

News **VILLAGE** from **PRESERVATION**

**GREENWICH
VILLAGE SOCIETY
FOR HISTORIC
PRESERVATION**
SUMMER 2022

SOUTH OF UNION SQUARE NAMED A NEW YORK STATE 'SEVEN TO SAVE'

*Designation Lifts Preservation Campaign,
Highlights Danger to Historic Area*

In May, the Preservation League of NY State (PLNYS) declared Preservation's proposed South of Union Square Historic District one of its 2022-23 "Seven To Save" — one of the seven most important endangered historic sites in the Empire State. Village Preservation had applied for this designation as part of our ongoing effort to seek recognition and landmark status for this largely unprotected and endangered historic section of Greenwich Village and the East Village, from 14th to 9th Streets, west of Fifth Avenue to east of Third Avenue.

PLNYS now joins the State's Historic Preservation Office (SHPO) in recognizing the historic significance of this area; in late 2021, the SHPO determined that the bulk of our proposed South of Union Square Historic District was eligible for the State and National Register of Historic Places. In their determinations, both PLNYS and the SHPO cited the area's rich 19th- and 20th-century architecture and deep connections to transformative civil rights, social justice, and artistic and cultural movements of the

last century and a half, as documented by our research.

Over the last 15 years, that research and advocacy has helped lead to the landmark designation of more than a dozen buildings in this area, including several facing imminent danger of demolition (128 East 13th Street and 827-31 Broadway, former homes of artists Frank Stella and Willem de Kooning, respectively), and most recently 70 Fifth Avenue, the former headquarters of the NAACP and an unrivaled roster of civil rights and social justice organizations, where the zoning would otherwise allow a supertall skyscraper to be built.

But we need to do more, and the League's recent declaration will help tremendously with that effort. We need to secure landmark designation for this entire area, encompassing all or parts of about 20 blocks and 200 buildings, to protect its rich history and ensure new development



THE HOTEL ALBERT AT UNIVERSITY PLACE AND EAST 11TH STREET WITHIN THE PROPOSED SOUTH OF UNION SQUARE HISTORIC DISTRICT.

remains in character with the neighborhood. The loss of buildings like the St. Denis Hotel at Broadway and 11th and its replacement with a glass tech high-rise, and of other buildings like 64-66 University Place, speaks to the ongoing threat this area faces — all made worse by the upzoning deal allowing construction of the 14th Street Tech Hub in 2008 by then-Mayor de Blasio and Councilmember Carlina Rivera (who, unlike her colleague Erik Bottcher, is yet to support landmark designation of the area in her district).

MORE INFO villagepreservation.org/southofunionsquare

STATE PLAN TO ALLOW SUPERSIZED DEVELOPMENT CITYWIDE DEFEATED

Village Preservation Plays Key Role in Blocking Scheme for Supertalls in Residential Neighborhoods

Earlier this year, Governor Hochul withdrew a plan in the state budget to lift the 60-year-old cap on the allowable size of residential developments in New York City, which would have permitted the city to rezone neighborhoods to allow new residential developments at any size. Further cementing the plan's undoing, the two houses of the state legislature refused to support it in the budget process. This was a huge and hard-fought win for Village Preservation, and all those who opposed this wrong-headed plan.

The current very generous cap has allowed construction of the “supertalls” of Billionaire’s Row on 57th Street, which reach as high as 1,555 ft; lifting the cap would have allowed even larger developments in residential neighborhoods, potentially throughout the city. Village Preservation took a lead role in fighting the plan, meeting with legislative leaders and generating thousands of letters from New Yorkers to elected officials urging them to oppose it. The real estate industry and some nonprofits supported the

plan, claiming it was needed to address New York City’s housing and affordability needs. But this was nothing more than a red herring.

Nearly all supersized residential structures are developed as super-luxury towers that typically serve as third or fourth homes for their owners, or no home at all — many are merely places to park or invest money. They also tend to have an extremely low number of actual housing units for their size, as the luxurious apartments are often massive duplexes, triplexes, or more. These buildings sometimes destroy more residential units in the smaller buildings demolished to make way for them than they create. The proposed lifting of the cap had no affordable housing requirements attached to it whatsoever, placing the final nail in the coffin of this specious argument.

The city does need to create and preserve more housing, especially affordable housing. But allowing more supertalls won’t help in that regard, and may actually do more harm than good, destroying affordable units and even reducing net housing in the process. Village Preservation, working with our allies in the tenant and affordable housing movements, have pointed to other measures to address this need, including: stemming the loss of existing affordable units, creating more truly affordable housing on appropriate sites, and facilitating the conversion of obsolete or underutilized commercial build-



ings, including hotels and office buildings, to residential use. None of these measures require lifting the long-standing cap on the already massive allowable size of residential developments in our neighborhoods.

This is not the first time this proposal has been advanced. But it came closer to reality this time than it ever has before, making our “win” especially valuable. We fully expect pro-“upzoning” forces in real estate, government, and elsewhere to push for this measure again, and we must be prepared. The threat of allowing these supersized structures is more than theoretical; when the city upzoned SoHo and NoHo late last year, they allowed new development at the maximum size permitted by this state-imposed limit. No doubt if that limit is lifted, the next upzoning in our neighborhoods will go even higher.

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MORE INFO villagepreservation.org/supertall

SOHO/NOHO UPZONING UPDATE: MAYORAL VETO, NYU LAWSUIT

We continue to work closely with allied groups and elected officials to seek to undo as much of the damage as possible from the corrupt, disastrous SoHo/NoHo/Chinatown Upzoning+Displacement plan approved by the Mayor and City Council late last year, and to defend the important improvements we did secure to the plan.

One of the most pernicious elements of the plan was a separate piece of legislation passed simultaneously that applied draconian penalties to longtime residents of the neighborhood simply for continuing to occupy their homes. The penalty would have applied to noncertified artists living in units supposed to be reserved for certified artists — a provision the city has openly ignored for decades, thus

encouraging such residents to move in. To retroactively begin penalizing these residents after decades would have been cruel and punitive, serving no public purpose. That legislation was introduced by (now-former) Councilmember Margaret Chin, and was supported by current Councilmember Carlina Rivera and former Councilmember Corey Johnson.

We joined in an effort spearheaded by the Coalition for Fairness in SoHo and NoHo to get Mayor Adams to veto this measure, passed in the last days of the de Blasio administration and never signed by the outgoing Mayor. Local Councilmember Christopher Marte played a key role, and the new Mayor vetoed the measure, which was not challenged by the new City Council — the first sustained Mayoral veto in years. This was a huge victory for equity, rationality, and neighborhood residents.

One of the victories we had secured in the approval process for the upzoning plan was getting the City Council to remove provisions that would have allowed NYU and other private universities to expand in the rezoning area, where they had for the most part been prohibited from locating by the prior zoning. Village Preservation spearheaded that effort, while also securing some major reductions in the allowable size of new developments in the area and of big-box chain retail and eating and drinking establishments (of course these changes didn't go far enough, and we lobbied heavily for rejection of the entire plan).

But this spring NYU sued to have the provision preventing them and other private universities from expanding in the

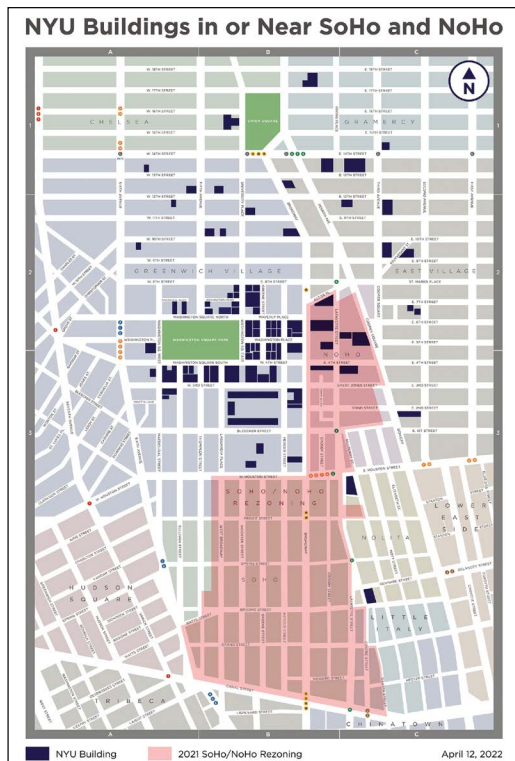


rezoning area struck down by the courts, saying it violated the State's constitution. Village Preservation immediately reached out to city and state officials to shore up opposition to the lawsuit, and ensure the provision is vigorously defended in the courts. We immediately launched a letter-writing campaign generating thousands of letters to city officials, urging them to use all resources to defend against NYU's harmful and destructive lawsuit. We will continue to closely monitor the progress of the suit.

We are also committed to monitoring the impact of the upzoning plan, specifically in relation to proponent's claims regarding what sort of development it would spawn, especially in relation to their inflated and unrealistic projections of new affordable housing. We issued detailed studies and analyses showing how deeply flawed the affordable housing projections connected to the plan were. We intend to look at the actual results and see how they line up with the justifications for the plan. So far, the one new announced development under the rezoning was not included in the city's studies as a possible site for new development, thus undermining the accuracy of their projections (its impact in terms of affordable housing is neutral, however, in that it will contain none, though the city didn't predict any there).

Because proponents of this type of rezoning seek to bring it to more neighborhoods, it's critical we show the fallacies upon which these plans are based.

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SAVING THE EAST VILLAGE'S HISTORIC EYE AND EAR INFIRMARY

For over 165 years, the oldest specialized hospital in the Western Hemisphere has been located on the northeast corner of Second Avenue and 13th Street. The New York Eye and Ear Infirmary was founded in 1820, with its current building constructed in stages between 1856 and 1903. The loosely Richardsonian Romanesque masterpiece has provided care to some of the neediest New Yorkers for generations, and has been the site of some of the great advances in treatment for the visually and hearing impaired (not to mention a memorable scene in *The Godfather*). None other than Helen Keller helped cut the ribbon for the final addition to the building.

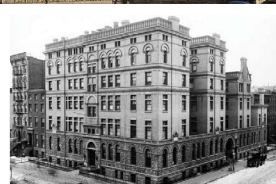
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But after several consolidations, the hospital has begun clearing doctors and offices

out of the building, leaving its fate in doubt. Village Preservation is working with allied local groups and doctors and alumni of the Infirmary on a campaign to seek landmark designation for the building, to ensure that no matter what happens, that rich history and this magnificent building are not erased. As we go to press, local State Senator Brad Hoylman and Assemblymember Harvey Epstein have joined in calling for landmark designation; we're awaiting a response for support from local City Councilmember Carlina Rivera and Borough President Mark Levine.



THE NEW YORK EYE AND EAR INFIRMARY TODAY (ABOVE) AND IN 1904.



[MORE INFO villagepreservation.org/eastvillage](http://villagepreservation.org/eastvillage)

PATCHIN PLACE PURCHASE RAISES EYEBROWS

Few places embody the charm and history of Greenwich Village like Patchin Place, the collection of 10 quaint three-story houses around a private cul-de-sac just

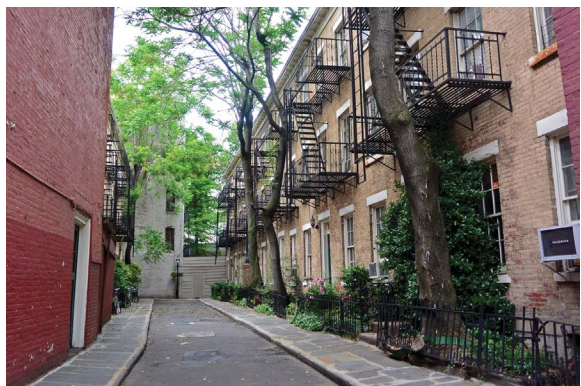
off 10th Street between Sixth and Greenwich Avenues. Built around 1849, the tiny lane has housed luminaries from Marlon Brando to ee cummings, Djuna Barnes to Theodore Dreiser.

Perhaps that's why the news of their being sold by longtime owner Morgan Holding Capital to a real estate investment firm this spring for \$32 million has caused so much concern. Any harm befalling this iconic enclave would be an unimaginable loss to our neighborhood and city.

Fortunately, however, the buildings and their surroundings are all

landmarked as part of the Greenwich Village Historic District, and thus their exteriors are protected from loss of historic fabric or inappropriate changes — at least if the city's Landmarks Preservation Commission does its job. And no such changes have, at least thus far, been proposed or even mentioned.

That said, the change in ownership warrants close scrutiny, to ensure that this beloved symbol of our neighborhood and of New York history remains that way. We are in touch with residents and neighbors, and are keeping a watchful eye so nothing is contemplated or attempted that would negatively impact the irreplaceable historic quality of this unique place.



LANDMARKS BUDGET CUTS RESTORED, BUT MORE HELP NEEDED

This spring Mayor Adams proposed in his preliminary budget slashing funding to the Landmarks Preservation Commission (LPC), which would have resulted in significant staffing losses at what is already the city's smallest public agency. Village Preservation led a campaign opposing the cuts, generating thousands of letters to city officials from New Yorkers urging the funding be restored, and working with sympathetic local Councilmembers like Christopher Marte and Erik Bottcher.

In response, when the Mayor issued his final proposed Executive Budget, the cuts were

fully restored. This is a huge victory, but only part of the story. For years, the LPC has allowed staff positions to remain unfilled,



ADAMS



MARTE



BOTTCHER

while longtime staff have left the agency in droves as salaries failed to keep pace with

inflation and workloads increased. Not surprisingly, fewer much-needed landmark designations have taken place, and wait times for processing necessary applications for owners of landmarked properties have in many cases gone up, hurting landmarked areas and those which should be landmarked.

That's why we've now shifted our campaign to modestly increase the LPC budget, to fill empty positions and hold on to experienced but underpaid staffers. The City Council and the Mayor will hammer out their budget agreement sometime in June.

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

5 LPC DROPS THE BALL WITH MEATPACKING DISTRICT ROWHOUSE DEMOLITIONS

In 2020, Village Preservation opposed an application by a developer to demolish much of nine landmarked 1840s houses on the northeast corner of 14th Street and Ninth Avenue and erect an office tower behind them. The plan was reconfigured to preserve much more of the dilapidated and altered

structures, and the tower reduced in size. In 2021, we protested vociferously against approvals by the city to allow the facades of all nine houses to be demolished, which was not part of the approved plan, because of unforeseen "urgent safety issues" that only came to light once construction began.

We argued strenuously that any such safety issues (if real) could have been addressed without the facade demolitions. The Landmarks Preservation Commission (LPC) promised that the project would have to go through a whole new round of public review as a result of the changes.

But the LPC let us down again — twice. When the project returned for a public hearing, the Commission refused to consider revoking the permits for the (smaller) tower now that less of the historic buildings was being preserved, as we and other advocates called for. And this spring it was revealed via Freedom of Information requests that the engineering specialist the LPC hired to review conditions at the buildings advised the agency that they could be made just as safe by measures that did not require demolition of the facades — just as we had said. The LPC hid this information from the public, elected officials, and community board. Instead, the developer, via a high-powered lobbyist known for engaging in alleged "pay to play" practices with the prior administration (which made the demolition decision), was able to tear down the facades of the nine landmarked structures as they requested. We are demanding full accountability from all involved.

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



VILLAGE PRESERVATION LED A RALLY LAST YEAR PROTESTING THE CITY'S DECISION TO ALLOW THE DEMOLITION OF THE FACADES OF THESE 19TH-CENTURY LANDMARKED BUILDINGS (UNDER SCAFFOLDING).

In Brief

NEW MAP CONNECTS GREAT NYC LANDMARKS TO THE VILLAGE

Earlier this year we launched two new interactive maps called “Beyond the Village and Back.” These virtual resources show the stories behind some of our city’s great landmarks — from the Empire State Building to Bowne House (the oldest structure in Queens), the Met Museum to Staten Island’s Sailors’ Snug Harbor, and the Chrysler Building to Brooklyn’s Weeksville — and how their histories are deeply intertwined with Greenwich Village, the East Village, and NoHo.

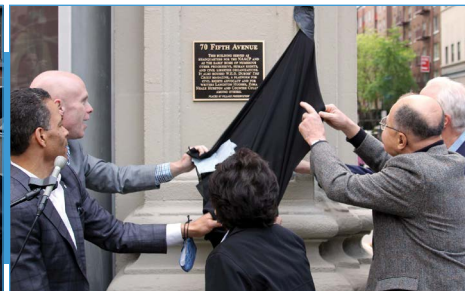
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The maps contain dozens of city landmarks, stretching from the Battery to the Bronx, Harlem to the Rockaways. The stories behind them are fascinating, some dating back to the 17th century. All would not exist were it not for people, institutions, or events rooted in our neighborhoods, and these maps trace those often hidden connections. You can explore virtually or in real life; either way, you’ll learn more about some of our city’s most iconic spots, and the critical role our neighborhoods played in their development.

[VISIT villagepreservation.org/btvabmaps](http://villagepreservation.org/btvabmaps)



THE EMPIRE STATE BUILDING (L.) IN MIDTOWN AND THE ORIGINAL EMPIRE STATE BUILDING AT BLEEKER STREET AND BROADWAY.



NEW PLAQUES HONOR CIVIL RIGHTS LANDMARKS

We unveiled two new plaques this spring, both honoring the civil rights legacy of our neighborhoods. In April (left photo), we and the NYC LGBT Historic Sites Project unveiled a new plaque on Julius’ Bar (Waverly and 10th Street) marking the 1966 “Sip In” that took place there, a milestone in LGBTQ+ rights. Three years before Stonewall, activists challenged rules that essentially made gay bars illegal and encouraged harassment of and discrimination against gay patrons. Julius’ is also one of the city’s oldest bars (since the 1860s) and its oldest gay bar.

In May, we were joined by The New School as we unveiled a plaque on 70 Fifth Avenue, which a century earlier headquartered the NAACP, *The Crisis* Magazine, and an unrivaled assortment of peace, civil rights and social justice organizations. Here lynching and *The Birth of a Nation* were protested; Harlem Renaissance careers were launched; the ACLU was founded; the women’s peace movement flowered; Sacco and Vanzetti were defended; the Armenian genocide was confronted; and so much more.

[SEE villagepreservation.org/plaque](http://villagepreservation.org/plaque)

LOCAL FOTOG EXPANDS IMAGE ARCHIVE: WTC, GAY PRIDE, HISTORIC SIGNS, AND MORE

We were very pleased to expand our historic image archive earlier this year via donations from local photographer Robert Fisch. Fisch first came to the Village in the early 1980s as a teen, and has lived here since 1991; fortunately for all of us, he captured all of it on film, which we can now share.

His pictures show young people like him who came here in the early 1980s seeking an LGBTQ+ affirming environment; the Gay Pride parades of the 1990s; the World Trade Center pre-9/11; lost

institutions from St. Vincent’s to Joe Jr.’s; the changing Greenwich Village waterfront; neon and painted wall signs throughout the neighborhood; and so much more.



Robert’s is but one of dozens of collections you can explore (almost all donated like his) which compose the nearly 4,000 images from the late

18th to the early 21st century in our historic image archive.

[EXPLORE villagepreservation.org/imagearchive](http://villagepreservation.org/imagearchive)

FROM THE DIRECTOR
ANDREW BERMAN



June is a wonderful time of year for so many reasons. Among them, we gather for our Annual Meeting, and honor treasured neighborhood people, places, businesses and institutions with our Annual Village Awards. This year is no exception, and our awardees reflect the diversity and vitality of our neighborhoods: Astor Place Hairstylists, Rev. Dr. Jacqui Lewis and Middle Collegiate Church, Pageant Print Shop, Bonsignour, Razom for Ukraine, Zinc Jazz Bar, and our Regina Kellerman Awardee, Jane Friedman and Howl! Arts. We were thrilled to be able to partner with Cooper Union, who co-hosted us at the storied Great Hall.

June is also around the time when new mayors often announce their appointment to lead the NYC Landmarks Preservation Commission. As we go to press, Mayor Adams is yet to do so. We're all anxiously awaiting to see who the Mayor will select to run this critically important agency, and lead the efforts to protect our city's rich and varied heritage. Stay tuned.

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Bulletin Board

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

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.

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

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.

SAVE THE DATE! Our VILLAGE VOICES benefit and public art installation returns September 18–October 31 with 22 new interactive exhibit boxes displayed throughout our neighborhoods, featuring photographs, artifacts, and sound-scape recordings that entertain, illuminate, and transport you into the momentous heritage of our neighborhoods. Get the latest updates at villagepreservation.org/voices.

ture, Lenore Mills, 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.

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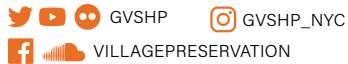
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