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Testimony of Albert Cotugno
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New York University – College of Arts and Science
Before the New York City Planning Commission
For the Public Hearing on The New York University Core Project

Good afternoon Chair Burden and Fellow Planning Commissioners,

In the brief amount of time I have today, I will do my best to give you a snapshot of a day in the life of a typical NYU student. I should clarify: there is no such thing as a typical NYU student. But I will do my best to share with you some of the common struggles we all face. Particularly, I want to talk about the struggle of dealing with limited space – no, more than that – inadequate space, and how that inadequacy stunts the growth of tomorrow’s shapers of society.

So let’s say you start your day, as many do, with a lecture in Silver, one of our main buildings for class rooms. Expect to wait five minutes in a sprawling line whether you enter the building from the north side or the south side, and you better get it right, because the elevators on each side of the building go only to specific floors to alleviate the stifling congestion that occurs in the minutes before class. If it’s raining, you better have an umbrella, because even with the elevators set the way they are, the line usually extends out of the building and onto the sidewalk.

Now a couple hours go by, and you’re out of class. You just finished learning something interesting, and later you want to review. Maybe an exam is approaching. But if that’s true, expect that all of the space in the library will be occupied. Most universities ensure enough study space for one quarter of their students. For us, that would mean 9,600 seats, but today, we have only about 3,000 seats. There’s never enough room to study, and this has been a serious problem as long as I can remember.

But there’s more to the student experience at NYU than academics. With over 300 clubs and activities just on the University-wide level (there are many others at the school level), the diverse interests that are reflected in the various organizations we have on campus are at the heart of what makes our community special. But groups on campus need space to meet and to host programs, and the deficit here is crippling. If you don’t book a room a year in advance, and I’m not exaggerating, your club should not expect to find somewhere to meet. You’re out of luck for this year. Students have been pushing their elected representatives to do something about this since before I came to NYU, but there’s nothing we can do about it. The University’s hands are tied, and so are ours.

Another issue on campus is the state of the Coles Athletic Facility. Every major University provides its students with facilities to work out, practice sports, and foster
good physical health. Coles is unacceptably behind the state of the art. Not only is it small, but the facilities are outdated. We need a new gym.

I’ll wrap up by saying that I really appreciate that you are considering a plan that will help students do the things they love. NYU students cherish the place they have in the city and consider themselves New Yorkers through and through, members of the community. I know I’d prefer to sit in Washington Square Park with all its various people than on some private University green. This plan also puts more public green space near our buildings, so there is more space for us to share with the community. I know I won’t be here to enjoy it, but I have felt the need for a plan like this ever since coming to NYU. I hope you will allow our University to serve its students better by permitting us to improve our facilities and add the space we so desperately need. Thank you.