



Greenwich
Village
Society for
Historic
Preservation

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March 6, 2012

Hon. Scott Stringer
Manhattan Borough President
One Centre Street, 19th floor
New York, NY 10007

Re: New York University "Core" ULURP

Dear Borough President Stringer:

I strongly urge you to recommend denial of New York University's ULURP application.

The Greenwich Village Society for Historic Preservation and our members have communicated with you on innumerable occasions about this issue since you became Borough President in 2006. In summary, I believe that it is critical that the plan be rejected for the following reasons:

Oversaturation of University Facilities and Loss of Neighborhood Character: NYU's tremendous growth in the last several decades has had a profound impact on the character of not only the Village, but surrounding neighborhoods such as the East Village, SoHo, Union Square, and Chelsea. As the university's growth in population and amount of occupied space has grown, the character of the neighborhood has palpably shifted, so that NYU's presence has become increasingly dominant in more and more areas and ways. This balance will only continue to shift in that direction unless NYU's growth in the Village and immediate vicinity is capped and an equilibrium between university and non-university uses is established.

NYU 2031 Only A Short-Term Solution: Even if NYU is given every approval they are seeking, by their own admission this will only satisfy their growth needs for the next 19 years – until 2031. If they continue on this path, focusing their growth on the Central Village, in 19 years they will inevitably come back to this community and city officials asking for more zoning changes to allow them to continue to grow, to add to the facilities and schools which are here. Thus the problem of a balance of neighborhood character skewed further and further in the direction of the university will only worsen over time, not improve, if this plan is approved.

Better Alternatives for NYU and NYC Exist: NYU has thus far refused to consider other options for channeling its growth, such as the Financial District. Continued NYU growth in the Village would not only negatively impact the character of this neighborhood; it would lock the university into an area with limited room for additional future growth, and would have limited broader beneficial economic impact. A location like the Financial District, with its wealth of mass transit options (just a 10 minute subway ride or 30 minute walk from NYU's Washington

Square and Downtown Brooklyn campuses) offers almost limitless possibilities for future growth. Additionally, by helping to create a 24 hour a day community, adding cultural, recreational, and educational facilities, and lessening that neighborhood's dependence upon the financial industry, NYU could help meet long-term goals for the Financial District, which will face the challenge of millions of square feet of space coming on-line at the World Trade Center in the coming years. Thus having NYU's expansion focus on the Financial District would have a much greater economic multiplier effect, benefitting New York City as a whole. While adding more students and NYU faculty to the Village just adds more of the same, NYU facilities in the Financial District could add a much-needed element to that neighborhood and help catalyze additional growth which would not take place in the Village. Downtown community leaders have welcomed this possibility, and NYU's ongoing expansion would likely generate considerably less controversy there than in the Village.

Inappropriate Insertion of Commercial Zoning: NYU is seeking to change the zoning for a residential area with almost exclusively residential uses to commercial zoning in order to allow the construction of a large hotel. A hotel does not belong at this location, nor should the zoning be changed from residential to commercial.

Superblocks Were Meant to Have Open Space and Low-Rise Buildings: The Washington Square and University Village Superblocks were meant to have their large buildings surrounded by generous open space and low-rise buildings in perpetuity. This is reflected in the original modernist designs by I.M. Pei and Paul Lester Wiener and S.J. Kessler (both of which have been recognized by the New York State Historic Preservation Office), in the original urban renewal agreements which prohibited additional development on these sites, and in the zoning, which requires a certain amount of open space to offset the large towers on site. To add new construction where it was never intended on these sites would not only ruin the integrity of these designs, but destroy the balance between open space and large-scale construction which was established.

Violation of Terms By Which Public Land Was Disposed: Both superblocks were originally publicly-owned land; both were given away (University Village directly to NYU, Washington Square Village to a private developer and then to NYU) with certain stipulations attached, largely around what types of uses were allowable on the blocks, and what type of additional construction was (or was not) allowed. NYU is seeking to have these agreements governing how public land could be used overturned.

Loss and Degradation of Open Space: In spite of what NYU says, their plan would reduce and eliminate the amount of open space in the superblocks, which is within one of the most open-space starved communities in New York City. Additionally, remaining open spaces would be severely degraded in quality – mature trees

would be destroyed, new buildings would permanently shadow open spaces, and easements NYU is seeking would allow them to dig through, park construction equipment upon, and close for indefinite periods of time these spaces.

Unacceptable Increase in Density: The NYU plan would add nearly 2.5 million square feet of space – the equivalent of the Empire State Building – to the superblocks. This would bring an enormous number of people, visitors, and traffic to the area, while also more than doubling the number of gross square feet of usable space on the blocks.

Loss of Public Land Through Disposition and Easements: NYU is seeking to have several pieces of public open space, currently used as playgrounds, gardens, dog runs, and other types of recreational space, transferred from public ownership to the university. Here again, to alienate public open space in one of the most open space starved communities in New York City is completely unacceptable. Additionally, NYU is seeking easements over remaining public open space which would make this space unusable and inaccessible for years at a time at the discretion of the university. This is similarly unacceptable.

Beginning in 2007, you convened a Task Force of interested and affected parties to issue recommendations regarding NYU's expansion plans. NYU's plans clearly fly in the face of these recommendations, including:

- NYU should first seek to locate new facilities in satellite locations
- NYU must demonstrate why new facilities need to be located in the already-oversaturated Village core
- NYU should respect and maintain the low-scale, moderate density, historic character of our neighborhoods
- NYU must consider additional areas for potential satellite locations, including the Financial District and Long Island City, and should examine the scores of stalled and abandoned construction projects throughout the city to potentially address some of their facility needs while also eliminating these blights from neighborhoods

In light of all of these factors, I hope you will agree that the only responsible recommendation to make for the NYU ULURP is that it be denied without condition.

Sincerely,



Andrew Berman
Executive Director