April 23, 2012

Honorable Amanda M. Burden, Chair
Members, New York City Planning Commission
22 Reade Street
New York, NY 10007

Dear Chair and Members of the New York City Planning Commission,

I am pleased to comment on the proposed NYU project that you are considering, specifically to offer observations on the context of space requirements of major research universities.

Cornell University has been a longstanding part of New York City through our Weill Cornell Medical College, our cooperative extension service active in all five boroughs, our several other programs in facilities throughout Manhattan, and more recently our initiative on Roosevelt Island. We understand how challenging it is for universities to address long-term needs for space while respecting the character of neighborhoods in which residents including our students, faculty and staff work and live.

New York University, a member of the prestigious Association of American Universities, is one of our country’s outstanding institutions of higher education. It is an excellent exemplar of the many ways that universities contribute not only to the highest quality of undergraduate, graduate and professional education and research but as well the many ways that colleges and universities contribute to the economy, vitality and culture of our towns and cities. In particular, NYU contributes substantially to the robustness of New York City in the many neighborhoods in which it operates its superb programs. President John Sexton, one of the country’s finest university leaders, is well aware of the role and responsibility of his institution in the life of the city.

NYU has made its home at Washington Square for almost two centuries. We at Cornell understand the dual challenge of planning for the future in educational and research activities, while being thoughtful about developing plans that are compatible with the immediate community. As fellow New Yorkers and educational colleagues, we appreciate their need to ensure that academic space appropriately supports their current and future missions of education, discovery, scholarship, creativity and public engagement. It is imperative that universities plan for their future needs to remain competitive and be prepared to meet the needs of future students and society.

Successful modern universities face tremendous pressure for space expansion. This pressure comes from the need for expanded programs to serve new curricula, increasing enrollments in a broad variety of fields, and students’ needs and desires for extracurricular programs and activities. In addition to the
need for more space, there is the need for increasingly new types of space that older, iconic buildings cannot supply. Research and teaching approaches have and will continue to change, often resulting in functional obsolescence of existing facilities. As these new needs evolve, however, it remains critically important to keep in close proximity the many traditional and evolving programs and activities of the university. This proximity is necessary so that students may choose classes from different disciplines and schools, and so that the faculty and staff from various parts of the university can work together in addressing the many interdisciplinary problems whose solutions require a wide variety of areas of knowledge and expertise.

I support NYU's efforts to address these difficult challenges, and have every confidence in the extensive process its leaders have undertaken as well as the meaningful collaboration with the community that is occurring through the ULURP process.

Again, I appreciate the opportunity to comment on this important set of issues.

Sincerely,

[Signature]

David J. Skorton
President, Cornell University