GETTING TO NYU’S CORE: GREENWICH VILLAGE PROPOSAL MEANS LESS OPEN SPACE

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Prepared for:
LaGuardia Corner Gardens
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by

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Executive Summary

Net Loss of Open Space

This report challenges NYU’s claim that its Core Proposal would increase publicly accessible open space by more than three acres by the year 2031. We find instead that NYU’s planned development on two Greenwich Village superblocks would:

- **Eliminate 2.84 acres of open space**—a 37% reduction of open space on the two superblocks. The Washington Square South Urban Renewal Plan was founded on the principle of protecting open space and ensuring access to light and air for residents; the 2012 NYU plan violates these principles behind the urban renewal plan that created the current residential community.

- **Result in a significant negative environmental impact.** The 37% loss of open space exceeds by far the minimum threshold of 5% requiring disclosure of a negative impact under the city’s Environmental Quality Review Guidelines.

- **Privatize most of the remaining open space on the superblocks** by creating quad-like interior courtyards with its proposed new buildings, fences and barriers, and continuing past practices that make public places exclusive enclaves serving NYU’s purposes.

- **Result in the privatization of .47 acres of the Coles public strip** and other publicly-owned open space adjacent to the two boomerang buildings.

- **Eliminate current plantings on the Mercer Strip, including the LaGuardia Corner Gardens and Time Landscape** (1.56 acres) and place in jeopardy an additional .39 acres of publicly-owned open space that NYU promises to restore by 2031, or states will not be affected by the construction.

- **Burden the residential neighborhood with inappropriate commercial uses,** through zoning changes that fail to respect the neighborhood character and sense of place.

- **Eliminate the environmental benefits of the trees and vegetation on the public strips.** The Sasaki Gardens, for example, store more than 1,200,000 pounds of carbon a year.
⇒ Broken Promises and Lack of Trust

This report questions NYU’s capacity to properly steward publicly accessible open space, based on its current and past practices. Over the years, NYU’s management of these superblocks has produced a deep mistrust among local residents and open space advocates. The university has made and broken promises, neglected both publicly-owned and private land for which it is contractually obligated to care, and created roadblocks for many neighborhood groups such as the LaGuardia Corner Garden, Lower Manhattan Neighbors Organization (LMNO(P)), the Mercer-Houston Dog Run Association, and Manhattan Community Board 2, to name a few. Why should we trust that NYU will build an accessible playground, open gates, remove barriers, and maintain and enhance green space, when they haven’t followed through with similar promises in the past?

⇒ Loss of the Environmental Benefits of Green Space

The trees and vegetation in the two blocks strips around the Sasaki Gardens store more than 1,200,000 pounds of carbon a year. Most of this and other environmental benefits are jeopardized by the project, particularly during construction. NYU has argued that the green space on the public strips affected by new construction will be restored by 2031. This report shows that it will take more than 40 years to replace the environmental benefits provided by the 121 trees on the public strips and the 180 specimen trees in Sasaki Gardens and adjacent areas. Indeed, many of the environmental benefits will never be restored. Virtually all of the public strips would be covered in shadows and the growth of trees will be greatly inhibited if this project is approved. The elimination of trees runs counter to the objectives of PlaNYC2030 and the city’s million trees initiative.

⇒ Recommendations: Map All Public Strips as Parkland, Reject Commercial Rezoning

We recommend that all public strips be mapped as Parks to fully protect them and prevent the privatization of public space in the future. This must include LaGuardia Corner Gardens, the oldest community garden in the country, and the Time Landscape. Many people are under the impression that the community gardens are already Park property. They are not, and NYU has indicated that it will not support this level of protection.

We also recommend that the City Planning Commission reject the requested commercial rezoning which allows for building bulk and heights far above current residential limits. This, too, would contribute to the permanent and irreplaceable loss of valuable open space resources.
GETTING TO NYU’S CORE:
GREENWICH VILLAGE PROPOSAL MEANS
LESS OPEN SPACE

NYU’s Core Proposal Means Less Open Space, Not More

NYU’s Core Proposal claims that the project will increase publicly accessible open space by more than 3.1 acres. A careful look at the numbers, however, reveals a loss of 2.84 acres of open space by 2031, a 37% reduction. This in a neighborhood that is drastically underserved by open space and is far from reaching the City Planning Commission’s minimum open space guidelines.

NYU’s Core proposal would jam more than two million square feet of building space into two city blocks. The university’s colorful maps showing the two blocks in 2021 and 2031 give the impression that there will be lots of added green so that the there would be “No Significant Negative Environmental Impact” on open space resources.

As Manhattan Borough President stated in testimony at the 2011 EIS scoping session,1 “retaining the park strips is an important community goal...Community District 2 has some of the lowest open space ratios of any neighborhood in the City.” He noted that the CEQR Technical Manual defines the area as “underserved” in open space. In this section we show that

1 Scoping Session before the Department of City Planning, May 24, 2011
if the proposed project were to be built, there would be a reduction in open space on the superblocks.

**NYU Admits to “Temporary” Loss of Open Space During Construction**

NYU admits that many of the existing open spaces will be “temporarily” lost while it is constructing its new buildings and can only claim a return of open space by 2021 by including interior space in the proposed Zipper building. They argue that more open space will be put back by 2031 by taking public space on the strips and by claiming the Sasaki Gardens as found open space, yielding a net gain in open space in the long run.

In the short term, the noise and dust from construction would render open areas in the entire area inhospitable. The few areas designated for playspace will be unusable. Nearby residents will be forced to go elsewhere to walk their dogs or play with their children. But will things improve after 2021? This scenario is problematic for several reasons:

- Construction delays in New York City are common. Any number of problems with financing, permissions, contractors, or subcontractors could result in significant delays.
- NYU could change its mind; decades from now, residents of the new NYU enclave may not know what had been promised in 2012, just as many today have no idea of the mandate to provide open space in the original urban renewal plan for the superblocks. As in the past, NYU could effectively turn what was supposed to be public open space into its own private turf.
- There are no significant penalties for NYU if it does not fulfill its promises or guarantee accessibility.
- Therefore, in the DEIS, **the Reasonable Worse Case Scenario should be a net loss of open space in 2031.**

**The loss of open space is likely to be permanent and not temporary.**

NYU’s open space calculations are fundamentally flawed and misleading. NYU uses “creative accounting” to reach a conclusion that the amount of open space will increase by the year 2031. Indeed, their numbers game flies in the face of plain logic. If you add four massive new buildings that enclose interior spaces, then take away existing open space strips on the streetfronts, how can you wind up with more and not less open space?

We counted existing and future open space in three different ways, and in each case there was no gain in open space and the loss went from small to medium to large. If we count everything except building footprints as open space, then there is a net loss of 1.43 acres. If we count the Coles Gym roof deck, there’s a net loss of 2.84 acres. And if we only count the publicly owned strips on Mercer Street and LaGuardia Place, there is still a loss of .47 acres. (See Appendix for details).
NYU performs the magical feat of producing a net gain in open space by:

- Undercounting existing open space
- Obscuring the impacts of the new buildings
- Falsely claiming portions of NYU’s private building space as public open space

UNDERCOUNTING EXISTING OPEN SPACE

The City Environmental Quality Review (CEQR) technical manual defines open space as land that is “set aside for the protection and/or enhancement of the natural environment.” NYU excludes some existing open spaces from its count by considering them to be private or inaccessible. However, the definition explicitly includes even private open space that enhances the natural environment. The critical point here is that by not counting some existing open spaces that NYU has itself rendered inaccessible, it can then claim a gain in open space, even if, on the ground, it turns out to be a net loss. All open areas on the superblocks, excluding the building footprints, meet the broad CEQR definition of open space and should be included in the open space analysis. We have done this in our calculations.

NYU is inconsistent in its methodology when it includes the Sasaki gardens in its open space analysis, while excluding the corresponding open space in the southern block, the Oak Grove and the Silver Towers central plaza (denoted by the letter “Q” but not even given a name in the open space inventory\(^2\) so as to draw less attention to the contradiction in methodology).

By unlocking gates NYU itself has erected and padlocked, NYU claims it is giving open space to the community; in fact, this is disingenuous at best, since they have made promises over the years to properly maintain and make available spaces which they have subsequently neglected.

\(^2\) DEIS, p. 5-9
The Public Strips: Key Public Open Space Assets

The most valuable public open spaces on these two superblocks, both now and in the future, are the public strips on Mercer Street and LaGuardia Place. They total 1.93 acres of public open space\(^3\). NYU’s plan treats them as mere remnants that get used for construction staging and eventual decoration at the borders of their giant new residential enclaves. Parts of these strips will become walkways that feed into their building complexes. What remains of green will be little more than window dressing.

NYU’s map of the two-block project area in 2031, with all its misty green hues, shows fully restored green strips along LaGuardia Place: The Time Landscape, a rebuilt LaGuardia community garden, a new LaGuardia Play Garden,\(^4\) and other areas that NYU failed to count in its inventory of current open space.

The LaGuardia Strips

NYU’s open space inventory classifies two well known and obvious public spaces as private: The La Guardia Corner Gardens and the Time Landscape. This lets them claim an increase in open space if and when these are restored by 2031. Let’s look more closely at these examples of curious accounting.

The LaGuardia Corner Gardens (approximately .15 acres) and Time Landscape (.19 acres)

The LaGuardia Corner Gardens is an active and successful community garden in the city’s Green Thumb program. It is the oldest running community garden in the city. Green Thumb’s mission is to “foster civic participation and encourage neighborhood revitalization while preserving open space.” LaGuardia Corner Gardens was established in 1975 and incorporated in 1980.

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\(^3\) According to Sanborn maps, the Mercer public strips are 54’ wide; the LaGuardia public strips are 45’ wide.

\(^4\) Also called Friends of LaGuardia Association or Adrienne’s Garden.
Through volunteer community labor and private fundraising, the Corner Gardens has become a well established community institution.5

The DEIS treats LaGuardia Corner Gardens as “private open space.” The reason given is its “limited hours of public accessibility.” By this reasoning, most public parks and playgrounds would be “private.” La Guardia Corner Gardens is publicly accessible in accordance with the mandates set forth by the NYC Greenthumb program. The Gardens has public and educational programs during volunteer hours. Needless to say, it is on publicly-owned land. In fact, there is much more “public” in the Gardens than, for example, the Coles Gym rooftop or the Coles interior athletic space, which were supposed to be accessible to the public.

The LaGuardia Corner Gardens includes peach, crabapple, apple, black pine and pear trees, as well as vegetables, herbs and flowers. These would be destroyed when the land is “temporarily” covered by sidewalk sheds and used as a staging ground for construction of the proposed Bleecker Building. After completion of construction, the gardens would struggle to survive at the foot of the new 178-foot Bleecker Building, and be virtually unusable for growing vegetables, herbs and flowers that require at least partial sunlight. The old growth trees that would be lost could not be replaced until decades in the future, if ever, since the species that currently exist require more sun than they were receive after construction is completed.

The Time Landscape Garden should be transferred from D.O.T. Green Streets and be mapped as parkland. Created by artist Alan Sonfist (1946- ), the Time Landscape was conceived “as a living monument to the forest that once blanketed Manhattan Island. After extensive research on New York’s botany, geology, and history, Sonfist and local community members used a palette of native trees, shrubs, wild grasses, flowers, plants, rocks, and earth to plant the ¼ acre plot. In place since 1975, it is a developed forest that represents the Manhattan landscape inhabited by Native Americans and encountered by Dutch settlers in the early 17th century, the only dedicated native landscape in Manhattan.”6 This

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5 This community garden and Time Landscape are separate and distinct from the Friends of LaGuardia Association landscape on the northern superblock.
6 NYC Department of Parks and Recreation, sign denoting the significance of the Time Landscape
landscape should be permanently protected and mitigated—not moved or otherwise encroached upon.

Many of the existing plants in the gardens will not survive under the harsh conditions of construction and, the replacement plants will have to be shade tolerant plants since the flowering vegetation and edible plants that are there now will not survive the shady conditions in the shadows of the Bleecker or Zipper Buildings. It should also be noted that the Borough President and NYU sponsored a white paper extolling the benefits of urban food production, only to turn around and effectively quash the production of food on this highly visible, accessible and active community garden.

NYU suggests that the community gardens be temporarily relocated, but the CEQR map for this underserved area shows that there is no available open space for relocation within a ¼ mile radius. “Temporary” relocation would most likely result in a permanent loss.

**The Mercer Strips**

The proposed Zipper Building would shut down all open spaces on Mercer Street’s southern block. The entire Coles strip, now owned by the City and under the jurisdiction of the Department of Transportation, would be completely eliminated. The Mercer-Houston Dog Run would be displaced to a slightly less accessible area. Coles Playground and Coles Plaza would be removed. This would result in the loss of .478 acres of public open space.

The current Coles Plaza, Coles Playground and Dog Run are all currently city-owned, but with the proposed plan, they would be replaced by a narrower concrete walkway with a proposed toddler playground on the west side of the new Zipper building, buried deep in the south block, away from the block perimeter. In the shadows of the proposed Zipper Building and Silver Tower, and set back beyond the proposed Dog Run, this facility is likely to be perceived, and used, as a strictly private facility, if it is found at all. If NYU’s track record of managing the .53 acre Washington Square Village “Key Park” Playground is any indication of future performance, access to the proposed Toddler Playground will be tightly controlled, unlike most public playgrounds in the city.

The replacement of the Coles Strip eliminates land at the perimeter of the block where it is now highly visible and accessible and tucks it away within the block. The displacement of the public strip on Mercer Street to the interior courtyard spaces of Greene Street walk is another example of the privatization of public land by making it inaccessible. Below we show how this is done on a massive scale with the enclosure of Sasaki Gardens.

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8 378’x54’, the length of the south block times the width of the public strip.
NYU’s calculations are founded on unsupportable bases—namely that the interior and exterior of Coles gym contribute 4.82 acres\(^9\) to the open space inventory and are defined as publicly accessible open space—while, at the same time, it disqualifies a total of 2.43 acres of grade-level open space\(^10\) as not publicly accessible. One cannot have it both ways—either *everything that is unbuilt on the block is open space, or only public lands, such as LaGuardia Corner Gardens, the Mercer Street Playground, the Time and LaGuardia Landscapes and Coles Plaza, are open space.*

The contention that NYU is adding to the open space is founded on the assumption that the current Coles Gym rooftop *and* the interior space are viable publicly accessible open spaces. NYU claims that this space currently adds up to 4.82 acres, and then implicitly indicates that equal open space will be available within the proposed Zipper building.\(^11\)

The 2031 future build conditions hinge on the inclusion of the proposed athletic facility in the Zipper building as open space\(^12\)—an odd contention since the multi-leveled roof will not provide even the amount of active open space currently on the Coles track. Does the inclusion of the athletic facility in the proposed Zipper building mean that New York City should revise its open space inventory criteria to include Crunch, Reebok and every other private gym in the City? Indeed, interior gym space is never included in open space inventories and cannot be equated with Washington Square Park, a community garden or a grade-level playground.

**Mercer Street Playground and Adjacent Landscape**

Though it appears that NYU has agreed to withdraw its proposal to construct a temporary gym, Mercer Street Playground would eventually be destroyed and encroached upon by the Mercer Boomerang Building—another example of privatization of public space. Though NYU states it supports the eventual remapping of Mercer Street Playground as parkland—after it has demolished the current playground in the construction phase—the Playground would be much reduced in size and would cease to exist in any recognizable form. While the proposed tricycle area is euphemistically named a garden, in fact it appears to be almost exclusively a concrete plaza—a continuation of the Mercer Street plaza just to its south.

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\(^9\) DEIS p. 5-12.

\(^10\) Open spaces are identified in the DEIS, pp. 5-9 to 5-12 by the letters B, E, F, G, J, N, O, P, Q, R, T, W, X, Z and additional land which NYU overlooks entirely (M1, G).

\(^11\) The January presentation to CB2 includes the addition of open space within the Zipper building, but does not provide any details.

\(^12\) But the January 2012 report to the Community Board does not specify how much space will be made available to the public within the proposed Zipper building; specifics were not found elsewhere.
Lower Manhattan Neighbors’ Organization {LMNO(P)}
was founded in 1991 by several parents and organized
as a not-for profit in 1992 in part as a response to an
attempt by NYU to remove the then-existing open
space on DOT property used by the public as a
playspace for older children. At the time, NYU was
seeking to install “viewing gardens” which the
community felt would detract from the active open
space that existed previously. Community response
was particularly negative because NYU had just
installed a key system to control entry to the Key Park,
which had previously been open to the public. After
about 3 years of negotiation with NYU and DOT, DOT
issued a permit to Parks that enabled the community
group to fund raise in earnest for the playground.
Through auctions, street fairs, private fund raising and
other events, they raised almost $200,000 which they
lovingly poured into the Playground, designing and
commissioning the fabrication of the fence according
to Park’s criteria.

Additional fencing was required to enclose the small gardens at both ends of the block, which
the group had to give up in negotiations with NYU. NYU also required LMNO(P) to retain fire
lanes, requiring the fabrication of giant swinging gates, controlling access to the space; tellingly,
the fire lanes, so important to NYU in 1991, are eliminated in the current 2012 plan—
apparently, the gates were not so necessary after all. LMNO(P) paid for these fences and equipment
directly to NYC Parks—an affirmation that this playground is and should remain a public park, and
should not be encroached upon by NYU’s current plan.

Over and over again, NYU has neglected to
maintain the property under the original agreement
with the Parks Department—the founding
members have good reason to doubt that they will
do a better job in the future.
Obscuring the Impacts of the New Buildings: From Sasaki Gardens to Dark Inner Courtyard

The building footprints of the proposed four new buildings alone would decrease open space by at least one acre. NYU magically transforms this net loss into a gain by first failing to count existing open space such as Sasaki Gardens, and after hemming in the same space with two new buildings calling it public open space!

In its open space inventory NYU considers the landmark-eligible Sasaki Gardens (1.34 acres) as private. This interior space on the north block is now accessible to the public, but with limitations that are no more onerous than other public spaces on the blocks. NYU would have us believe that after they completely close the interior space by erecting two new buildings on the east and west ends of the block and redesigning access points, the resulting interior courtyard, in virtually permanent shadows, would be public open space. With the addition of the proposed LaGuardia and Mercer buildings, this space will effectively become an interior courtyard and less accessible to the public than the existing elevated gardens. The enclosure produced by the two new buildings will create new visual barriers. Landscape design and signage at the entry points to the courtyard could change over time without oversight or approvals and further create barriers to public access. Furthermore, NYU would be replacing old growth trees and vegetation of Sasaki gardens with a highly-privatized concrete plaza embellished with an occasional tree, thus losing the peace and tranquility, not to mention the environmental benefits, of the 180 trees, herbs, flowers and edible plants.

NYU also counts open space within the proposed gym and in below-grade “light wells” or moats 3 floors below grade, that partially surround the boomerang buildings to create the illusion that it will be adding publicly accessible open space in the colorful drawings, further degrading the public accessibility of the inner courtyard. The proposal is designed in such a way that the only people who will benefit from these spaces are NYU students, faculty and tenants who pay for access, not the public.

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13 The difference between the existing building footprints and the proposed footprints, plus the “moats” that partially surround the proposed boomerang buildings.
NYU’s Poor Track Record as a Steward of Open Space

NYU has a history of failure to implement commitments to provide and preserve open space, thus violating the public trust. NYU has installed padlocks on gates, erected fences and walls, and raised sidewalk levels on and near its property. This has had the effect of limiting public access to the superblocks. With the express intent of meeting the narrowest of CEQR guidelines, nothing would stop NYU from doing what it has done in the past, limiting access to areas they promised would be open and accessible.

Much of the natural beauty presently in the two superblocks can be credited to the sustained hard work and fundraising of community members, often over the objection of NYU itself. Trees, bulbs, shrubs and other vegetation have been paid for and planted by members of the community, while NYU has allowed open spaces to sink into the ground or has otherwise neglected open space that it was legally bound to maintain.

A review of correspondence and community board records shows that only after community groups have complained in a sustained manner were some of the gates opened and improvements made. This is the case for the dog run, Coles and Key Park Playgrounds, Sasaki Garden, the community garden and the Coles athletic facilities.

Promises Made/Promises Broken—a Brief History of NYU’s Soured Relationships with the Community

NYU has historically made and then broken promises to the community so that it could acquire property, variances or certain benefits. Property has been so badly maintained in some cases that the university has had to close areas off entirely. Signs, padlocks, fences or walls have been erected to prevent the public from passing through areas that were to be publically accessible. This history has tarnished the institution’s reputation in the community and engendered a lack of trust and wariness that future promises would be kept.

Even today, the DEIS does not make clear whether any space in the new Zipper building will be made available to the community. The 2021 scenario does make mention of the addition of athletic facilities that will replace the Coles gym, but there is no information given about public accessibility nor does it quantify the amount of open space that will exist in the Zipper building.

Given NYU’s poor record of managing and making its open space accessible, there is no guarantee that even the dwindling fractions of open space in NYU’s complex will be available for the use and benefit of the public.
Coles Gym

- Access to active open space on the roof of Coles gym has been consistently curtailed, despite years of discussion and negotiation with the Community Board. The building of Coles and the widening of Mercer Street was granted under the condition that the roof space would be accessible to certain community members, thereby taking the strain off the limited active open space in the study area.

- Original plans included a playground that was to be available for public use. However, the area includes a padlocked sinkhole and sparse and poorly kempt concrete areas, hardly the model of public stewardship that one would expect from a leading institution.

- The “shared use” of Coles as a community sports facility, and its specific membership details, were requirements placed on NYU by the Board of Estimate when it approved the addition of Coles to the urban renewal plan in 1979. The rezoning from residential/open space to educational use required Coles to grant access to the community. However, Coles gym continues to suffer from years of neglect and poor maintenance; the interior shows signs of minimal upkeep; the rooftop has been closed for more than 4 years, except for track use; the rooftop surfacing was never maintained so that the outdoor tennis courts have been closed for years. Furthermore, tennis memberships offered to community members in the “shared use” agreement have long been discontinued; the tennis courts were closed for seven years until only recently.

Washington Square Village “Key Park”

- Community parents have faced administrative hurdles in order to get access to the Key Park, contravening the proscribed “shared use” requirement. Like Coles, it is up to community residents to navigate the arcane system; they share and pass on keys and help newcomers to overcome obstacles to admission. Applications take 4-5 years for a ruling on acceptance, and the system is not transparent.

- Since keys are never “recalled” and children grow up and families move, several decades of keys are counted as proof of “overuse,” of the park, allowing NYU to limit access to community families, thus effectively privatizing the space. A daily body count of children reveals under-use of the pleasant park. By all accounts the Key Park is a premium playground, underused in a neighborhood categorized by the Parks Department as underserved by public playground space.

Dog Run/Playground

- The playground and dog run were left in a deplorable state of neglect, sinking into the ground, for years, until Councilman Gerson’s office found and forwarded to President
Sexton a record of NYU’s 1979 agreement to “rebuild and maintain” the Mercer strip. It was not until 2009 that the dog run conditions were improved—again, at the behest of the community who wished to use the space, conveyed to the public according to the original urban renewal plan.

⇒ Environmental and Economic Value of Trees

Trees and vegetation convey considerable economic and environmental value to the surrounding areas. New York City has set tree planting goals (one million trees planted by the year 2030) to realize increased environmental benefits and offset negative anthropogenic factors. Unfortunately, NYU’s proposed expansion would cost the lives of most of the over 300 trees in the public strips and Sasaki Gardens (see Appendix for details). If the trees are not actually felled, they will be cast in the shadows of buildings and sidewalk sheds and covered in dust. One way or another, most of them will not survive.

Thanks to the computer modeling program I-Tree Streets, we can quantify the benefits and costs of trees, their value in cleaning the air, storing carbon, and diverting stormwater from our aging water system; we can also quantify the degree to which they cool the air, thus mitigating the urban heat island effect. This program has been used in an analysis of the New York City urban forest, commissioned by the NYC Department of Parks and Recreation; it provides a fascinating insight into the ways that trees enhance the urban environment.¹⁴

To obtain a fine-grained analysis of the benefits of the trees on the public strips on the two NYU superblocks, we joined with Carsten W. Glaeser, Ph.D., a professional arborist, and local residents. We identified tree species and the size of trees in the LaGuardia Corner Garden, the Time Landscape, Friends of LaGuardia, the Mercer Dog Run, the entire Coles strip, and the areas in and around Sasaki Gardens. We entered the data into the I-Tree Streets program to

analyze their benefits and calculate the air quality improvements conveyed by trees through their ability to reduce temperature (via shading and transpiration), remove, intercept or avoid air pollutants such as carbon dioxide (CO2), nitrogen dioxide (NO2), ozone (O3), sulfate dioxide (SO2) and particulate matter (PM10), and store carbon dioxide. We also quantified the reduction of energy use by adjacent buildings, thereby reducing the pollutants emitted by the utility facilities and other gaseous emissions.

Carbon Stored by Public Strip Trees

Currently, the trees planted on the public strips and in and around the Sasaki Gardens store more than **503,395 pounds of carbon a year**, bestow annual air quality benefits of these trees total 370 pounds of air pollutants such as carbon dioxide (CO2), nitrogen dioxide (NO2), ozone (O3), sulfate dioxide (SO2) and particulate matter (PM10) which the trees currently remove, intercept or avoid.

The trees also support ecosystem functioning by providing food for passing birds and wildlife. Fallen leaves and debris decompose to nurture the soil. Their roots soak up rainwater, reducing stormwater overflows in the combined sewer system in heavy downpours—the number and severity of which are increasing due to global warming. The ITree analysis finds that over **393,151 gallons of rainwater are intercepted by the trees annually**.
It takes years for trees to convey the environmental benefits that the 15 different species currently convey to the neighborhood. NYU cannot just replace the old-growth trees and realize the same environmental and aesthetic value. Larger and older trees provide more ecosystem services than younger and smaller trees. The diversity of species and age protects the tree inventory from total annihilation should a disease affect one species.

Will community groups be as active in caring for and maintaining young trees planted by NYU or the City after they see their years of hard work destroyed by the bulldozer? Will NYU nurture and maintain newly planted trees as poorly as it has taken care of its open space in the past?
Sasaki and Surrounding Trees: Species Distribution

- London planetree: 36.11%
- Washington hawthorn: 32.78%
- Japanese flowering crabapple: 14.44%
- Kwanzan cherry: 13.39%
- Norway maple: 11.61%
- Eastern redbud: 11.11%
CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

In this report we have shown how the NYU Core Proposal would result in less open space and exacerbate the current severe lack of open space resources in the neighborhood. We have given many examples of NYU’s long history of poor stewardship of public open space and the deep lack of trust of NYU among residents.

We have demonstrated the substantial quantitative and qualitative environmental benefits of the existing open space and shown how the NYU proposal would severely reduce them.

The rezoning that NYU seeks provides for a substantial increase in bulk on the two superblocks. At the same time open space requirements under the zoning are severely reduced.

Therefore, the City Planning Commission should reject the NYU Core Proposal.

Map All Public Strips as Parkland, Reject the Rezoning

The City Planning Commission should map all open space strips as parkland and support their transfer to the Parks Department, thus guaranteeing their preservation. In 1995 NYU specifically opposed a proposal to do so. The community groups that have cared for this land have been lobbying to designate these open space resources as parkland for 30 years, but NYU has only negotiated with the Parks Department to protect and map as parkland the public strips on the northern superblock. The Borough President’s amendment does not offer parity with the same parkland mapping to the valuable green resources on public strips on the southern superblock. The Time Landscape and LaGuardia Corner Gardens should mapped as parkland and receive protection as the valuable open spaces they are.

The City Planning Commission adopted the urban renewal plan in the 1950s largely because they believed the taking of private lands was justified because it enabled the creation of both the “Park” and the “Tower,” thus safeguarding open space without sacrificing density. The current NYU plan bids adieu to the “Park” part of the “tower in the park” urban renewal construct. As noted in The Impacts of New York University’s Proposed Expansion in Greenwich Village prepared by Gambit Consulting, the proposed zoning would reduce the open space to about 38% of the superblock, down from the currently allowed 85% for open space. Notably, the fact that NYU is requesting so many changes in zoning lays bare the fact that its plan reduces open space; if its plan truly added to open space as it contends, many of the requested zoning changes would not be necessary.
NYU’s Proposal Turns Away From Its Obligations under the Original Development Plan. The City Planning Commission Should Insure That All Future Obligations Are Binding in the Long Term.

When, in 1953, the City Planning Commission approved the acquisition of Washington Square Southeast property under Title I of the National Housing Act of 1949, it did so to “permit the development of playscapes and landscaped areas and provide for arrangement and spacing of buildings to permit maximum light and air.”\(^{15}\) The Commission subsequently modified the Redevelopment Plan to decrease density, and increase landscaped and playground areas.\(^{16}\) The current NYU proposal goes in the opposite direction and the current ULURP process would thus legitimize, after the access-limiting behavior that NYU has actively pursued over the years.

The City Planning Commission should reconsider whether to “retire” the original urban renewal plan. That plan stated that the area was to “be developed largely for residential purposes...[accommodating commercial space] not exceeding two stories in height...[and to accommodate] maximum population density of 375 persons per acre of the two superblocks...residential land coverage by buildings will not exceed 24 percent of the net residential area.”\(^{17}\) Not only does the proposed plan significantly increase density, it fundamentally replaces the Urban Renewal vision of the block as being primarily residential in nature. NYU would make it an institutional block, designed by and for the private institution, not the public, and expand commercial uses in a way that is incompatible with the residential neighborhood.

We are at a crossroads in 2012, as we were in 1953, and the City Planning Commission must again take into consideration the public interest and weigh this against the private interests of a developer that has already gained significant benefits as the result of public actions.

\(^{15}\) CP-10203, p. 1061  
\(^{16}\) CP-10203, p. 1063  
\(^{17}\) CP-10203. December 9, 1953 p. 1059
Appendix

I. AREA CALCULATIONS

Total unbuilt area on superblocks: 11.85 acres = (474.08 x 605.08 sf) + (605.09 x 378.44) \(^{18}\)

**Scenario #1: Everything is open space EXCEPT building footprints**

Total Area on superblocks: 11.85 acres
Minus building footprints: 4.1 acres

Before: Total Open Space 11.85 - 4.1 = 7.75 acres existing open space
After: MINUS the difference in the building footprints (1 acre if you include the light wells that are below grade); minus Loss of Coles (0.43 acres) and building footprints (1 acre) = 1.43

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Scenario</th>
<th>Before</th>
<th>After</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>#1</td>
<td>Total Open Space 11.85-4.1 = 7.75 acres</td>
<td>7.75 - 1.43 = 6.32 acres</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Scenario #2: Everything is open space EXCEPT building footprints and Coles Roofdeck**

Before: 7.75 acres + 61062sf (1.41 acres) = 9.16 acres
After: Loss of Coles roof (1.41 acres), Coles Strip (0.47 acres), difference building footprints (1 acre)
\[= 2.88 \text{ acres (can't count the roof of the new Zipper building because it's going to be different levels)}\]
\[7.75 - 2.88 = 4.87 \text{ acres remaining}\]

Lose 2.84 acres
Percent change = -37% change

**Scenario #3: Only the public strips are accessible open space: Lost Publicly Owned Property**

Coles Strip is 0.47 acres
Before: 4 public strips = 1.93 acres PLUS Bleecker St strip = 0.18 = 2.12 acres Public Open Space
After: 2.12 - 0.47 (Coles Strip) = 1.65 acres public open space remaining

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Scenario</th>
<th>Before</th>
<th>After</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>#3</td>
<td>2.12 acres publicly owned open space</td>
<td>1.65 acres publicly owned open space</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Loss of 0.47 acres publicly owned open space</td>
<td>-25% change in publicly owned open space</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\(^{18}\) From Sanborn maps.
AFTER Proposed Development, according to AKRF maps Total acreage of block (should they receive zoning approvals):

- South Block 644.89 x 378.44=5.6 acres
- North Block 474.08 x 693.97=7.55 acres

Total Acreage after proposed development=13.15 acres

13.15-11.85 acres=1.3 acres added acreage on block accomplished by takeover of public open space, namely public strips.
## II. TREE INVENTORY

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Species</th>
<th>#</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Friends of LaGuardia (from 3rd St heading south to Bleecker)</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Little Leaf Linden</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Crabapple (multi)</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pagoda</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>London Plane</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pear</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Callery Pear</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Honey Locust</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mulberry</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>LaGuardia Corner Garden</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Peach</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black Pine</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Crabapple</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pear</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Time Landscape</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White Oak</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Green Ash</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pin Oak</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>American Elm</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ash</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black Cherry</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Red Oak</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>American Beech</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>American Beech</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black Cherry (double)</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Locust (double)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Witch Hazel</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Dog Run sidewalk</strong></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Honey Locust</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pin Oak</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Reflecting Garden (sinkhole)</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kwanzan Cherry</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Water Playground (sinkhole)</strong></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Honey Locust</td>
<td>6</td>
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<tr>
<td>Eastern White Pine</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Weeping Birch</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Coles Entry Plaza</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pin Oak</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Bleecker St Cherry Grove</strong></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kwanzan Cherry</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>London Plane</td>
<td>2</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>LMNO(P) - Mercer Playground</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>London Plane</td>
<td>10</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Sasaki Gardens and Surrounding</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Section 1: Between Citibank and the WSV Sasaki Garden</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hawthorns</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hawthorns</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>London planetrees</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>London planetrees</td>
<td>11</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Section 2: WSV Sasaki Garden</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Japanese maples</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Silver maples</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Redbuds</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dogwoods</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hawthorns</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Crabapples</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Apple</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White mulberry</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eastern white pines</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>firs (Abies)</td>
<td>2</td>
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<tr>
<td>Weeping willow</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hawthorns (south) 5&quot;</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Weeping cherries</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Weeping cherries (east)</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Section 3A: Between WSV Sasaki Garden and east edge of the Key Park playground

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>London planetrees</th>
<th>Hawthorns</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>21</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Section 3B: In Key Park

- **Crabapples + misc**: 11
- **Honeylocust**: 2
- **Norway maple**: 5
- **London planetree**: 6

### III. TREES LOST

**Sasaki Gardens—181 trees lost**

Sasaki Gardens presently feature 181 trees in addition to many other shrubs and plants. They will be destroyed by the NYU proposal and replaced mostly by a concrete plaza.

Photo and Graphics: Georgia Silvera Seamans