

**TESTIMONY OF VILLAGE PRESERVATION**  
**131 Charles Street**  
**Certificate of Appropriateness Application**  
**January 10, 2023**

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**232 EAST 11TH STREET**

**NEW YORK NY 10003**

**212-475-9585**

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Good morning commissioners and thank you for the opportunity to testify. My name is Anna Marcum and I am speaking on behalf of Village Preservation today.

The proposed changes to 131 and 131 ½ Charles Street are deeply alarming and dangerous. We strongly oppose this application. Designated on March 8, 1966, 131 and 131 ½ Charles Street were among New York City's first individual landmarks, designated alongside the Flatiron Building, Grace Church, City Hall, and the Morgan Library. The home was also included in the Far West Village Greenwich Village Historic District Extension designated on May 2, 2006.

131 Charles Street is one of the most architecturally intact examples of Federal rowhouse architecture in New York City. The architectural significance of the home has been cited in many publications, including Ada Louise Huxtable's "Classic New York," Harmon Goldstone's "History Preserved: A Guide to NYC's Landmarks and Historic Districts," Charles Lockwood and Patrick Ciccone's "Bricks and Brownstone" (both the 2nd and 3rd editions), Kevin Murphy's "The Houses of Greenwich Village," and all editions of the A.I.A. Guide to New York City, among many others. 131 and 131 ½ Charles Street also hold great cultural significance as the home of groundbreaking photographer Diane Arbus from 1959 to 1968.

Both structures are remarkably intact, with original details. The proposed changes to 131 and 131 ½ Charles Street would significantly alter their architectural integrity. The large openings proposed for the back facade of the main house and the front facade of the stable, the changes to the rooftops of both houses, as well as the loss of the rear section of the horse walk, would radically diminish the historic fabric as well as the character of these buildings. The excavation of the rear yard and addition of a subterranean structure connecting both houses has the potential to destabilize both 131 and 131 ½ Charles Street, as well as adjacent historic buildings. Especially in light of the recent nearby loss of 14 Gay Street and nine rowhouses at the corner of West 14th Street and 9th Avenue, the most extreme care must be utilized when considering excavation — especially what is in this case completely unnecessary excavation — under fragile structures such as these. The potential risks far outweigh the personal benefits to be gained by allowing this incredibly extensive excavation.

The proposed changes are completely inappropriate for such an intact iconic example of a structure so near to the heart of Greenwich Village, New York, and American history. And the proposed excavation and digging opens up the danger of even greater damage being done to these and other adjacent structures. We strongly urge the Commissioners to deny this application.