



## NYU ARTICULATES ITS PLANS FOR THE PROVINCETOWN PLAYHOUSE

- NYU Will Preserve the Exact Volume and Footprint of the Provincetown Playhouse Theater
- NYU Will Preserve and Restore the 1940's Playhouse Façade
- NYU Will integrate Relevant Historical Features and Pieces of the Existing Theater
- NYU Will Build a Smaller Building than Allowed by Zoning
- New Construction to Be Low-Scale, Contextual, Brick Building for Law Faculty and Student Research

Existing



Proposed



NYU has recently begun discussions with local community groups about a construction project on the site of 133-139 MacDougal Street that would provide space for legal research centers for the NYU School of Law.

133-139 MacDougal, currently an office and apartment building which houses the Provincetown Playhouse, occupies an important cultural spot in the history of the American theatre. However, the actual building that exists at 133 MacDougal today looks nothing like the building occupied by the Provincetown Players, most famous for launching the career of Eugene O'Neill among many others of his contemporary writers, actors and artists.

The existing building is the result of a major renovation in the 1940s when four separate houses (133-139 MacDougal) were converted into one apartment building. This conversion included the complete renovation of the interiors of the buildings and the construction of a single façade that you see today.



After reviewing many options for the site (see Options Section), NYU has come up with a sensitive and contextual plan that respects the cultural history of the site.

- The University plans to preserve and restore the portion of the 133 MacDougal façade that contains the theatre in a way that reflects the 1940s Playhouse. The façade of the Provincetown Playhouse from the era when the Provincetown Players were there was demolished in the 1940s conversion. The façade of the 1940s Theatre will be protected during the construction and then cleaned and restored.
- NYU will preserve the exact volume and footprint of the theater so that it will hold its 133 MacDougal address which it has held since 1918. This includes preserving the structural walls of the Provincetown Playhouse.
- The internal “house” or “auditorium” will be rebuilt, integrating into the future plans relevant historical features and pieces of the existing theater such as the seats which we believe date back to circa 1920s – 1940s.
- The new building is of low scale and is designed and detailed to be harmonious with the existing streetscape. It will be a low-scale, contextual, brick building which will house NYU Law faculty and student research centers.

Pre-1940s renovation



NYU 2008 Proposal



---

## Background and History of 133-139 MacDougal

Historical and physical evidence show that 133-139 MacDougal Street was constructed in three major building campaigns.

1. The site was originally occupied by four three-and-a-half story brick rowhouses constructed in the 1830s. These were 133, 135, 137 and 139 MacDougal Street.
2. During the 1870s and 1880s, all four were increased in height and had major façade alterations. 133 MacDougal was converted to a stable at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century and later to a bottling plant.
3. In 1941-42, the four buildings were combined into one structure and refaced, giving the building its current appearance. The 1941 plans filed at the Department of Buildings show a radical alteration including the unified façade and removal of the interior fabric including walls, stairs and finishes. It is not clear whether the theatre at 133 MacDougal was altered during the 1940s; however, based on historical descriptions and physical evidence it is likely that the volume of the theatre was retained, while all finishes and furnishings have been updated, most recently in 1997.

The entry of the existing theatre was designed and built as part of the 1940s renovation, it is not reminiscent of the building façade that the Provincetown Players knew.

No. 133 MacDougal 1935-36



No. 133 MacDougal 1945



### The Provincetown Players (1915 – 1929)

The Provincetown Players was an experimental, amateur theatre company which, between 1915 and 1922, was highly influential in American theatre, and best known for introducing the works of Eugene O'Neill. The group came together in the summer of 1915 in Provincetown, Massachusetts and gave performances over the next year, which were so well received that it inspired them to establish a theatre in New York City in the fall of 1916.

In 1916, the Players opened a theatre in Greenwich Village, which was at the time the heart of bohemian intellectualism and artistic expression. They rented the parlor floor of No. 139 MacDougal Street, which they converted for the theatre. The Provincetown Players debuted on November 3, 1916 with O'Neill's *Bound East for Cardiff*.

---



In 1918, the Players moved to No. 133 MacDougal and renovated that space for the new Playwright's Theatre.

The end of the 1921-1922 theatrical season marked the end of the Provincetown Players, as a result of internal struggle among the various managers, playwrights and actors.

By 1925, the group that remained called itself Experimental Theatre, Inc., which was directed by James Light. The group staged plays over four seasons. But by 1929, the group was in search of a better venue and raised money to move uptown to the Shubert's Garrick Theatre, located at 35<sup>th</sup> Street. With the stock market crash of 1929, subscriptions and financing went unfulfilled, and the company was forced to close. After two bills of the season, the "Provincetown Playhouse at the Garrick Theatre" closed on December 14, 1929.

### Later History

Although between 1929 and 1940 the theatre continued at 133 MacDougal, little of note was produced there.

In 1940 the building was refaced and the upper stories were completely reorganized and renovated. The theatre space in 133 MacDougal was retained, but the façade was demolished and completely redesigned.

In the 1960s, the theatre enjoyed a revival when it was used to produce Samuel Beckett's *Krapp's Last Tape* and Edward Albee's one act, *The Zoo Story*. Other significant playwrights also staged their work at the Playhouse, including John Guare (*Muzeeka*, 1968; New York premiere), Sam Shepherd (*Red Cross*, 1968); and David Mamet (*Edmond*, 1982; New York premiere).

NYU purchased the building in 1984. The University continued the use of the theatre, and Charles Busch's *Vampire Lesbians of Sodom* ran there from 1985 – 1990.

The theatre was dark between 1992 and 1998, and a major renovation of the theatre space was undertaken between 1996-1998.

Re-opened in 1998, the theatre is operated by NYU's Steinhardt School of Culture, Education and Human Development, which uses it for a myriad of activities including theatre productions and art performances, the majority of which are free or low cost to the public. Shows include chamber opera, musical theatre and regular running programming like *Storytelling at the Provincetown Playhouse*, which runs monthly during the academic year. Tickets are only \$5. During the summer, the Playhouse offers programming for high school students. The Shakespeare Youth Ensemble runs theatre classes during the day. In the evening, the *New Plays for Young Audiences* series offers family friendly productions with free tickets to high school students. Additionally, for the last 10 years the Annual O'Neill Festival has been held Provincetown Playhouse.

These programs will continue in the new Provincetown Playhouse Theatre.

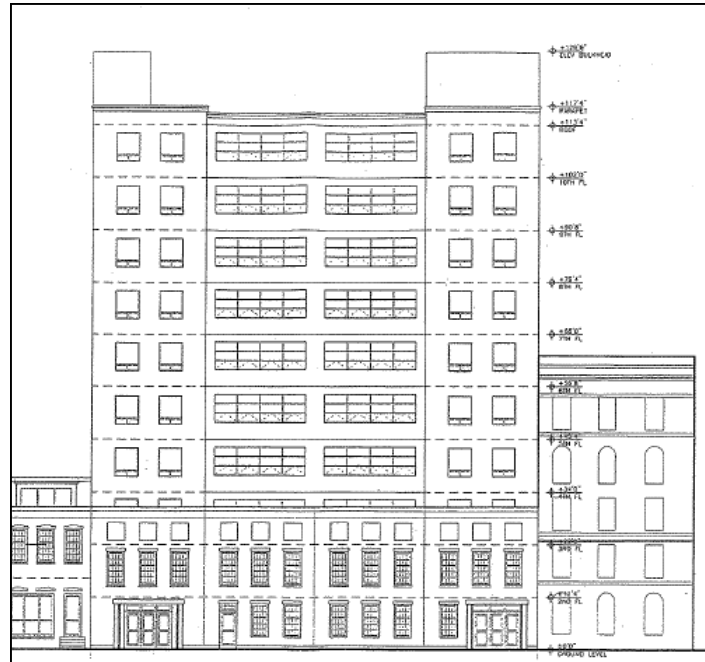
### NYU's Review of Options for 133-139 MacDougal

**Concept 1: In January 2007, the NYU Law School was working on a proposal for the site that called for a demolition of the entire building.**

The Law School worked on different schemes including looking at whether capacity/load could be added to the existing building. At the time, it was decided that the building could not bear any additional structure without significant shoring up, and a plan for a new 8 to 10 story was proposed. This plan maximized FAR/square footage.

The University then began to work with the Law School to come up with a better solution for the site that would be in keeping with the principles that were being established with the community task force. The first step was to dedicate an existing NYU building (22 Washington Square North, which served as the home of the Undergraduate Admissions Office) to the Law School, allowing the Law School to preserve some of the square footage that would be lost by creating a smaller, more contextual building.

### Image of Original Plan (Concept 1)

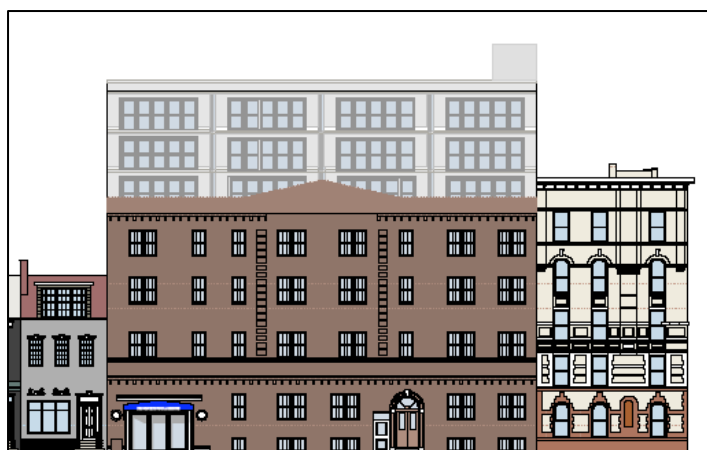


### Concept 2: Renovate Existing Building, Add Rear Additions, and Add 3 floors above; Full Façade and Playhouse Façade to Remain

A thorough structural engineering report was commissioned which revealed that:

- The existing structure could not support additional floors and the existing pressure on the bearing wall footings was not adequate for the additional load required.
- Significant reinforcement would be required, including new columns and bracing in all sections of the building, including the Provincetown Playhouse.
- The additional bracing and columns would severely hamper layout of the building.
- At that point, a preferred option could be a full demolition of the site behind the façade and a preservation of the full façade.

### Existing Façade with 3-story Addition (Concept 2)





The question for the MacDougal site became: was the full façade worth saving? Was this a building that had architectural distinction?

After much analysis and consultation with theatre historians, owners, users and architects, the answer led to an exploration of a new building and preservation of the volume and footprint of the Provincetown Playhouse as well as the façade.

**Proposal: New building with existing Playhouse façade as well as preserving volume and footprint**

The University’s proposal is one that:

- builds an architecturally attractive and contextual building on the site;
- preserves the existing façade of the Provincetown Playhouse;
- preserves the same volume and footprint of the Provincetown Playhouse; and
- allows a similar amount of square footage as the second concept but in a shorter, more attractive and contextual building.



*New Proposed Building*

Based on our conversations with the Borough President’s Community Task Force on NYU Development, Community Board Two, theatre historians, users of the theatre, and those who are invested in the future of the Provincetown Playhouse, we refined our thinking and believe this proposal presents the best opportunity to preserve the rich cultural history of the Provincetown Playhouse while improving the overall functionality of the theater for the next generation of performance artists, playwrights and teachers of the arts.

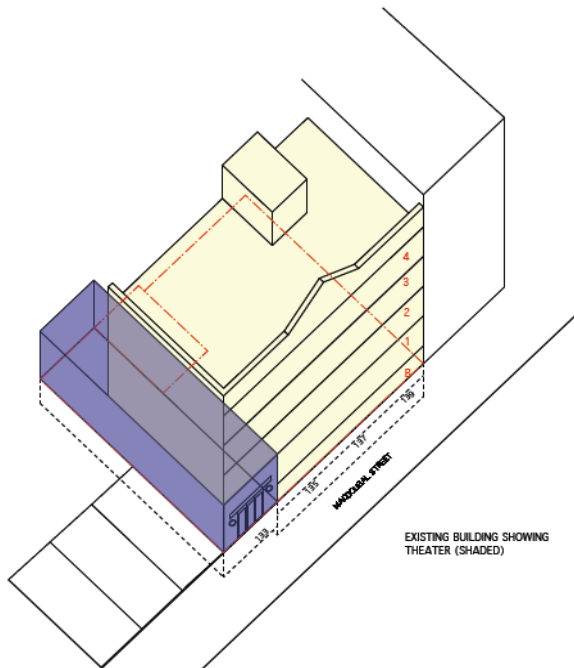
In addition to preserving the exact volume and footprint of the theater so that it will hold its 133 MacDougal address which it has held since 1918, our proposal is to preserve the structural walls of the Provincetown Playhouse. It is that structure and volume that people passionately feel celebrates the history and heritage of the theater.

As it is today, the Provincetown Playhouse of the future will be home to NYU’s Steinhardt School of Culture, Education and Human Development, which uses the theater as a training facility that celebrates the experimental theater long associated with the spirit of the site. The [programming at the Playhouse](#) is rich and diverse, including plays, readings, musical performances and outreach programs that bring together NYU faculty and students, local community residents and school-aged children. The theater is also used for important performances such as the annual Eugene O’Neill Festival.

*The drawings below show the preserved façade and volume of the current Provincetown Playhouse and how that will be drawn into our new building.*

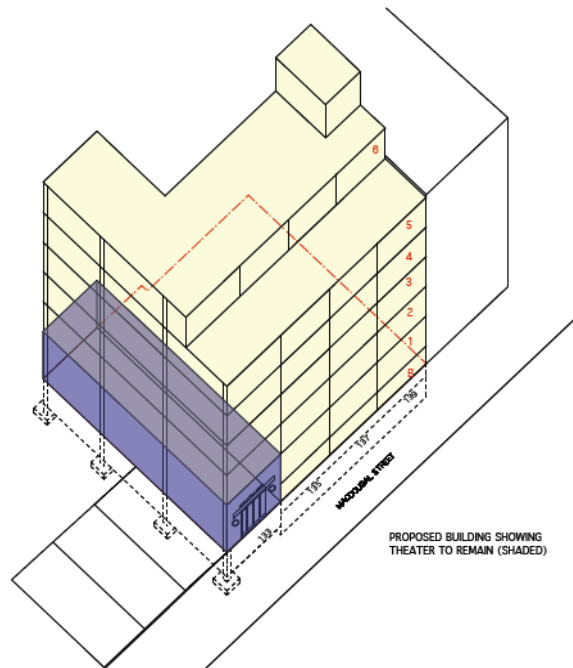
**EXISTING BUILDING**

133 – 139 MacDougal  
*Current Theater Shaded in Blue*



**PROPOSED BUILDING**

133 – 139 MacDougal  
*Theater Volume and Footprint Remain as Shaded in Blue*



**COMPARISON OF OPTIONS**

	Existing	Concept 1	Concept 2	Proposal
Total Zoning Area (Square Footage)	27,245 SF	53,222 SF	44,123 SF	44,362
FAR	3.23	6.31	5.23	5.26
Street Height	57 ft	31 ft	57 ft	60 ft
Total Height	57 ft	117 ft	85 ft	70 ft
Total Floors	5 floors	10 floors	8 floors	7 floors