Testimony of Samuel A. Cohen  
Before the New York City Planning Commission  
for the Public Hearing on the New York University Core Project

Dear Chair Burden and fellow Commissioners,

I grew up in the middle of nowhere in Maine, a place where there is abundant space in which to expand and develop. This has made it fascinating for me to come to NYU, located in the heart of one of the densest and most space-limited locations in the world. One of the most moving lessons that I’ve learned from witnessing the way New York develops is the way the city tries to balance a desire for future progress with a desire to respect the past. Because of this, I have great respect for the work of your Commission, and I thank you for investigating and thoughtfully approving only those projects which will strengthen New York City.

I believe that the NYU 2031 Core Expansion Plan is one of those city-strengthening projects. As an NYU undergraduate and student leader, I have seen on a daily basis how space limitations impact the programs offered by the university and by the students. I’ve also seen how space availabilities lead to new opportunities for student growth and collaboration. Since our square footage per student is so very small, finding a space in which to host an event is the single greatest challenge to organizing a student program at NYU. Increased space availability results in increased student programming creativity, and thus multiplies the ways NYU students engage with and contribute to their university and NYC communities.

For example, NYU’s new Global Center for Academic and Spiritual Life, which opened this spring, has built-in social spaces which have generated daily interfaith student mingling and dramatically increased spiritual programming on campus. I believe that NYU’s 2031 plan will allow students to come together on an even greater scale.
Students don’t come to NYU to be in a college bubble—we come so that we can engage with the city in all possible ways. We’re not interested in harming Greenwich Village—we’re interested in giving back to it, which is why so many NYU students (myself included) take it upon themselves to do community service in the area on a regular basis. As I noted above, increased space for student programs has a direct correlation with increased student activity and ability to bring people together to do good in the world. NYU’s plan for growth is a recognition by the University that more space for students and faculty to come together is a major factor in the development of new academic ideas, extracurricular programs, and student activities. By building on the University’s own property and not further extending into Greenwich Village, I am moved by NYU’s decision to support its students and our beloved surrounding village simultaneously.

It is for this reason—the respectfulness of NYU’s building proposal, and the incredible growth potential for the university and the city—that I strongly support the 2031 plan. I hope you will, too.

Thank you for your consideration, your leadership, and your vision for the city. With your support, future NYU students will be able to come together in new ways to learn, grow, and contribute to our ever-growing, ever-inspiring city.

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