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G A N S E V O O R T



History Wrestles Commerce in Meatpacking District

The three-year drive to confer landmark status on the meatpacking district is taking on a new urgency. What began as a low-key investigation of warehouses and blood-soaked Belgian blocks has quickened this summer into a race that pits preservationists against developers.

"We're hitting a critical juncture," said Andrew Berman, executive director of the Greenwich Village Society for Historic Preservation. "Several development projects are moving forward that would denigrate the historic sensibility of this neighborhood. If the landmark designations were in place, they could be shaved in a way that is more appropriate."

But time is not on their side. Groundbreaking will start any day on the Hotel Gansevoort, a 12-story structure at Gansevoort and Hudson Streets. The land is currently an empty parking lot. The project is being billed as a first-class boutique hotel that will draw on the area's growing cachet. It is scheduled to open next August, with 188 rooms, a zinc facade and a rooftop swimming pool.

"It's a very modern signature building, where the most significant feature are bay windows," said Stephen Jacobs, the hotel's architect. "Once you get above the third or fourth floor, you can see over the low buildings, which will hopefully, at some point, be the new historic district."



Stephen B. Jacobs Group

A second project, a 32-story mixed-use residential tower, is planned for a block at Little West 12th and Washington Street. A local restaurant owner, Florent Morellet, describes the slim, silvery-black building, designed by the French architect Jean Nouvel, as "beautiful." But as a leader in the preservation campaign Save Gansevoort Market, he opposes the residential intrusion.

Groundbreaking is to start any day on the 12-story Hotel Gansevoort.

"It's smack in the middle of meat markets and clubs," said Mr. Morellet, who owns the restaurant Florent on Gansevoort Street. "If you put in residents, you put these clubs and markets in jeopardy. It will hurt the equilibrium."

The Nouvel tower requires a variance allowing residential use in a manufacturing zone. A final hearing before the Board of Standards and Appeals is set for Oct. 30.

At the same time, the Landmarks Preservation Commission is studying the designation of the neighborhood as a historic district, but the proposal may not be officially considered until late fall, by which point the tower may already be approved.

So far, preservationists have collected more than 5,000 postcards in support of a historic district, bounded roughly by West 16th, Horatio, Hudson and West Streets. They are also seeking to have the district added to the state and national historic registers. Last month, the state took the significant step of declaring the area eligible for review. "It's all coming to a head right now," Mr. Berman said. **DENNY LEE**