Good afternoon. My name is Emily DaSilva and I am a graduating senior in New York University’s College of Arts and Science. I have provided the following statement in keen support of NYU’s 2031 expansion proposal.

As a student of theatre, literature and music, I am deeply sympathetic toward the tremendous historical achievements of the Greenwich Village. These monuments are the very reason I transferred to NYU in my junior year of college. But when I began at NYU, I faced what were for me two highly unusual oppositions: the first, that there was a common notion among students that “NYU has no community,” and the second, that as a new member of my college’s student council, it was impossible to find a place to host student programs.

I learned quickly that I had entered NYU at a unique time in its history. Some of you may be familiar with NYU’s initiative to establish a global network university, one that will compliment today’s increasing internationality and foster the benefits of having access to the world’s highest intellect. For such a brilliant (and perhaps even ahead-of-its-time) idea in higher education, it made no sense to me that my school—extremely enthusiastic about giving its students the world as their campus—was so stifled in providing us with the same quality of learning, living and growing at home on Washington Square.

Then, of course, I found out about NYU 2031; a plan that I would subsequently hear local Greenwich Village residents shouting about to each other everywhere I turned. The plan floored me with its vast idea for expansion. So as I pursued my love of involvement in student life, challenging my peers’ (and my parents’) pathetic assumption that cohesive community could not exist at a school with no walled-in campus, I realized the issue was not that student life could not exist here; there just presently is no physical place for it to begin.

I don’t feel as though I need to convince you of the benefits of community. But I’d like to share with you an issue that hits home for me, student safety, which is a direct result of community at NYU.

One of the student life facets I became involved in this year was residential life. I use “was” in the past tense intentionally. Last week, I made the painful decision to step down from my role as a leader for my upperclassmen residents after the wellness of my resident and myself was compromised in a highly unsafe situation. I’ll spare you my story about how I have never in my life resigned from any commitment, but what you need to know is the following: NYU residential life and NYU’s office of health and wellness are in fact fantastic, reputable institutions. Yet, in an effort to create community at NYU, the administrators of student life have pushed these departments to carry the weight of planning most NYU student activities. Last week, in my time of urgency and anxiety, both of these departments were busy with responsibilities to a week promoting tolerance for LGBTQ students… a cause about which I am passionate, but not the job of either of these departments in the wake of a student emergency.

Rather than feeling resentment towards the establishments I felt had fallen through on me, I realized something far more important: I wanted change. NYU has never more than today, within and beyond this circumstance, needed change: change that will give its departments the full reign
to focus on the purposes for which they were instated. But this can only happen if they have space to do so.

My school’s administrators have been genuine in their desire to promote student community; and they were wise to utilize the largest professionally run departments at NYU to initially make community a reality. Now, more blatantly than ever, it’s time for the next step. The need for community is here; otherwise wellness would not be as enormous a concern as it is. But we have to have the rooms to plan programs and events. We have to have the outdoor parks and the hallways to interact, to exchange ideas, to support each other. NYU 2031 is not asking to impose a clichéd-gated campus in the Greenwich Village. It not attempting to take away or distract from any community the Village deems it has. But for Village residents so seemingly passionate about the prospect of community here, I ask that you please consider it is what we NYU students are asking for too.

I’m not in the minority for, as I said before, having come to this school so that I too could be thrown into the depths of the cultural epicenter of the world. And if you ask me what I want to do with my life post-graduation (2 weeks from today), I want to be that next downtown luminary. I am not alone with this aspiration. NYU needs 2031 to keep these visions here, to keep the village booming with creation and to keep us on our intellectual toes. This plan is not about aestheticism and it should not be about one school versus a district. I see NYU 2031 as a chance for the much needed development of a community. And if you’re not growing, you’re dying.

Thank you.