCIL'S APPROVED REZONING WOULD ALLOW A NEW 275-FT.-TALL BUILDING WITH NO AFFORDABLE HOUSING AT ALL.



THE FINAL MAP OF THE UPZONING PLAN AS APPROVED BY THE CITY COUNCIL.

In spite of this broad opposition and empirical data, the plan moved ahead. Our efforts did have an impact, however, forcing the Mayor and then the City Council to roll back some of the worst elements of the plan. We got reductions in the allowable size of commercial developments in most locations; the overall size and height of developments in several areas; and big-box chain retail and mega-bars and restaurants throughout the rezoning area. We also got the allowance for NYU/private university expansion eliminated. This also means new developments are slightly more likely to include a fraction of the promised affordable housing, and to not result in displacement of existing residents, affordable rent-regulated housing, arts uses, and small businesses.

But even the watered down plan was still a giant loss for our neighborhoods, for our city, and for equity, and a giant gift to developers who lobbied and donated extensively for it.



VILLAGE VOICES CELEBRATES STORIES OF NEIGHBORHOOD TRAILBLAZERS

Free Public Exhibition Raises Funds for Preservation and Education

This past fall, Village Preservation staged our first-ever *Village Voices* public exhibition. The free event, which remained up and accessible to the public for six weeks, was a safe, socially distanced celebration of 21 sites in our neighborhoods connected to historic figures and events that profoundly impacted the fields of civil rights, the arts, science, or social justice.

Village Voices utilized shadow boxes placed throughout Greenwich Village, the East Village, and NoHo, within which specially curated artworks and artifacts connected to the people and locations could be found reflecting the story of their significance. A QR code on each allowed visitors to hear narrations about the subjects by Edward Norton, Kathleen Chalfant, and John Leguizamo, among many others, and at some spots to access enhanced reality images to learn or see even more. Figures featured included James Baldwin, Bob Dylan, Patti Smith, Lorraine Hansberry, Jane Jacobs, and less well-known figures like John W. Draper (who took the first picture of the moon from Greenwich Village), along with sites like the former Triangle Shirtwaist Factory.

The exhibit's inaugural day in September included live interactive performances, as well as a special outdoor reception for the exhibition's strongest financial supporters at Jefferson Market Garden. *Village Voices* served as our 2021 annual benefit, replacing our annual house tour, which was postponed due to COVID concerns, with an entirely new model.

Not merely a safer way to stage a benefit, *Village Voices* allowed us to share our neighborhoods' rich history of innovation, progressive thought, and social transformation with the broader public and the entire city. By using sites like Washington Square, St. Mark's Church, and the NYC AIDS Memorial that were connected to these towering figures and watershed events, as well as historic figures' homes and studios, it allowed us to engage the public around the vital role our neighborhoods played in contemporary history, while using virtual technology along with in-person curated creations to tell these stories and reach a new audience.

Funds raised through this benefit event not only made *Village Voices* possible, but also supported the organization's education and advocacy work throughout the year. We were thrilled with the tremendously positive feedback it received, including coverage on NY1 News and in the *New York Times*, and that we were able to reach thousands of people through the event. We are planning a second *Village Voices* for 2022.



▲ A VISITOR SCANS A QR CODE ON ONE BOX TO LEARN MORE ABOUT JOAN MITCHELL.

▼ VILLAGE VOICES WAS FEATURED ON NY1: FROM LEFT, BENEFIT CHAIR LESLIE MASON, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR ANDREW BERMAN, AND NY1 REPORTER ROGER CLARK



CHALLENGING RATIONALES FOR PRO-DEVELOPER UPZONINGS

VP's Studies Debunk False Claims Driving Anti-Preservation Policies

Village Preservation released several studies this fall undermining the false premises behind the push by city leaders, misguided housing advocates, and real estate industry insiders to upzone neighborhoods (especially centrally located and historic ones) to increase the allowable size of development, as a way to supposedly address the city's lack of affordable housing. The argument is that a shortage of housing of all sorts is making all housing in our city less affordable, and that more housing production at any level brings prices down for everyone.

Not only do we not see this happening in New York City, we actually often see just the opposite. Analysis shows that upzoned neighborhoods with higher housing production don't necessarily have lower

housing prices as compared to those with landmark protections or zoning rules that may keep new housing production at lower levels. In fact, it's often the neighborhoods with the loosest restrictions and the most new construction that see the highest housing costs. Our analysis also found that adjacent neighborhoods with and without landmark protections, and those with and without huge amounts of new development, often have comparable housing prices, undercutting the argument that simply allowing more market-rate housing brings prices down.

Rather than benefiting average New Yorkers or those in need, these upzonings, and the concurrent push to strip away or limit landmark protections, mostly just help real estate developers.

Too many city officials nevertheless subscribe to this theory, which has been increasingly driving planning policy. The City frequently makes promises when rezoning neighborhoods about the impacts they will have, from affordability, to housing production, to stimulating positive retail growth. So we also did an analysis to see how frequently the city's projections about their rezonings' impacts are accurate.

Titled "Less Reliable Than Flipping A Coin," our report analyzing years of city rezonings found that in case after case, the city's predictions about developments in their rezonings were accurate substantially less than 50% of the time, or the rate of accuracy one would derive from a random



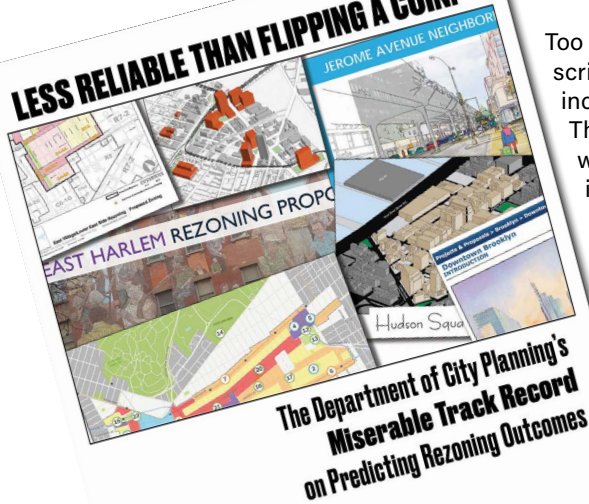
OUR ANALYSIS SHOWED THAT HUDSON YARDS IS THE NEIGHBORHOOD WITH THE MOST NEW HOUSING PRODUCTION IN NYC, AND THE HIGHEST HOUSING PRICES.

guess or coin toss. And yet it is such predictions that form the premise for these profoundly impactful rezonings, including the recently approved SoHo/NoHo/Chinatown rezoning, which the city claims will produce 900 units of affordable housing — an outlandish and fanciful claim.

Rather than simply exposing the damage that these lies do, we've also highlighted ways of helping to address affordability without destroying neighborhoods and allowing oversized development with copious amounts of luxury condos. One is to simply build reasonably sized affordable housing where it's needed, rather than upzoning entire neighborhoods to entice for-profit developers to include some "affordable" housing by granting them the ability to build huge amounts of luxury housing along with it. Another is to not upzone sites with existing rent-regulated affordable housing, encouraging its destruction and permanent loss. A third is to look for ways to incentivize or require that when our city's 1 million units of rent-regulated affordable housing turn over, they go to tenants whose incomes are appropriate for the rent (the generally accepted target of rent accounting for no more than 30% of income) rather than someone whose income exceeds that threshold.

MORE INFO villagepreservation.org/affordability

LESS RELIABLE THAN FLIPPING A COIN:



The Department of City Planning's
Miserable Track Record
on Predicting Rezoning Outcomes

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November 2021
villagepreservation.org

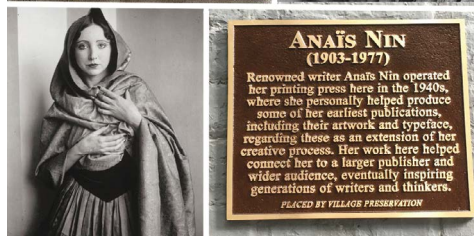
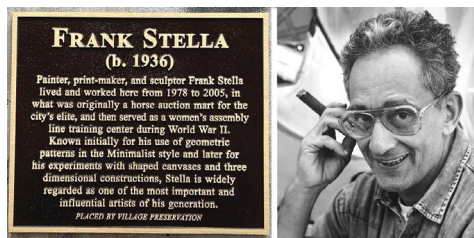
In Brief

#SOUTHOFUNIONSQUARE PLAQUES HONOR ARTISTS AND WRITERS

Village Preservation unveiled two new historic plaques in late 2021, one honoring artist Frank Stella, and the other writer Anaïs Nin. Both made great leaps forward in their careers producing trailblazing work South of Union Square.

At 128 East 13th Street, we were joined by Frank Stella himself along with Whitney Museum Director Adam Weinberg to unveil the marker on the artist's home and studio from 1978 to 2005, where some of his greatest works were produced. At 17 East 13th Street, we were joined by friends, scholars, and compatriots of Cuban/French writer Anaïs Nin during Hispanic Heritage Month to unveil the marker honoring where in the 1940s she housed her own printing press and hand-produced some of her most seminal, groundbreaking works.

SEE villagepreservation.org/plaque



NEW HISTORIC IMAGES CAPTURE 9/11, DRAG PERFORMERS, HUDSON PIERS, PRE-PARK HIGH LINE

We added several hundred new donated images over the last six months to our historic image archive, including several remarkable collections of images connected to the World Trade Center and 9/11 donated to help us mark the 20th anniversary of that tragic event. We also received several hundred images of East Village drag performers from the mid-1990s taken by the house photographer of the legendary boy bar on St. Mark's Place. A cache of donated photos also showed the crumbling but vibrant Greenwich Village waterfront piers in the late 1970s, while another showed the High Line and its surroundings in 1979 taken as part of an early but never-realized proposal for its conversion to a public walkway.

VIEW ALL THESE AND MORE AT villagepreservation.org/imagearchive

LATEST ORAL HISTORIES HONOR PLAYWRIGHTS AND ACTIVISTS

We were thrilled to share three new oral histories in late 2021, with playwrights John Guare and Barbara Kahn, and activist Ayo Harrington, adding to our collection of over 60 oral histories with some of our neighborhoods' most important figures.

Guare is the award-winning writer of *House of Blue Leaves* and *Six Degrees of Separation*, among countless notable works. He's also lived and worked in Greenwich Village for over 60 years, and shared with us how the neighborhood changed and supported and inspired his work. Kahn is also an award-winning playwright whose works have been staged around

the globe, with a particular focus on the history of our neighborhood and the struggles of marginalized groups like women, LGBTQ+ people, and immigrants, among others. She shared how she was drawn to the downtown scene and how theater shaped her life.



GUARE



HARRINGTON



KAHN

Harrington has been a leading East Village activist since she moved here in the 1960s. Her life and work covered in her oral history has been intimately intertwined with the civil rights, urban homesteading, community gardening, and educational reform movements.

ACCESS THESE THREE AND MORE AT villagepreservation.org/oralhistory

FROM THE DIRECTOR

ANDREW BERMAN

We're entering a new era in our city unseen in almost a decade. We have a new Mayor and a majority-new City Council (including new representatives in two of our three local council districts), and there are or soon will be new heads of city agencies, including those that most directly affect preservation and planning, like the Landmarks Preservation Commission and City Planning Commission. All offer new opportunities, and new challenges, for our work.



But no matter who's in charge, our mission remains the same: to document, celebrate, and preserve the special architectural and cultural heritage of Greenwich Village, the East Village, and NoHo — our built environment, our small businesses, our local cultural institutions, and our rich history of artistic, social, and political innovation, and as a place of welcoming to newcomers from across the country and world.

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Protecting and illuminating these qualities benefits not just these neighborhoods, but our city as a whole, and beyond. The challenge we face is to ensure it's not just developers and government bureaucrats with their own vested interests who get to decide the fate of our communities, but everyone who lives in, works in, visits, or benefits from these irreplaceable qualities does as well.

With the support of our ever-growing base of members, from across our neighborhoods, city, and the world, I'm confident we can do just that. Thank you for being a part of making that possible.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Village Preservation gratefully acknowledges grants in support of our work from the Achelis & Bodman Foundation, Craig Newmark Philanthropies, the Lynne Waxman Foundation, Mrs. Giles Whiting Foundation, the Kaplen Brothers Fund, the Mertz Gilmore Foundation, the Rogers Family Foundation, Humanities New York, NYC Department of Cultural Affairs, NYS Council on the Arts, and City Council Member Corey Johnson through the NYC Department of Cultural Affairs.

We also gratefully acknowledge in-kind support from Axis Theatre, Richard Corman, James Cuebas, Pryor Dodge, Doyle Partners, the Estate of Fred W. McDarragh, Jerry M. Feeney, Fireplace @409 Bleecker, Noah Greenberg, Peter Grisafi, Penny Hardy/PSNY, Jillian Jonas, Deborah Kadetsky, Charles Kramer, Edward LaGrassa, MADE Architecture, Lenore Mills, Eliza Paley, Marisa Palmisano, Michael Quinn, Robert A. Ripps, Steve Salvesen, SergeAudio, St. Mark's in the Bowery, Carole Teller, Veselka, Beverly Wallace, John Weiss, Westbeth Artists Residents Council, and Marjorie Zien.

Bulletin Board

STAY IN THE KNOW! Join our email list for alerts on critical preservation and development issues at villagepreservation.org/email.

SEE THE LATEST APPLICATIONS FOR CHANGES TO LANDMARKED PROPERTIES in our neighborhoods, and hundreds of past applications, at villagepreservation.org/lpc.

VISIT OUR BLOG OFF THE GRID for fun and fascinating glimpses into our neighborhoods' hidden history, eye-catching architecture, and colorful characters: villagepreservation.org/blog.

GET WITH THE PROGRAM! See all our upcoming lectures, book talks, panel discussions, and other programs, as well as thousands of videos and pictures from past programs, at villagepreservation.org/programs.

EXPLORE hundreds of local sites on our Civil Rights and Social Justice Map; thousands of photos and hundreds of sites of historic significance on our Greenwich Village Historic District Map; guides to Women's Suffrage historic sites and Greek Revival architecture in our neighborhoods; and the history of 3,000+ buildings and themed tours on our East Village Building Blocks site, all at villagepreservation.org/resources.

PICTURE THIS: Donate old photos of our neighborhood to our historic image archive, or explore more than 3,600 images at villagepreservation.org/imagearchive.

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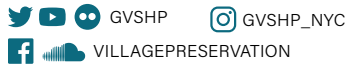
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VILLAGE PRESERVATION documents, celebrates, and preserves the special architectural and cultural heritage of Greenwich Village, the East Village, and NoHo. Follow us on social media:



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