Marjorie H. Mayrock  
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The Honorable Amanda Burden and Commissioners  
New York Department of City Planning  
22 Reade Street, 6th Fl.  
New York, NY 10007-1216  

Honorable Chairwoman Burden and Planning Commissioners:  

My name is Marjorie Mayrock and I am a member of the NYU student body in ardent support of the NYU 2031 Washington Square Core Expansion Plan.  

My undergraduate experience started on Washington Square West in 2007 as an excited freshman living in Hayden Hall; now currently a graduate student at NYU, I am a proud Greenwich Village resident and hope to stay here far beyond my University studies. NYU’s esteemed faculty and diverse curriculum cultivated my interests in urban planning, architectural design, and Chinese, which brought me to study at NYU’s global sites in London, Beijing, and Shanghai. Now that I am back in New York to complete my master’s degree in Historical and Sustainable Architecture, I am happy to be living and studying in the vibrant and unique environment of Greenwich Village, where NYU has been rooted since its founding in 1831.  

I first visited NYU as a High School junior. Since the university is “in and of the city,” I saw no immediate need for an official campus tour, and instead decided to walk around the Washington Square Core Campus and get a sense of place. I was immediately taken by the vibrancy of the area—local residents, retailers, faculty, and students, all mixed harmoniously in the historic Washington Square Park area and Greenwich Village. I had no trouble finding my way around the campus, as there are no gated walls surrounding an internal campus, as seen at many other universities. The dynamic campus felt like a creative and intellectual haven, one where I wanted to live, work and study.  

However, the Washington Square Village and University Village superblocks north of Houston Street struck me as inefficient, unapproachable outliers that did not feel connected to the rest of the university. Still today, these superblocks do not fit into the dense, yet open environment of the University. I’ve walked around the often desolate spaces numerous times and have observed the need for a mixed-use environment that will accommodate the critical space the University needs to thrive.  

As you know, the 2031 plan before you seeks to responsibly expand university facilities on the Washington Square Core Campus, where modernist apartment towers, concrete slopes and other uninviting design features call for major rezoning; the NYU 2031 plan will create accessible, inviting spaces for the public and members of the university community alike to enjoy.  

The NYU 2031 Core Expansion plan will not in any way detract from the uniqueness and diversity of Greenwich Village; but it will bolster the university’s facilities and relieve student and facility congestion. In support of this plan, I wish to make the following five points:
1. Space: I am in full support of NYU’s vision to add two million square feet to the Washington Square center by 2031, thereby strengthening the Square and better positioning the campus as the anchor of the university’s global network, all the while enhancing science, maintaining excellence in the arts and the professional schools, and building a stronger sense of community. NYU see its success in tandem with the rest of the neighborhood, and as the university creates the social, economic, and environmental infrastructure necessary to thrive, the surrounding community will benefit from the influx of investment and density of energy, vibrancy, commerce, and intellectual capital.

Universities are space dependent, and the NYU community suffers from a lack of square footage in its Washington Square Core Campus. Other urban universities like Columbia, UPenn and Fordham have all faced times in their histories when expansion became a necessity. NYU’s need for space is at an all-time high; new student dormitories, offices, faculty housing, a hotel, parkland, and a gymnasium are crucial to the future revitalization of the University and its quest to attract top talent. Because of its location, NYU will never be able to have the same amount of space allowances as its peer institutions; however, NYU’s plan to maximize its existing footprint by building within the core—specifically, on the two southern superblocks—for as much as two million square feet of development, a quarter to a third of which will be below ground, will meet the long-term spatial needs of NYU’s faculty, students and administrators while also being sensitive to the concerns of the surrounding community and the neighboring built environment.

I have personally experienced the absence of available rooms and seats for studying, exams, meetings, sports, and other aspects of student life. As NYU wants to maintain its status as a vibrantly functioning intellectual community, one that attracts top students and faculty, additional facilities are a necessity.

2. Secondly, in terms of sustainability and holistic development: I have looked at the 2031 Core Plan very carefully and have seen the ways in which the urban design of the area can be enhanced. Though the urban renewal superblocks now stand as inaccessible, barren structures, they have the potential to be woven into Greenwich Village as a sustainable and much needed urban connector, which will bring new, green open space to the public. The lush Philosophy and Tricycle Gardens, tranquil Greene Street Walk, and other public lawns and areas of greenery will offer much needed horticulture and landscape design, including new pathways to better traverse the superblocks. The university has also pledged to cut carbon emissions by 30 percent, on a per-square-foot basis, by 2017.

3. Third is the balance between NYU’s need to grow while also preserving Greenwich Village’s distinctive, historic character. This is appropriately addressed in the Core Plan and NYU poses no threat to the Village’s historical charm.

By building on the University’s own property and not further extending into Greenwich Village, creating enhanced and more usable open space, and donating land for a future public school, the NYU plan serves the needs of both the university and the surrounding community. In order for NYU to maintain its status as an international institution and global center for research and scholarship, there is a need for an infrastructural expansion that will also improve its learning and research facilities.
4. Fourth is community. Though I had the opportunity to live in a freshman dorm on Washington Square West, many first-year students are not able to be housed on the Washington Square core campus, which detracts from their assimilation to the university and New York at large. The 2031 plan will give additional first-year students the ability to live in the center of the University, and academic programming and classroom space will also receive top priority.

5. Fifth is job creation and economic output. New York City’s economy will greatly benefit from the thousands of construction jobs and permanent employment opportunities that this expansion plan will generate. The millions of dollars in economic output will aid local businesses and their employees.

In my five years as an NYU student, I have never been able to use the Washington Square Village or University Village superblocks for anything related to academics or housing, only athletic space, which is in dire need of improvement. It is clear that Coles is a much-outdated structure and that the vertical, ground-floor, below-ground, and garden expansion will make more efficient use of the land while also welcoming members of the local community.

I believe that an expanded campus will not only improve the University, but also create a stronger neighborhood and city. I urge you to support this vision for an enhanced Washington Square Core campus, as it has already thoughtfully incorporated desired changes, and is extremely important for the successful urban regeneration of both NYU and the City of New York. Thank you for your consideration and support of this historic plan.

Sincerely,

Marjorie Mayrock