Dear Chair Burden and Commissioners,

I am a resident in Washington Square Village and a proud Arts Professor teaching Lighting Design in the Department of Design for Stage and Film in the Tisch School of the Arts at NYU.

As a resident, I will admit to some mixed feelings about the scope of the NYU 2031 project. However, as a faculty member, I have to attest to both our place in the Village and our desperate need for appropriate space. Our department is one of the top two programs in the country in our discipline. And our facility is less current than most high schools in the country.

Our graduates have gone on to win, in the last 3 years alone, Tony awards, Oscars, Emmys, Oliviers, Obies, New York IT awards, you name it. We have been able to train visual storytellers at a very high level for many years. But our faculty, both full time and adjunct, have no offices or place to meet students privately at school, save the stairwell. Our students have almost no where to store the projects they are working on and no place where they can leave their work out for even 20 minutes while they go grab lunch. Our Design Department Library is tiny, used constantly, and turns away books for lack of space. Our computer lab is always full and in constant use. We are fortunate enough to have a light lab in which we teach lighting classes and students work on both lighting projects in and outside of class and photograph models. And it is in use literally 24/7.

Our theatre spaces are similar to the rest in the neighborhood – eccentric spaces that are both wonderful and limiting. Each of our students design productions in all years of training, and we use the spaces as labs in which to practice our craft while the shows are running. The spaces are so scheduled that we can barely get time in them to critique what has just happened, much less hold class in the theatre to explore other options within the space. We need dedicated spaces for our shows. Our actors need to hold voice and speech classes, for example, inside a theatre, rather than in a small rehearsal room so they can learn vocal techniques necessary to fill a Broadway house. My lighting designers need to practice composing stage pictures in a venue large enough that they can walk from one side of the stage to the other in more than 6 steps. They need to learn to control a larger volume of space so that they can work in a venue larger than a tiny basement.

Our world is becoming more and more visual all the time. Between theatrical venues, movies, dance, television, gaming, – all are looking for artists who can tell a story visually, and we are providing those people. But we get less competitive every year as our physical plant ages and our spaces become less and less in line with current technology, and are losing students because of it. Because we have no storage space, we have to spend our budget on the same props – chairs, tables, sofas, lamps - over and over again. It is both wasteful and doesn’t allow our set designers to be concerned with space but only with details.
As faculty members who both live and work in the Village, we have been members of the community for a long time. We all work in the neighborhood venues – the Public Theatre, New York Theatre Workshop, PS 122, Mabou Mines, LaMama, The Cherry Lane, the Ohio Theatre – all of the venues downtown. Our recent graduates are everywhere as well. We are as much a part of the Village as any of the most visible artists here. We are toiling at the theatre factory, and the widgets we produce there are a crucial part of the City.

Thank you,

Mary Louise Geiger
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