Good Morning Chair Burden and Fellow Planning Commissioners,

I am here to testify on behalf of the NYU 2031 Plan. I am Lynn Videka, Professor and Dean of the Silver School of Social Work at New York University.

The 2031 Plan provides a blueprint for the future growth of New York University. NYU desperately needs additional space for state of the art facilities, the lifeblood of any research university. NYU’s mission includes discovery, innovation, and the creation of new knowledge as well as educating the next generations of leaders for our society and our economy. The objectives of the NYU 2031 core project provides a transparent view of the University’s future growth, and a strong plan to create critically needed space so that the University can continue to implement and expand programs that serve New York City and the world.

The Silver School of Social Work offers baccalaureate, masters and doctoral degrees. It partners with over 600 non-profit agencies. This academic year alone, we placed over 1000 social work interns in the New York area to assist service providers in carrying out their missions to serve the City’s most vulnerable. To maintain the effectiveness of this and other initiatives, space for research, administrative support systems, field learning seminars and classes must be located in Washington Square.

I commend the University for the inclusion of a public school within the Core Project. By donating the space for this community amenity, NYU has made a non-required contribution to the City in an area where school overcrowding has reached unprecedented levels. This plan serves the University, the Greenwich Village community, and the City of New York.

All of New York University’s 18 schools and colleges have a pressing need for new space. The Silver School of Social Work is no exception. We are in the midst of implementing our strategic plan which includes a dramatic expansion of research programs. The Silver School’s mission is to be a leader in education for the social work profession, to develop new knowledge to solve social problems, and to be engaged with community partners that serve the most disadvantaged citizens of New York. We are facing a dramatic shortage of space to fulfill this mission. Our classrooms are overcrowded and at times there are no available classrooms on the entire NYU campus in which to house new classes or to
accommodate our students. Our researchers have inadequate space in which to conduct their research and this is limiting their ability to make new discoveries. For example, the McSilver Institute for Poverty Policy and Research and the Center for Latino Adolescent and Family Health are dramatically under-spaced. The lack of sufficient room to house graduate student assistants, to conduct interviews and to hold community meetings is preventing the McSilver Institute and the Center for Latino Adolescent and Family Health from reaching their full potential.

The Silver School is committed to lifelong learning, yet we have next to no space in which to hold our continuing education programs. We would like to recruit more faculty but cannot provide offices or the classroom space needed to accommodate their needs. We are also unable to give adequate office space to our part time faculty. Furthermore, there is no student study or doctoral student office space in the Silver School of Social Work.

On a personal level, my son was a student at NYU. He continually faced challenges to his learning environment including lack of space to study, lack of space in which to hold tutoring sessions, and overcrowding in classrooms and laboratories. The library is so crowded at peak hours that there is not a corner in which to find solitary and quiet space. Students must scout out hidden corners and crannies in which to hold study sessions among themselves. A world class university needs to provide up to date and learning conducive environments for its students. NYU 2031 addresses these pressing space needs and will advance NYU to achieve its mission as a leading research university in the world.

The expanded space needs must be accessible to students and faculty who are based at the Washington Square campus. For students to be able to walk to class and study areas, and for faculty to be able to walk to research center spaces and expanded classroom venues are important to the coherence and efficiency of our programs. While we are thrilled that the Center for Urban Science and Progress will be built in Brooklyn, the Silver School needs space that is accessible for all students and faculty at Washington Square. As a dean, I hear faculty repeatedly state that nearby space is crucial for their work to be efficient and productive.

The NYU 2031 Plan is socially responsible. So often, urban university expansion plans entail displacement of socially disadvantaged communities. NYU 2031 entails no such encroachment on the space of disadvantaged neighbors. The plan largely uses NYU’s own property for expansion. It maximizes below ground space development to reduce the above ground impact. It takes its own currently underdeveloped, underutilized and unaesthetic space, such as that between the Washington Square Village Towers and Coles Recreational facility, and puts it to more efficient use thereby creating better utilized pedestrian corridors, as well as
increasing public access to improved open green landscaping.

NYU 2031 is responsible in using the University’s own resources to locate the expansion rather than displacing businesses and residents. Many of our nonprofit colleagues in lower Manhattan support the Core Plan as good for the nonprofit community and its partnership with NYU. While some NYU faculty members stand opposed to any expansion in Washington Square, the specific building plans are not immutable. The University plans to provide accommodations to the faculty living in Silver Towers and Washington Square Village, and has demonstrated a genuine willingness to modify the plan. I have every confidence that that receptivity to NYU faculty concerns will continue. The plan will create a spatial endowment for the future of NYU. It will enable us to attract the best and brightest students and scholars and teachers to New York. I encourage the Commission to approve NYU 2031.