

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

**GREENWICH
VILLAGE SOCIETY
FOR HISTORIC
PRESERVATION**
SUMMER 2023

STATE PLAN TO ALLOW SUPERSIZED DEVELOPMENT DEFEATED AGAIN

Village Preservation Leads Effort to Block Scheme

Removing Critical Safeguard Against Oversized Construction

For the fourth time in as many years, Village Preservation has helped stop a plan to lift the State's 60-year-old limit on the maximum allowable size of residential development in New York City. Proponents of the plan, including the Governor and the real estate lobby, claim the cap — which allows buildings over 1,500 feet tall and up to nearly 1,500 units — is too restrictive, and that greater density of development is needed. Proponents falsely claim that lifting the cap will help address New York's affordability crisis and provide the kind of housing our city needs. But nothing could be further from the truth — the measure wouldn't require a single unit of affordable housing, and is likely to largely produce very expensive housing out of reach of most New Yorkers, of the kind of which there is currently a glut.

Village Preservation was again on the front lines of this battle, providing new data and research to refute the proponent's claims, and to argue for the value of keeping the cap. We showed how the cap that proponents call "overly restrictive" has allowed the

construction of the tallest residential building in the world, the largest residential building in the country, three of the ten tallest buildings in America, 23 buildings over 800 feet tall, and the tallest buildings in Brooklyn, Queens, Staten Island, and the Bronx. We showed that with the cap and current zoning in place, 2.7 billion square feet of housing can be built in NYC — the equivalent of 1,200 Empire State Buildings, capable of comfortably housing over 5 million additional New Yorkers. We also showed how lifting the cap would likely accelerate the destruction of existing affordable rent-regulated housing, displacing disproportionately older and less-well-off New Yorkers.

We couldn't have defeated this top priority of the real estate industry yet again without lots of help. Members of the public sent nearly 150,000 letters to elected officials opposing the plan using our online tools. And elected officials like Assemblymembers Deborah Glick and Grace Lee, and State Senator Liz Krueger, led the opposition in the legislature.



CENTRAL PARK TOWER, THE TALLEST RESIDENTIAL BUILDING IN THE WORLD, WAS BUILT WITH THE CURRENT CAP ON SIZE IN PLACE.

We can't give up this fight, which is likely to return again. If the cap is lifted, it would allow the City to rezone any residential neighborhood to as great a density as it wishes. And we've seen that the City and big real estate would like to massively increase development in neighborhoods like ours, if we let them.

MORE INFO villagepreservation.org/supertall

MORE LANDMARKS ENDANGERED AND DESTROYED ON CITY'S WATCH

Rash of Destruction Continues as City Releases Plan With Few Details to Address Growing Problem

Village Preservation has been a vocal critic of the city's lax oversight of landmarked properties, which has allowed nearly a dozen buildings in our neighborhood alone to experience partial or complete demolition in just a year.

First, there were the nine landmarked early 19th-century houses at 351-55 West 14th Street/44-54 Ninth Avenue, which the City ordered partially demolished in response to the developer "finding" fatal flaws in the structures while altering them (with city approval) to allow construction of an office tower behind. Then the City ordered the demolition of the 200-year-old landmarked house at 14 Gay Street, after the owner's illegal work made it unsafe and in danger of collapse. This February, City-approved work at the new tower rising at 14 Fifth Avenue damaged the nearby early 19th-century

house at 10 Fifth Avenue, requiring an emergency vacate order and shoring, with the future of the historically significant building in doubt. And most recently, a vacate order has been issued for the landmarked 33 Cornelia Street, where owner neglect has led to increasingly deteriorating conditions. Meanwhile, at the landmarked 50 Second Avenue in the East Village, the city is allowing excavation and digging next door that the owner fears will undermine his 125-year-old building, based upon an independent engineer's assessment and the impact of similar work at 14 Fifth Avenue.

Village Preservation has raised alarm bells about all of these, and demanded action and accountability by the City. We've staged protests at City Hall, received support and cooperation from elected officials and fellow preservation organizations, and focused significant media attention on this issue. In response, this spring the City finally issued its "Action Plan to Strengthen Protections for Vulnerable Historic Buildings," acknowledging the problem and the need to do more.

However, the plan was long on rhetoric, but short on specifics or commitments. And while it spoke to some issues we had been raising, it also completely overlooked elements we had urged be included, such as ensuring bad actors are sufficiently penalized to discourage destroying their buildings; applying additional oversight

CRACKS IN THE FACADE OF 10 FIFTH AVENUE



THE FORMER 14 GAY STREET (AT LEFT)

for buildings with owners with bad track records and/or buildings that were especially vulnerable due to age, type of construction, or neglect; and ensuring that if landmarked buildings are destroyed, they must be rebuilt faithfully to their original form, so the owner does not and cannot reap additional profit from their destruction.

We're pushing the City and its agencies to do more. We're also working closely with neighbors and residents of these buildings to hold the City and owners and developers accountable for their actions and faulty oversight. While 14 Gay Street has been destroyed, we're working hard to ensure that it has to be rebuilt as it was, and that the four other vulnerable adjacent buildings under the same ownership — 16-18 Gay Street and 18-20 Christopher Street — don't suffer a similar fate, and are restored. We're closely monitoring 10 Fifth Avenue and the nearby construction at 14 Fifth Avenue, to ensure more harm doesn't come to the historic building, and it's restored and its residents are allowed to return to their homes. And we're keeping a watchful eye on 33 Cornelia Street and 50 Second Avenue, to ensure these landmarked buildings don't suffer the same tragic fate that several of their neighbors did.



NYU LAWSUIT TO ALLOW EXPANSION IN NOHO/SOHO DEFEATED!

Village Preservation was a fervent opponent of the 2021 SoHo/NoHo/Chinatown Upzoning + Displacement plan. Among the many elements we opposed was the allowance for private universities to expand there, which the longtime zoning for the neighborhood had prohibited. One victory we secured from that rezoning process was a provision inserted at the City Council that stripped out the rezoning's allowance for private university expansion in the area.

But following the rezoning, NYU filed a lawsuit seeking to have that provision overturned, which would allow the university to expand throughout the area unimpeded. NYU particularly cited Village Preservation's advocacy in securing this provision as part of their filings and legal argument for removing this restriction. In response,

Village Preservation immediately began a campaign to get the City and City Council to vigorously oppose that lawsuit in court.

However, leaving nothing to chance, earlier this year, Village Preservation, the Coalition for Fairness in SoHo and NoHo, and Councilmember Christopher Marte filed a motion to intervene in the case, to allow us to fight NYU's lawsuit independently of the City — cooperating when helpful, and acting separately when needed.

In May, State Supreme Court Judge Gerald Leibovits ruled against NYU and dismissed their lawsuit, keeping the prohibition on their expansion in the rezoning area, which we



fought for, in place. While NYU may appeal, Judge Leibovits' decisions have a very high rate of withstanding such challenges. We'll continue to monitor the case, and fight to defend reasonable and necessary restrictions on NYU's ceaseless expansion in our neighborhoods.

PRESERVING 131 AND 131½ CHARLES STREET

Village Preservation strongly opposed an application to alter the iconic, individually landmarked 1834 house and rear house at 131 and 131½ Charles Street, and to dig deeply below the two structures in a manner we feared would compromise both these and neighboring landmarked historic buildings. No. 131 Charles Street is one of the most intact examples in New York City of a modest Federal-style house — the first architectural style to reflect our newly independent nation — and was one of our city's very first individually designated landmarks in 1966. (In 2006 Village Preservation got the

house doubly landmarked, along with dozens of surrounding buildings, as part of the Far West Village extension of the Greenwich Village Historic District.) The rear house at 131½ Charles Street was home to groundbreaking photographer Diane Arbus from 1959 to 1968 — a critical phase of her career.



131 CHARLES STREET

A new owner applied to build on to the rear roof and rear facade of the main structure, eliminate the historic "horse walk" that connected the rear building to the street, and expand and significantly alter the rear structure, as well as dig deeply below both buildings to create a subterranean space con-

necting them. The proposed changes were 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 might have endangered these and other adjacent structures.

Village Preservation cited the many recent examples of comparable landmarked structures being undermined by similar work in calling upon the Landmarks Preservation Commission (LPC) to reject the proposal, and mobilized scores of New Yorkers and elected officials to oppose the application. We're happy to report that the LPC sent the applicant back to the drawing board, saying they would not support major elements of the plan. As we go to press, no new application has been filed, but we continue to closely monitor the site.

NEW 100% AFFORDABLE HOUSING DEVELOPMENT PLANNED FOR 388 HUDSON STREET

This spring, the City began the process of planning a 100% affordable housing development with potential community space on the ground floor at 388 Hudson Street — currently a City-owned vacant lot cleared to allow water tunnel construction underneath. Though the site was originally promised as park space (and the southern half of the lot will be designed as public open space), both the City and local Community Board 2 subsequently earmarked the site for housing development instead.

Many elements of the plan are to be determined, and public input is being solicited. This includes the type of affordable housing to be included and who it should serve or house; the type of community space in the ground floor and possibly the basement; and the size, scale, and design of the structure. The City initially designated the site for 100 units of housing, but Community Board 2 has been calling for a significantly larger development.

Village Preservation welcomes affordable housing at this site, which straddles the



boundary between the Greenwich Village Historic District and the denser Hudson Square neighborhood to the south. We also believe a new building here must relate sensitively to that context, transitioning between low-rise historic buildings to the

north and bulkier loft buildings to the south, and minimize shadows on James J. Walker Park across the street. We have advocated for this approach. The City and community board are holding public meetings to incorporate feedback.

[MORE INFO villagepreservation.org/388-hudson-rfp](https://villagepreservation.org/388-hudson-rfp)

FIGHTING TO PROTECT THEATRE 80

Theatre 80 is one of the East Village's most revered and beloved cultural institutions (opened in 1966), housed in one of its oldest buildings, 78-80 St. Mark's Place (built in 1845). Its longtime owners, Lorcan and Genie Otway, have maintained the building, which was in the Otway family for many years. Unfortunately, a variety of factors, including the COVID shutdown, put them under extreme financial duress, and they went into bankruptcy. On May 9, the buildings were sold at auction.

Village Preservation worked closely with



the Otways to seek support from the City to help save the building and the theater.

Sadly, while the City helped Theatre 80 attain nonprofit status, they did not intervene to prevent the sale of the building, or seek to acquire it to preserve its use as a theater and place of culture. We have also initiated and led a campaign to have the building landmarked, so no matter what happens, the historic building is preserved.

As we go to press, we're continuing to work with the Otways to find ways to preserve Theatre 80, as well as to ensure the building is protected.

[MORE INFO villagepreservation.org/east-village](https://villagepreservation.org/east-village)

ENSURING PUBLIC REVIEW OF 5G TOWERS

We were deeply concerned when plans were announced earlier this year to install huge, ungainly three-story 5G towers on sidewalks across our neighborhoods, sometimes right next to residential windows, and in or adjacent to landmarked areas. Village Preservation immediately began a campaign to push back on the plan and its lack of justifiable rationale for the locations of the towers, inconsistency of information provided, and failure to abide by historic preservation requirements. Soon after,



construction of two towers in the Far West Village along Washington Street was halted.

While we've received assurances that any towers located in historic districts or directly adjacent to landmarks will be subject to review by the city's Landmarks Preservation Commission, how that process will work remains unclear, and the outcome even more so. That's why we asked for, and were gratified to receive, "Consulting Party" status for the review of all towers to be located in

our neighborhoods for a required Section 106 state and federal historic preservation review. CityBridge, the company behind the towers, had originally sought to skip the process, but thanks to fellow preservationists and elected officials like Congressman Jerrold Nadler, they were compelled to follow the procedure.

There remain many more questions than answers about the 5G tower program, its necessity, and the logic behind proposed sites. But Village Preservation will continue to push for thorough review and oversight, and to ensure these oversized towers aren't unnecessarily located where they don't need to be.

MORE INFO villagepreservation.org/5g-towers

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SAVING OUR LADY OF GUADALUPE, NEW YORK'S FIRST SPANISH CHURCH

Earlier this year, Village Preservation learned that the Archdiocese of New York had issued a "decree of relegation" for the former Our Lady of Guadalupe Church at 229 West 14th Street, a first step before the property can be sold, and very likely destroyed. The church, with its striking Spanish Baroque facade, was founded in 1902 and built out of two former brownstone mansions once belonging to the prominent Delmonico family. When it was founded, Our Lady of Guadalupe was the very first church in the New York archdiocese for a Spanish-speaking congregation.

Today, New Yorkers of Latin American origin make up over 30% of our city. But in 1902, they were a tiny minority. No. 229 West 14th Street was located in the midst of what was known as "Little Spain," a large Spanish immigrant community located in the northwest Village and southern

Chelsea. Its institutions and businesses attracted New Yorkers and visitors from Latin America, particularly Mexicans, Cubans, and Puerto Ricans, all of whom were from the beginning part of the congregation and community of Our Lady of Guadalupe (which was named for the patron saint of Mexico), along with the once large Spanish immigrant community.

Over time, as the Spanish immigrant community became more dispersed, and New York's Latin American community grew in size and diversity, Our Lady of Guadalupe's congregation included more and more members from the Americas. As the congregation expanded, it was eventually merged with other congregations and moved into what had been St. Bernard's Church, further west at 328 West 14th Street, and the original Gua-



dalupe church building remained empty. With the relegation decree, its future is in doubt.

Village Preservation has called upon the City to landmark the building, and launched a campaign toward that end, securing support from local elected officials, Spanish and Latin American cultural institutions, preservation organizations, and scholars and teachers of Hispanic/Latino history.

MORE INFO + TO HELP villagepreservation.org/our-lady-of-guadalupe

In Brief

CITY COUNCIL CANDIDATE FORUMS

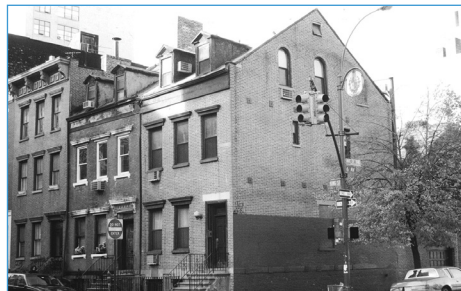
In May, we held forums for City Council candidates in the two contested races in our neighborhoods, for Districts 1 and 2. Decennial redistricting means the second City Council election in two years, but for redrawn districts with changed boundaries. All of Greenwich Village east of Sixth Avenue, and all of NoHo and the East Village, along with most of the east teens and 20s, are now in District 2, where incumbent Carlina Rivera was running for re-election.



EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR ANDREW BERMAN TALKING WITH ALLIE RYAN AT THE DISTRICT 2 FORUM.

While Rivera once again refused to participate in the candidate forum, as she did in 2021 (she did participate when she first ran in 2017, but later faced heavy criticism for breaking promises she made in that public forum), her opponent in the June 27 primary, Allie Ryan, did.

Several candidates for the 1st Council District, now covering almost all of Manhattan south of Houston Street, did participate in our forum for that seat, including incumbent Christopher Marte, who was running for re-election. Video can be found on our website and YouTube page for both candidate forums, which were unique opportunities to hear from candidates about their records and positions on preservation, development, and small-business issues.



NEW HISTORIC IMAGE COLLECTIONS

This spring we were proud to release several new collections in our Historic Image Archive. Two collections of photos from historian, researcher, photographer, and former Village Preservation employee Susan DeVries show early Federal-style (1790–1835) rowhouses and other historic architecture in Lower Manhattan in the 1990s (above left), as efforts to document and preserve these sites were being undertaken. Some survive, some have been destroyed, and many have since been landmarked due to Village Preservations' efforts over the last 25 years. It's a remarkable window back in time in our rapidly changing neighborhoods.

The other collection is from Riccardo Spina, who now lives in the Netherlands, but grew up in Greenwich Village, the neighborhood to which his family first arrived from Italy in 1890. Spina's remarkable collection (above right), taken throughout the second half of the 20th century, shows everyday views of familiar neighborhood streets and landmarks, along with extraordinary events like the Blizzard of 1978, as well as the beloved Cafe Figaro where he worked. The images capture a neighborhood we know well, but in a very different, and arguably more innocent, stage of its evolution. Both collections and our entire Historic Image Archive can be found at villagepreservation.org/imagearchive.

ONE HUNDRED BUSINESSES OF THE MONTH

Earlier this year we reached an important milestone in our popular long-standing program to celebrate and support local small businesses — we named our 100th Business of the Month. To mark the occasion, we released a video highlighting some of the dozens of unique neighborhood merchants we have chosen over the past 8½ years, giving them another opportunity to share their story and their distinctive services or products, as well as learning more

about their relationship to their communities. The heartwarming reel was one more way for us to try to give a boost to the businesses that make our neighborhoods so vital.



MCNULTY'S TEAS AND COFFEES WAS NAMED OUR 100TH BUSINESS OF THE MONTH.

You can view the video on our website and YouTube page. And if it hasn't been chosen already, nominate your local favorite for our Business of the Month

program at villagepreservation.org/business-of-the-month.

FROM THE DIRECTOR **ANDREW BERMAN**

Spring is a wonderful time of year in our neighborhoods, and for Village Preservation. This May, for the first time in four years, we returned to staging our Annual Benefit House Tour. The warm bright day could not have been more perfect, and the houses on the tour and for the reception afterwards were a delightful representation of the variety and creativity embodied in our neighborhood's irreplaceable historic architecture, and in how it has been adapted and reused. We're eternally grateful to all who generously donated their homes, and all who supported our biggest annual fundraising event.

This June we also gather to celebrate just some of the amazing people, places, and organizations that make such incredible contributions to our neighborhoods with our Village Awards. In combination with our Annual Meeting, that joyous community celebration — sometimes called “the Oscars of the Village” — takes place at the Cooper Union's historic Great Hall. This year we're honoring La MaMa ETC. for the renovation of its historic building at 74 East 4th Street; the Red Door Place food pantry and soup kitchen at 201 West 13th Street; Essex Card Shop at 47 Avenue A; Dashwood Books at 33 Bond Street; The Manhattan Monster Bar at 80 Grove Street; and Yara Arts Group. Congratulations to all our awardees, and to all our nominees, whom we hope to honor in the years ahead.

I hope your spring is equally joyous. Thank you for supporting our work, and for making everything we do possible.



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 sites of historic significance in our neighborhoods on our Greenwich Village Historic District Map, Women's Suffrage Map, Greek Revival architecture map, Civil Rights and Social Justice Map, South of Union Square Map, and East Village Building Blocks website — all at villagepreservation.org/resources.

DID YOU KNOW? Village Preservation has secured landmark designation of over 1,250 buildings, including 11 historic districts and district extensions, and zoning protections for nearly 100 blocks, from the Hudson River to Avenue D. See villagepreservation.org/accomplishments.

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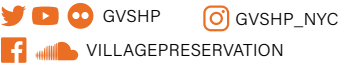
Borough President Mark Levine, the Mertz Gilmore Foundation, the Rodgers Family Foundation, Humanities New York, NYC Department of Cultural Affairs and NYC Council Member Erik Bottcher, and the NYS Council on the Arts.



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