April 23, 2012

Ms. Amanda Burden
Chair, City Planning Commission
22 Reade Street
New York, NY  10007

Dear Chair and Commissioners:

I am Richard L. Revesz, Dean and Lawrence King Professor of Law at the New York University School of Law. In addition to serving as dean for 10 years, I have been a member of the faculty for 27 years. Greenwich Village has also been my home for 27 years. Today I am here to speak in support of NYU 2031, the University’s strategic framework for growth. The University has engaged in a thoughtful process for planning for its long-term growth, both in Greenwich Village and beyond, and I want to specifically address the Law School’s growth needs over time, and more generally explain why creating a cohesive campus is so important to the success of an academic institution.

Since its founding in 1835, the Law School has been focused on the future, priding itself on its entrepreneurial spirit and legacy of inclusiveness. It has long been ahead of its time as the first to admit women in 1890; the first to offer scholarships to working- and middle-class candidates; and among the earliest to welcome Jewish and African-American students who were barred from other schools. From two floors of a factory building, the Law School evolved into Dean Arthur Vanderbilt’s conception of a law center, created “to mold our law to the needs of the times, assuring…a government of law and not of men, and above all individual liberty.” Vanderbilt oversaw the construction of a building on the southwest corner of Washington Square Park, but contributed more than just bricks-and-mortar to this vision: He developed programs to attract students and faculty from around the nation—and later the world—thus placing NYU Law squarely at the forefront of legal education.

Since Vanderbilt Hall was completed in 1950, the Law School has continued to innovate in response to student needs and the changing dynamics of the legal profession. Our Lawyering and Clinical and Advocacy Programs, interdisciplinary colloquia, and early recognition that law has an increasingly global dimension to which all students should be exposed in the classroom, have all served as models for other law schools. And we have
built a faculty that combines breadth and depth in numerous overlapping fields, and who engage in constant exchange with students, each other, and the public to produce a dynamic intellectual community.

I credit my predecessor, NYU President John Sexton, with truly placing the Law School on the map, which he is now doing for the University, with enormous benefits for New York City. One of the characteristics that makes the Law School distinctive and gives us a significant competitive edge over our peer schools is our location in the Greenwich Village neighborhood. Its unique character is a quality we value, and a factor we balance with great sensitivity in any plan to grow. Although mindful of the integrity of the area and our symbiotic relationship with the community, we also recognize the importance of a consolidated campus to creating strong intellectual links among faculty colleagues and the student population.

Our ability to recruit exceptional faculty is critical to our success, and a priority that I identified early in my deanship. Since 2002, NYU Law has significantly increased the size of its full-time faculty, appointing 44 new professors who are either leaders in their fields or among the most promising young academics in the country. More than merely increasing the faculty’s size by 31%, and its diversity, these additions have expanded the breadth and depth of its scholarly interests. Scholars who have joined the Law School over the past ten years conduct research in, among many other areas, international law, the law of democracy, immigration law, civil procedure, criminal law, labor law, tax law, local government law, administrative law, securities regulation, and intellectual property law. Beyond their areas of substantive expertise, recent additions to the faculty have also brought expertise in interdisciplinary fields, such as empirical legal studies, legal history, law and the humanities, law and economics, law and society, and law and philosophy, an increasingly important element of legal education.

An institution is only as strong as its people, and therefore a large part of any dean’s job is recruiting not only the brightest faculty, but the best students. I am convinced that large schools have an advantage, and to be a leading law school requires sufficient scale to support a faculty with expertise across the legal areas I described above; to offer a wide variety of specialized courses beyond the foundational subjects; to teach small sections of lawyering, where students learn how to interpret and practice law, interact with clients, and collaborate effectively to solve problems; to house a robust set of clinics where students develop litigation experience as well as mediation, legislative, regulatory, and advocacy skills; and to provide other opportunities for interdisciplinary learning. As the profession has changed, employers are demanding students graduate with more significant practical experience, requiring schools to offer students a greater range of opportunities to do meaningful professional work during law school. As a result, we need a large administrative infrastructure to support career services, academic registration and advising, student counseling, and for a school as deeply committed to public interest law and global legal education as NYU, dedicated offices to coordinate those efforts. We have therefore needed to expand our campus gradually over time to provide crucial physical space for all of our intellectual endeavors.
Shortly after 9/11, the Law School broke ground on Furman Hall, the first construction project begun in Manhattan following the terrorist attacks and the first new academic building at NYU Law in more than 50 years. The new building, located on West Third Street between Sullivan and Thompson Streets, opened in January 2004, providing much needed classroom space and offices for our clinical and lawyering faculty, who had previously worked off-campus. Furman Hall also provided space for our many student services offices, as well as three floors of apartments for faculty and their families. Furman Hall connects to Vanderbilt Hall through the library, part of which is under Sullivan Street, and that contiguity has made an enormous difference in not only the program of education we provide, but the interactions among our students, faculty, and administrators.

Dean Vanderbilt’s original vision provided the foundation for NYU Law’s signature centers, and today we house more than twenty that bring prominent public figures and policy makers to the Law School to engage in important dialogue with the legal academy. During the last decade, the Law School has established eleven new centers and institutes—interdisciplinary ventures that link the important research and scholarly projects of the faculty to the real world of policy, shaping the public discourse surrounding issues such as national and international security in the post 9/11 environment; land use, real estate, housing and urban affairs; and civil liberties and human rights. Most importantly, the centers and institutes provide important venues in which faculty members, students, and professional researchers can work together on salient legal issues with important public policy implications.

By 2007, the centers and institutes had outgrown the space they occupied in our residence hall. The number of research staff had grown by 30% over the past five years, and we needed a long-term solution for space. We knew it was critical that the centers remain on campus since they rely on the synergies between faculty, research fellows, and students for their success. In addition, the Law School has been shifting its academic programming to a more graduate school model in order to enhance our recruitment of top students. As part of this effort, we had created a number of specialized fellowship programs designed to support research scholars who intend to pursue careers in academia, government, and the public sector. We were already providing space to 40 fellows and scholars, and had a projected growth rate of approximately 20% over the next decade. Again, the programs’ success depends on space on campus that facilitates collegiality and academic exchange and allows for easy access to the law library.

Recognizing the need to expand our footprint, we identified a building we owned at 139 MacDougal Street as an opportunity to gain much-needed space for our many centers, institutes, and academic fellowship programs. We agreed to leave valuable floor area ratio (FAR) on the table in order to accommodate the concerns of the community, and instead negotiated with the University to purchase a 5-story commercial townhouse located on the north side of Washington Square North between MacDougal Street and Fifth Avenue. We opened 22 Washington Square North in Fall 2009, and Wilf Hall in 2010, and both buildings are already at capacity. Wilf Hall, which recently attained a LEED Platinum Standard rating from the U.S. Green Building Council's Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design, remains the home of Provincetown Playhouse, which continues to operate as a working
theatre run by the NYU Steinhardt School of Education. Wilf Hall is today a vibrant community of scholars as envisioned. I teach a clinic there every week on administrative and regulatory law, and work closely with a team of students who are gaining valuable skills and experience.

I remain convinced that to be a top-tier institution requires a sufficiently large scale to support rich and diverse educational opportunities. During the past year, I have also worked on a proposal for a new NYU Institute for Cities, the Environment, and Sustainability. This University-wide initiative would bring together faculty, research centers, and undergraduate and graduate students to facilitate new research on the interconnected challenges facing the future of cities and foster rigorous, interdisciplinary research and teaching. I am convinced that for this new initiative to succeed, it will need space on NYU’s main campus to foster collaboration among faculty and students and to attract the leading scholars and thinkers to participate in its work on urban sustainable development.

In conclusion, it is important to our academic mission that our faculty members are accessible to our students and have ample opportunity to interact and exchange ideas with each other and with the community. This requires us to be forward-looking about our needs, and I strongly support the University’s efforts to engage in a transparent and interactive dialogue with the community and the City about its plans. While the Law School will continue to be creative in looking for ways to provide a first-class legal education without requiring additional physical space, the reality is that a certain amount of growth is necessary. There has been significant research about the benefits of face-to-face interaction, which have grown rather than diminished in our more technologically connected world. I am convinced that the advantages of collaboration are even more important in an academic environment, which is why sound, sustainable plans for growth on NYU’s campus remain a critical priority.

Thank you for your consideration. If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Sincerely,

Richard L. Revesz