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JUDICIARY

December 2, 2013

**Ruth L. Pierpont
Deputy Commissioner for Historic Preservation
Division for Historic Preservation
New York State Office of Parks Recreation and Historic Preservation
Peebles Island Resource Center
P.O. Box 189
Waterford, NY 12188-0189**

Dear Ms. Pierpont:

I represent New York State's 27th Senate District, in which much of the proposed South Village Historic District is located. I strongly support the nomination of this district, which has a largely-intact, historic architectural landscape, to the National and State Registers of Historic Places.

As you know, the southern portion of the proposed South Village Historic District is roughly bounded by West Houston Street to the north and Watts Street to the south, and ranges from LaGuardia Place to the east to Sixth Avenue to the west. The northern portion of the district is roughly bounded by West 4th Street to the north and West Houston Street to the south, and is largely between LaGuardia Place and Seventh Avenue South, with an extension to Hudson Street between St. Luke's Place and West Houston Street. The District consists of more than 650 buildings—including row houses, tenements, commercial structures, and institutions—that illustrate the historical growth of New York City.

Of these buildings, there still exist a number of row houses designed in the Federal style and constructed in the early 1800s, just as an influx of affluent residents found its way to the area. Many of these row houses have survived the development of the modern neighborhood with minimal modification to their structures and can still be viewed today. As the area filled with residents of more modest means in the 1860s and 1870s,

some of these row houses were converted into multi-family residences or found themselves neighboring subsequently built tenements in the Italianate and Neo-Grec styles that predated tenement law. While the basic design of these tenements remained the same throughout this period, one could trace the trends in public fashion by the facades of these buildings. Around this time, Minetta Street and Minetta Lane became New York's then-largest African American community, known as "Little Africa."

With the Tenement House Act of 1879 came a ban on this basic design due to their windowless interior rooms, which gave rise to "dumbbell" tenements, so-called because of the shape cut by internal air shafts allowing for interior windows. This design also gave rise to the term "railroad" apartment, which is still commonly used today. Neo-Grec style gave way to more multiform exteriors which combined elements of Renaissance, Queen Anne and Romanesque Revival. Notably, due to the requirement to register architects beginning in the mid-1860s, all of these newer buildings can be attributed to specific designers. Several of these buildings can still be found on Sullivan Street.

The 1879 law was a step forward, but in practice did little to improve the living conditions of tenement residents. Due to the resources of wealthy tenement owners, it was not until the dawn of the 20th Century that further reform efforts convinced Governor Theodore Roosevelt to establish a commission on housing reform. It was this commission's report that led the New York State Legislature to build upon the 1879 law by enacting the Tenement House Act of 1901, which established more effective regulations not only on new tenements, but also on existing tenements, a big step forward relative to the law's previous iteration. And while some felt these new requirements would have a chilling effect on new construction, 1903 and 1904 were the peak years of tenement construction in the South Village. Many of these buildings, with their terra-cotta and limestone details, remain in the area.

Housing reformers, unsatisfied with the marginal gains of the 1879 and 1901 laws, and unconvinced that for-profit construction would supply abundant, safe housing for the laboring class, were driven to create their own model tenements. These buildings, intended to illustrate that safe housing was indeed possible for tenement-dwellers, are still located throughout the district today and can serve as a reminder of the long struggle for tenants' rights.

The proposed area is as notable for its visible progression of architectural history as it is for its place in America's cultural evolution. Over the 18th and 19th Centuries, the South Village Historic District served as home to the upper class as well as the middle and working classes, to both native-born and immigrant populations, and to groundbreaking social changes such as the fight for LGBT equality and the counter-culture movement. Its jazz clubs, cafés and theaters would act as incubators for

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American art, literature and music. It would also serve as a melting pot into which a diversity of nationalities would be blended, including French, German, African-American, Irish, Italian and English.

All of this is only a brief overview of the fascinating architectural and social history of the proposed South Village Historic District. Certainly this area is worthy of listing on the National and State Registers of Historic Places. I continue to call on the New York City Landmarks Preservation Commission to designate the remaining unprotected areas of the proposed South Village Historic District to truly safeguard the area for posterity.

Thank you for your consideration of my comments and the New York State Office of Parks Recreation and Historic Preservation's dedication to preserving our State's heritage. Should you have any questions or to follow up, please contact me at 212-633-8052.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read "Brad Hoylman", with a long, sweeping horizontal line extending to the right.

Brad Hoylman
New York State Senator
27th District

cc: Greenwich Village Society for Historic Preservation