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**Park Advocates, Villagers, Elected Officials Join @ Rally/Press Conference to Keep the Village Green/Save the Village Featuring a Performance by the World Famous [STOMP](#); NYU, City Try to Overturn Decision That Would Save Parks from Destruction by NYU Expansion**

On Wednesday, September 24<sup>th</sup>, parks, gardens and open space supporters from across the City held a rally at Greenwich Village's LaGuardia Park, decrying NYU's and the City's appeal of the court decision that saved that park and two other Village parks from being destroyed. The appeal was heard after the rally, at the Appellate Division's First Department.

Members of the internationally acclaimed East Village-based group [STOMP](#) joined the crowd and did a short performance. "We've been a Village institution for 20 years. We support the community here and stand with them in asking the city to keep our parks as parks," said **Steve McNicholas, co-creator of STOMP**.

The three parks in question – Mercer Playground, LaGuardia Park and LaGuardia Corner Gardens- were at risk of destruction for the sake of NYU's outsized and unwanted 2031 expansion plan. On January 7<sup>th</sup>, Judge Donna Mills vindicated the position of parks advocates and community members by officially declaring those parks as City parkland, effectively halting redevelopment efforts by NYU that would have stripped the community of that precious open space. NYU's rejection of that decision and its subsequent appeal (through the City) have left a bitter taste in the mouths of many Village residents, NYU faculty, parks and open space advocates and elected officials.

The overall mood was somber, but hopeful. Speakers and attendees alike shared regret for NYU's continuation of its agenda to build on the parkland (and the City's accession to its wishes), but hoped that the appeals court would find the same conclusion as Justice Mills.

[City Council Member Corey Johnson](#), a strong supporter of the cause, said, "The decision by Justice Donna Mills was an affirmation of the community's fight to preserve public open space. Rather than engaging in protracted litigation, NYU should have worked together with stakeholders to craft a growth plan that was contextual and respectful of the community character."

[Manhattan Borough President Gale Brewer](#) was quick to weigh in, and noted that any expansion by NYU must have the public good in mind, "As Borough President, I am committed to ensuring that the community also benefits from NYU's planned expansion. Protecting open space has long been a priority of mine, and I will continue to work hard on this issue."

Greenwich Village Society for Historical Preservation ([GVSHP](#)) Executive Director Andrew Berman said, "We had hoped that, following the court decision, NYU and the City would accept that these areas are parkland. The fact that they are continuing with the appeal is an affront to both the rich history of the area and the law. We are saddened that NYU is still fighting against the wishes of the community. Greenwich Village is already so short on parks and open spaces. Judge Mills' decision championed the parks; we hope that the appellate court continues to support her decision."

Several of the elected officials took a stand on NYU's use of not only its own resources but also those of the city in this protracted battle, and objected to the use of government for the purpose of destroying parks.

[State Senator Brad Hoylman](#) said, "State law protects public parks from development. I'm hopeful that the appeals court will concur and these park strips won't be bulldozed by NYU. In the meantime, I urge NYU to drop this misguided appeal and stop wasting precious resources to fight the overwhelming sentiment of faculty, students, residents, preservationists and elected officials who want to preserve our precious open space in Greenwich Village."

[Assemblymember Deborah Glick](#), who was also a petitioner in the lawsuit, agreed, "The City should not waste any more time or tax payer dollars supporting the loss of open space. NYU overreached, the Courts recognize it, and the City should join us in resolving this to the benefit of the community"

"NYU continues to ignore the will of its own faculty, along with the entire community, while seeking to invalidate the crucial laws protecting public property. We'd hoped that Judge Mills' ruling would move NYU's top brass to halt this multi-billion-dollar folly, which is costing all the rest of us at NYU in money, reputation, and morale. As they will not stop pushing that mad project—a giant threat to NYU itself as well as our historic neighborhood—we have no choice but to fight on," said Professor Mark Crispin Miller, president of NYU Faculty Against the Sexton Plan ([NYUFASP](#)).

"Mercer Playground was created through the 9-year efforts of LMNO(P), a 22-year old community group, working with Community Board 2, elected officials and City agencies. So much effort went into collaborating with government to realize this much-needed space. It's painful to think that all of that work could be swallowed back up by NYU, which clearly has no regard for the legal process," said Enid Braun, speaking on behalf of Lower Manhattan Neighbors Organization ([LMNO\(P\)](#)).

"Justice Mills affirmed that these green strips are parks. In its appeal, NYU is playing dumb, claiming they are streets and can be destroyed. Such behavior, from an institution of higher learning, is a slap in the face to the Village Community that has cared for the parks for thirty- five years," said Ellen Horan, speaking on behalf of [LaGuardia Corner Gardens](#), a NYC Greenthumb Community Garden.

Former Parks Commissioner, **Henry Stern**, who submitted an affidavit for the lawsuit, more than agreed with that statement. "I was Parks Commissioner for 14 years, and throughout that time, I tried repeatedly to get the pieces of parkland turned over as dedicated parks. NYU through its lobbyists consistently blocked these efforts, assuring people that they were already parkland and there was no need to make it official. A private institution, no matter how laudable its intentions, or how influential its board members may be, cannot simply ignore the law to acquire public land without legislative consent, and in this case, the City Council acted illegally when it approved NYU's expansion plan and granted it those pieces of parkland. I hope that the appellate court sustains Justice Mills' well-reasoned opinion," he said.

"Accurate assessments of the impacts of new development are a crucial part of community planning, but NYU's expansion plan failed to include more than half of the open space available to the community and protected as parkland," said [State Senator Daniel Squadron](#). "Once again I join my colleagues and the community in urging for a complete reassessment of the expansion plan in an inclusive process that accounts for all open space, as well as other priorities."

[Congressman Jerry Nadler](#) summed up the sentiment of the crowd:

“The support for protecting these three much-used parks is overwhelming. I urge NYU to work with the community on preserving this open space and planning for a future for NYU2031 that works for the entire Village, instead of continuing to fight Judge Mills’ decision in court,” he said, “There is a lot of history and a strong community here and the future of this plan must include them both.”

The court’s decision is not expected for several weeks.

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Supporters of the event included: [Assembly Member Deborah Glick](#); State Senators [Brad Hoylman](#) and [Dan Squadron](#); [City Council Member Corey Johnson](#); [David Gruber, Chair, Community Board #2](#); [Jo Anne Simon, Democratic District Leader, 52<sup>nd</sup> AD](#); [Greenwich Village Society for Historic Preservation \(GVSHP\)](#); [Historic Districts Council](#), [NYU Faculty Against the Sexton Plan \(NYUFASP\)](#), [Washington Square Village Tenants’ Association](#), [East Village Community Coalition](#), [Friends of Petrosino Square](#), [LaGuardia Corner Gardens, Inc.](#), [Lower Manhattan Neighbors Organization \(LMNOP\)](#), [SoHo Alliance](#), [Bowery Alliance of Neighbors](#), [NoHo Neighborhood Association](#), [Washington Place Block Association](#), [Friends of DeSalvio Playground](#), [1000+ Friends of Parks](#), [NYC Park Advocates](#), [Union Square Community Coalition](#), [Liz Christy Garden](#), [Trees Not Trucks](#), [Loisaida United Neighborhood Gardens \(LUNGS\)](#) and [Community Action Alliance on NYU 2031 \(CAAN 2031\)](#). Other supporters include [New York City Community Garden Coalition](#) and [NYC Parks Green Thumb](#)