

# Residents At Community Board Meeting Concerned About The White Horse Tavern's Integrity

by [Paula Mejia](#) in [Food](#) on Mar. 15, 2019 4:39 pm



*(Scott Lynch / Gothamist)*

On Thursday night, Community Board 2 in Manhattan held the first public meeting regarding [the recent sale](#) of the historic White Horse Tavern. [Opened in 1880](#), the White Horse is the second-oldest continuously-running bar in New York City, and over the years has been frequented by longshoremen, union workers, and literary luminaries including Jane Jacobs, James Baldwin, and Dylan Thomas (who had his last drinks there before dying).

Last week, [news broke that](#) the infamous landlord Steve Croman had reportedly bought the block, including 567 Hudson Street, where the White Horse Tavern is located, for \$14 million. Croman recently spent [eight months in prison](#) after pleading guilty to both mortgage and tax fraud, and will pay [\\$8 million to former tenants](#) that he strong-armed into giving up their rent-controlled apartments. 17 apartments, the [majority of them rent-stabilized](#), are currently situated above the tavern.

Eytan Sugarman, the operator behind the likes of the upscale Midtown steakhouse Hunt & Fish Club (of which Anthony Scaramucci is a partner), signed a 15-year lease for where the White Horse currently stands. Sugarman [has said](#) that he intends to keep the place as is, in spite of concerns from the community about how it might change under his domain. His attorney, Bruno V. Gioffre, Jr., would neither confirm nor deny to Gothamist that Croman is the landlord in question, but stated that Scaramucci had "no connection" to the takeover of the White Horse.



*White Horse Tavern, 1975. (Photo by Edmund Vincent Gillon, courtesy of the Museum of the City of New York; 2013.3.1.613)*

The State Liquor Authority Licensing Committee of Community Board No. 2, which oversees the Greenwich Village and SoHo, among other neighborhoods, helmed the meeting last night. SLA Committee Co-Chair Robert Ely called business owners and tenants looking to obtain or transfer their liquor licenses to the stand, as community members voiced both support and concern about how their respective presences meant for the neighborhood. Noted West Village resident Sarah Jessica Parker was among the onlookers.

"I have every intention of keeping this amazing institution the way it is, I have no intention of making any dramatic changes," Sugarman said on the stand. "I want to fix what needs to be fixed, I essentially took this to maintain the integrity, to preserve the White Horse Tavern," mentioning several times that the bar and restaurant needed "a little love." Ely pressed him on said changes, citing concerns from the community about how extensive those might be. Sugarman said he would fix the likes of leaky pipes and faulty air-conditioning, and cracked wise that he might move to make "a little

bit of a better burger." Beyond that, he said, the interior's decor and paintings will stay as is, adding, "At the risk of sounding immodest, I'm the one that you want here."

The Greenwich Village Society for Historic Preservation recently submitted a request to [landmark the interior](#) of the White Horse Tavern (the exterior has been a protected landmark since 1969). When asked, Sugarman said he didn't have a position on the interior landmarking request yet. "I don't necessarily think that a neon sign that says Coors Light that was put up 15 years ago is a landmark that needs to remain," he said. "I think a painting of Dylan Thomas that's been there for 50 years does need to remain," stating that he wouldn't "make a blanket judgment that I'm going to keep every single thing the way that it is."

He was vague about whether the tavern's menu of no-nonsense pub grub would remain the same. "I intend to have a similar menu," he said. "The price points could very well change."



*(Scott Lynch / Gothamist)*

Local residents at the meeting questioned the building's new ownership, with one man standing up in the back and exclaiming: "Where's Steve Croman?" Others cited the lack of outreach the new proprietors had done within the community, and how the tavern may shift from the lowkey hangout and community gathering spot it's been for two centuries. "That's what the White Horse has been to me and a lot of other people I know,"

said neighborhood resident Kat Georges, while on the stand. "That's why Dylan Thomas went there: He didn't go there because his picture was going to be on the wall 20 years from now. He went there because it was a place where you could have cheap or reasonably priced drinks and sit there for a while, and drink 18 shots and kill yourself outside the front door." Georges then read a line from Thomas's poem "On No Work of Words:" "To surrender now is to pay the expensive ogre twice."

Later, Sugarman took the stand again, saying he would do his best to keep the White Horse as close to how it currently is, but that paying rent meant it also had to be "run like a business" and that some differences were inevitable with the "changing of the guard."

The SLA licensing committee will now vote and make a recommendation (or not) before the full Community Board next Thursday. If they come to a consensus, the paperwork will then be sent to the State Liquor Authority.

Outside the church, friends and White Horse regulars Peter Carlaftes and Henry Laura worried about their friends who bartend and wait tables at the White Horse, as well as the tenants who live in the building. "I'm scared to death for them," Laura said. "The infrastructure, yeah, I'm glad that they're keeping it. But it's the ambiance, and what happens when you're inside, and that's what's going to change." Carlaftes, who has been going to the White Horse since the 1970s, added: "Maybe we can come in and get senior discounts."

Georges told Gothamist after the meeting that she wasn't convinced that Sugarman would retain the community spirit of the place, and that her sense was that it could likely become a "go-to destination spot gastropub" with staggering prices. "The burgers, he brought that up as a funny thing," she said. "But I don't have any confidence that I'm going to ever be able to go there ever again."

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**ptginnyc** • 5 days ago

The bar is now owned by a criminal scumbag slumlord. I guess keeping it the same is better than seeing it become an upscale wine bar run by a B-grade celebrity chef, but no matter what you are now handing your money over to some unsavory characters.

I feel like lost in all of the coverage is that Croman is about to screw over whoever lives upstairs (assuming those are apartments?). He went to jail for one year unlike every other horrible landlord who does terrible things, but I'm sure he's right back at it now.

4 ^ | v • Reply • Share ›



**Linda** → ptginnyc • 4 days ago

He also drove the owner of Caffe Vivaldi to his death and they closed, so he is bad with commercial tenants too.

4 ^ | v • Reply • Share ›



**joebeans** → Linda • 4 days ago

You can bet he's back on his bullshit.

3 ^ | v • Reply • Share ›



**Dancing With A Stranger** → ptginnyc • 4 days ago

The West Village has a very high turn over in restaurants and bars. Unless it is a high profile destination restaurant like the Spotted Pig the chances of turning a significant profit are slim even if they totally redesigned the space. I think it is partly because there isn't much foot traffic through the area. Which leads me to believe he bought it to upgrade the apartments above the restaurant.

^ | v • Reply • Share ›



**joebeans** → Dancing With A Stranger • 4 days ago

That's a good point. Perhaps he's hoping to turn it into a tourist destination based on it's history.

^ | v • Reply • Share ›

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**Dancing With A Stranger** → Guest • 4 days ago

The West Village is no longer a bohemian mecca filled with artists and literary types...as we all know...now it is just a playground for superrich and students from overpriced private universities like NYU and New School and so on with some middle and lower income residents in public housing and rent controlled apartments.

3 ^ | v • Reply • Share ›



**Lisa** • 4 days ago

So do I understand this correctly? The busybodies of Community Board No. 2, up in arms because this unexceptional bar might lose its

unexceptional character, are now in the process of deciding whether to transfer the liquor license to the new proprietor?

"Assure us that you won't make changes to this bar, or else we'll deny this bar license to continue to serve liquor!", they cry.

6 ^ | v • Reply • Share ›



**Brian Van Nieuwenhoven** → Lisa • 2 days ago

Okay, so, everyone quoted in the article is a resident of the community district, and seemed to be attending the meeting as public guests. I don't see any quotes from the committee chair or committee members specifically cited here. They must not have said anything that riles up the commenters.

2 ^ | v • Reply • Share ›



**Cormac Flynn** → Lisa • 2 days ago

You do not understand it correctly, or apparently at all.

The Community Board was merely holding a hearing to gather community input on the license application, as is required by law. The people quoted in the article are community members who came to listen and/or express an opinion, they are not members of the community board. The board will express its view on this matter later when it meets later this week.

The CB is an appointed branch of city government charged with (among other things) providing the SLA with the consultative input on proposed licenses required by state liquor law. For the record, I am a co-chair of the Community Board's SLA licensing committee and attended the hearing in question, though I did not chair on this occasion.

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**JakeNYC** • 4 days ago

Great burgers, nasty staff. No great loss if it goes.

^ | v • Reply • Share ›



**Steve McGee** → JakeNYC • 2 days ago

Seems a contradiction. I'd rather eat a so so burger from friendly staff. Better still, i'll make it myself.

^ | v • Reply • Share ›



**artisticfame** • 4 days ago

Croman had been busy trying to burn out his rent controlled tenants from the East 18th street buildings, bashed a few around as well to scare them out one way or another .

I hope those 18 th st tenants were part of that 8 million dollar settlement.

I know he also paid 50 thousand dollars to get others to leave in those same group of buildings at least one tenant I knew there did.

I Think he is nuts like Trump as with Trump he inherited these properties from his Daddy.

1 ^ | v • Reply • Share ›



**pep** • 4 days ago

who cares that this is a beautiful, old space with unparalleled literary and musical history - it's a perfect spot for a realtor's office. Or better yet, a bank branch. Or a nail salon. Gut it.

9 ^ | v • Reply • Share ›



**Jeremy Freedman** → pep • 2 days ago

It should become a Bojangles

1 ^ | v • Reply • Share ›



**The Angry Otaku** • 4 days ago

They did something like that with Guage and Tollner in Brooklyn right? So there is an example to follow.

^ | v • Reply • Share ›



**Lloyd Bergenson** → The Angry Otaku • 3 days ago

They landmarked the interior of Gage and Tollner's and it went through several iterations as fast food restaurants, and then a shitty jewelry store, but now it's happily returning as a fine dining restaurant.

<https://gageandtollner.com/>

<https://gagearandomner.com/>

^ | v · Reply · Share ›



**Brian Van Nieuwenhoven** → Lloyd Bergenson · 2 days ago

So, both true AND not the best example. If anything is landmarked, I hope it has a better journey than G&T did.

^ | v · Reply · Share ›

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**bkmanposeur** · 4 days ago

Shouldn't they address the Croman-the-subhuman.

1 ^ | v · Reply · Share ›



**The Real Deal** → bkmanposeur · 3 days ago

"Croman the Cromagnon." Why was this deleted some time ago?

1 ^ | v · Reply · Share ›



**NavNYC** · 2 days ago

Not sure the part about Dylan Thomas' 18 shots to kill yourself is a great selling point...

^ | v · Reply · Share ›



**Brian Van Nieuwenhoven** → NavNYC · 2 days ago

DT visited the place twice. It must stand as a monument to him forever. Every poet who doesn't even merit a mention in common high school English lit should have a whole Manhattan building dedicated to the one time they got drunk.

^ | v · Reply · Share ›



**Heywood JuhBlowme** → NavNYC · 2 days ago

Correct. He was a Professional. 18 shots wouldn't have made a dent.

1 ^ | v · Reply · Share ›



**ghostbusters\_mayor** · a day ago

I just really hope they keep the outdoor seating. Nothing worse than someone saying "omg it's a gorgeous day, let's go sit outside somewhere in the West Village!" There are fewer options than you think and it's this bar's greatest strength