University Space Priorities Working Group
Meeting Summary

Meeting Date: Friday, October 5, 2012

Members in attendance: Robert Berne, John Billings, Corey Blay, Sewin Chan, Mary Cowman, Rajeev Dehejia, Mariam Ehrari, David Engel, Allyson Green, Wen-Jui Han, Perri Klass, Angela Kamer, Marty Kurth, Ted Magder (chair), Laurence Maslon, Panos Mavromatis, Tony Movshon, Andrew Schotter, Jalal Shatah, David Vintinner, Larry White, Diane Yu

Members unable to attend: Barbara Albrecht, James Jacobs, Perri Klass, Tony Saunders, Rosemary Scanlon, Matt Stanley

1. Welcome and introductions

The group members introduced themselves to one another. Twenty-two members (of 27) attended the meeting. President John Sexton, Senior Vice President Lynne P. Brown, and Vice President Alicia Hurley attended as invited guests of the Working Group. Michael Patullo attended as staff coordinator for the Group.

Prior to the meeting, members of the Faculty Against Sexton Plan (FASP) group presented materials to each member of the Working Group.

2. Working Group charge

President Sexton began his remarks by emphasizing his status as a guest at the meeting and noted his willingness to remain at the disposal of the group if called upon to attend future meetings.

He traced the genesis of the Core project, as one element of NYU’s overall improvement strategy, back to the Presidential Transition Team report (issued in 2002) and the NYU Framework 2031 (issued in 2008) that were built from significant community participation in their respective processes. Both reports, President Sexton noted, drew important conclusions about the need for additional space and the decompression of existing space in order for the University to continue on its upward trajectory. The individual school academic plans, which were generated by the deans and grew out of Framework 2031, motivate a large part of the need for approximately 6 million square feet of space that stood as an impediment to NYU’s continued development.

Following this statement of need, President Sexton explained that the decision to build 2 million square feet in the Core was based on how our University accomplishes our multiple goals, and the nature of the Greenwich Village community, resulting in our plans for two million square feet of space on the superblocks. The benefit of building on the superblocks, he noted, rested partly in the cost savings of developing NYU-owned land (which constitutes a $600 million endowment savings)
and partly because it did less harm to the Jane Jacobs notion of Greenwich Village, given that high-rise buildings already exist on these sites.

In addition, President Sexton emphasized the relevance of the Core plan to NYU’s past operations, which had included significant amounts of deferred maintenance and spending on both expanding and renting space, all of which are very costly. The Core plan, he said, will help to mitigate these significant draws on capital and open up valuable financial resources. President Sexton explained that this new budgetary “headroom”, the revenue-generating capabilities of certain types of new space (e.g. residence halls and labs), philanthropic efforts, and borrowing all work together to make the project both affordable and feasible to the institution, while maintaining roughly the same amount of capital in the aggregate.

Following the decision to build on the superblocks and significant budgetary analysis and review by the Board of Trustees, President Sexton said, was the entrance of the NYU Core plan into the Uniform Land Use Review Process (ULURP), which is a closed, 7-month process and allows only the city to make changes to the plan as submitted. During this process, the petitioner (NYU, in this case) is disallowed from making any alterations to its submitted plan. Now that ULURP is complete and the zoning envelope has been defined by the City, however, President Sexton hopes that this group can engage in a meaningful and productive dialogue about the most effective and best way to move forward from planning to the implementation stage.

President Sexton then delivered the charge to the working group, asking them to focus on the following points:

a. Given the zoning envelope defined by the city in ULURP, provide recommendations on the first elements of the Core project to be implemented on the southern block. This includes issuing recommendations on specific details of the project, including considerations on phasing and criteria for choice of architect.

b. Within budget constraints, advise as to the norms and principles that should be used for implementing various options for ameliorative efforts to minimize the impact of construction on residents and the broader community. He noted that actual construction will not commence for another 2-3 years.

Following the charge, President Sexton emphasized that the Group, its process, and its recommendations will be both meaningful and legitimate in guiding the implementation of the Core plan. He also emphasized that no further decisions will be made or implemented about the use and sequencing of the space on the superblocks until the Working Group reports next spring.

Responding to questions from the Group, President Sexton indicated that the Group will have broad access to financial information, including the effects of different building scenarios. He expects that the administration will work “dialogically” with the Group in providing information it needs to make recommendations. He noted that he does not expect that the group will be unanimous in its recommendations, but hopes that, by the end of this process, each and every member will recognize the task put before the Working Group to have been serious.

President Sexton also expressed his expectation that the Working Group will be “radically transparent” in its dealings and deliberations, and encouraged members to think about the Group as one way to ensure that the faculty maintains a dominant voice at NYU. He anticipates that the
Group will also prove valuable as a way to engage faculty, and the broader NYU community, in future decision-making processes.

3. **Presentation on final plan as approved by ULURP**
   
   [A copy of the presentation and handout materials is available on the Working Group Web site]

   Senior Vice President Lynne Brown and Vice President Alicia Hurley presented the final Core plan as approved by the city’s Uniform Land Use Review Process (ULURP). The presentation focused on the following points:

   **Background**
   
   - Choosing to develop on the superblocks was not an arbitrary decision. First, there is an acute demand for space within NYU’s core neighborhood, which is highly preferable for freshman housing and for other academic programs. In addition, NYU’s property in the Core is surrounded by historic districts and zoning restrictions, which makes the surrounding neighborhood beautiful but inadequate and extremely costly for development. In addition, NYU has nearly exhausted the potential capacity in the buildings in and around Washington Square Park—only a maximum of 180,000 square feet of space is available in these remaining buildings, which were considered when looking at NYU’s space needs over a 20-year horizon.
   - NYU submitted its Core plan to New York City’s Uniform Land Use Review Process (ULURP), which was also utilized by Columbia and Fordham during their expansions. It is a closed process with two key decision points over 7 months:
     - approval from the City Planning Commission, which includes the opportunity for the CPC to make non-negotiable alterations to the original plan as submitted; and
     - approval from the City Council, which includes the opportunity for the Council to make non-negotiable alterations to the original plan as submitted.
   - The plan was approved, with modifications that included a 20% reduction in overall square footage and the addition of public/social amenities, in July 2012.

   **Features of the plan as approved by ULURP**
   
   - The modified site plan defines a “zoning envelope”—the dimensional constraints (i.e., height, footprint, usage) that are acceptable and approved by the city—within which NYU has approval to build, and makes adjustments to the submitted plan in these key areas:
     - Reduced in density the Zipper Building (Mercer St.) and the Bleecker Building (Morton Williams site) on the southern block
     - Reduced the Mercer and LaGuardia buildings on the northern block; prohibited the development on the northern block until 2022
     - Rejected the hotel proposal
     - Rejected the temporary gym on the northern block
   - The options for the Bleecker Building depend largely on whether the Board of Education decides if a school is necessary for the site. The Board of Education has until the end of 2014 to make a decision.
     - If the Board of Education decides to use the site for a school, NYU will donate the above grade site (100,000 square feet) to be used for a school, which the Board of Education will build at its own expense. NYU would retain 70,000 square feet of below grade space.
If the Board of Education does not choose to build a school, NYU will retain the 70,000 square feet of below grade space and will have the option to build out 100,000 square feet of above ground space. The above ground space is to be divided between NYU multipurpose space (75,000 square feet) and community usage (25,000 square feet).

The group inquired as to the flexibility of space between academic, residential, and commercial uses. The northern block is limited to academic uses, which can be anything from classrooms and study areas, to faculty and departmental offices. There is greater flexibility on the Southern block where student and faculty residences can be mixed with academic uses, and where limited commercial use is possible.

4. Discussion of Working Group procedure and protocols

The Working Group engaged in a discussion of various internal procedures and protocols, including how to communicate and engage with the NYU and external communities. The Group agreed that its work should be transparent and involve discussion with the NYU and external communities.

- A Web site has been created to post agendas, meeting summaries, and documents reviewed by the Group. The email addresses of individual members, as well as a Comment form, have been added to the site as a means for the Community to communicate with the group.
- Meeting summaries will be posted as soon as possible after meetings. In the interest of speed, these will not be formally approved minutes, but draft minutes prepared and reviewed by a subgroup with rotating membership.
- Reports of group discussions and of suggestions made from those outside the group will be anonymized.
- Meetings will be closed to observers, to minimize distraction and promote collegiality, candor, and efficient communication between Working Group members. Guests may be invited from time to time as agreed by the Group.
- The Group will engage with the community in various ways, which may include: open meetings, town halls, outreach efforts to various stakeholders and units, and other mechanisms. Much discussion was focused on this point as the members debated the merits of each strategy, considering options such as creating subcommittees, convening focused town hall meetings with a specified topic, and having individual members attend departmental faculty meetings. This issue remains open.
- Members from the Faculty Against the Sexton Plan (FASP) will be invited to present at an upcoming meeting of the working Group.
- Among its first discussions, the committee will solicit and consider detailed accounts of the extent and use of existing academic space at NYU.