



‘We will not go gentle into that good night’: Pols push to landmark White Horse Tavern interiors

1

Notorious landlord Steve Croman is the building’s new owner

By **Caroline Spivack** | Mar 22, 2019, 8:00am EDT



The historic White Horse Tavern on Hudson Street in Greenwich Village. | Neville Elder/Getty Images

Lawmakers are urging the city’s Landmarks Preservation Commission to protect the interior of the storied White Horse Tavern after outcry over the bar’s sale to a cadre of developers—including notorious landlord Steve Croman.

City Council Speaker Corey Johnson and four other elected officials penned a letter Wednesday to Sarah Carroll, the head of the LPC, stressing that the more than century-old watering hole, famed as a regular spot for literary greats, is “extraordinarily intact” and deserving of landmark protections.

“We are deeply concerned about the preservation of the interior of this iconic Village tavern,” the letter reads; signers include Rep. Jerrold Nadler and Manhattan Borough President Gale Brewer. “Although the new owner has pledged to maintain its history and preserve the legacy, we believe the interior will now be open to destruction and that a landmark designation of the inside of this cultural and literary treasure is necessary to insure its protection.”

A group of investors recently bought the bar and neighboring rental buildings for \$14 million, setting off alarm bells for area preservationists. The Greenwich Village Society for Historic Preservation sprang into action and [submitted a request](#) to the LPC, asking the agency consider the White Horse Tavern for interior landmark status. The exterior of the building at 567 Hudson Street is already protected by its location within the Greenwich Village Historic District.

Eddie Brennan and James Munson have long owned and operated the bar, but after decades of running the business, the pair are retiring and sold the building. The deal was contingent on the new owner finding someone to run the White Horse Tavern. Restaurateur Eytan Sugarman—who runs Midtown steakhouse Hunt & Fish Club and recently made waves with his Made In New York pizza shop, which [Eater dubbed “Prince Street Pizza’s copycat”](#)—stepped in and has signed a 15-year lease for the space, but neighbors fear the historic watering hole will transform into an upscale pizza joint.

“The White Horse Tavern is iconic and very, very dear to our hearts and minds we cannot let it go and turn into a pizzeria or a place for the wealthy,” said Cynthia Chaffee, co-founder of the [Stop Croman Coalition](#) and a resident of

one of the landlord's East Village buildings, at a Wednesday rally outside the bar. "This building is landmarked but the tavern is not and all that history will soon be reduced to: 'A slice with pepperoni please.'"

A representative for Sugarman confirmed to Curbed that Steve Croman is a landlord for the building, but stressed that he will have nothing to do with the operation of the historic bar and said that Sugarman plans to preserve the tavern's character. But locals are extremely skeptical that the business will remain preserved, given Croman's legacy.

A regular on "worst landlord" lists, Croman in 2017 pleaded guilty to grand larceny, among other felony charges, for his involvement in tax and mortgage fraud schemes. He served eight months of his [year-long sentence](#) on Rikers Island before he was released in June. His stint in prison came after an investigation by then-New York State attorney general Eric Schneiderman, who revealed Croman falsified payroll documents and beefed up the value of his more than 140 buildings—enabling him to deceptively secure more than \$45 million in mortgages.

Many rent-regulated tenants who occupy Croman's buildings have experienced deplorable conditions and [harassment](#), including having their buildings flooded with hazardous lead dust through intrusive construction, intimidation at the hands of a former NYPD officer, and numerous other tactics to force tenants out of their homes, according to a 2016 civil suit filed against Croman. Eventually, Croman [agreed to pay \\$8 million](#) to his former tenants through a restitution fund that launched last year.

"We know what Croman is like," Wasim Lone said at Wednesday's rally. Lone serves as the director of housing with nonprofit Good Old Lower East Side, which works with the Stop Croman Coalition to aid tenants of his buildings. "It doesn't surprise us that his lack of respect and diversity extends beyond tenants, that he has no appreciation of cultural history, of the arts, and what this White Horse Tavern represents."

Croman did not immediately respond to requests for comment.

Some two dozen locals gathered outside the bar, waving homemade posters, to rail against the building's new ownership. Tenant advocates and preservationists vented their frustration that Croman wasted little time after his

release from jail before diving back into the real estate world, and stressed that they are closely monitoring the property.

“This is a community united in protecting our history, our historic buildings, and the people who live and work in them, and we will win this fight,” said Harry Bubbins with the GVSHP. “We know Croman paid a lot of money for these buildings and he’s sure to try and recoup that investment in some way—fair or not fair—but he should know that we’ll be watching.”

State Senator Brad Hoylman, who was among the officials encouraging interior landmark status, rattled off a list of longtime lower Manhattan businesses that shuttered after Croman purchased their buildings including [Caffe Vivaldi](#), [Snack Dragon](#), and [Gimme Gimme Records](#). He borrowed a phrase from an author whose legacy is tied up with the White Horse Tavern as a warning to the landlord.

“To paraphrase Dylan Thomas, we will not go gentle into that good night,” he said.



Curbed NY Newsletter

By signing up, you agree to our [Privacy Policy](#) and European users agree to the data transfer policy.