University Space Priorities Working Group
Frequently Asked Questions

Working Group Process and Charge

• How can you keep your list of priorities objective and avoid favoring one school over another?

The University Space Priorities Working Group (USPWG) is undertaking a comprehensive review of space needs. Our recommendations will focus on general categories of needs and priorities, such as classroom space, study space, department and program space, residential space for students and faculty, performance space, and athletic and recreational space. While we will try to acknowledge that different schools feel pressed for space (or less pressed for space) in different ways, we will not make specific recommendations with respect to School needs. The USPWG includes representatives from all the different schools at the Square to ensure that all are included in our deliberations and that none are favored or ignored.

• Are you seeking the views of all (or most) of the schools and departments near the Square?

Yes. We have held informational interviews with the deans of all the schools near the square. We have also reached out to all the departments and programs that passed resolutions on 2031 last spring, and we have met with all those who expressed an interest in meeting. We have received many comments via our website. We see the Town Halls as another opportunity to hear from the community, and will undertake further efforts to seek the views of the community in the future.

• Isn’t the Working Group just a rubber stamp for the administration’s plans?

No. We couldn’t be more serious about our investigations and the recommendations we are expected to make. The material on our website – much of which reflects requests for information previously unavailable to the University community at large – is one indication of the Working Group’s diligence. Our meeting summaries provide further evidence of the group’s commitment to exploring every detail of our charge. We’ve started from scratch and we expect the administration to take our recommendations seriously—and we also hope that our colleagues will take the time to read through the materials we’ve gathered and understand our thinking, even if they don’t always agree with it.
• How is the committee addressing the concerns of critics?
   The Working Group includes many faculty members who are themselves skeptical about or critical of different aspects of the original NYU 2031 plan. The NYU community as a whole has asked for greater transparency and the USPWG, echoing that sentiment, has insisted on conducting our work in plain view and providing the whole community with the same set of documents that we are reviewing. If the critics have the same information we have, it becomes easier to engage them in dialogue.

• How is the Working Group’s report going to influence the decisions of the University administration? Will it have an impact?
   We assume and expect that our recommendations will carry great weight in the University’s decision-making with respect to space needs and priorities. In agreeing to serve on this committee, faculty members from all the different schools asked for assurance that the time and effort we put in would actually have an impact. We have a public commitment from the University to that effect, and the highly public nature of the undertaking—and the recommendations to come—should help assure that these ideas will not be disregarded.

• What is the Working Group’s charge/mission?
   See website (link)

• How was the Working Group appointed?
   The Working Group members from the Faculty Senators Council, the Student Senators Council, and the Administrative Management Council were elected or appointed by those bodies. Faculty representatives from schools were nominated by deans, in consultation with department chairs and school faculty members. The University appointed the two members from the administration.

• What is more important to the Working Group: getting a definitive report or getting your report done by the end of the spring semester?
   We think it’s important to submit a report by the end of this semester, even if it’s not our last word. If we feel we have recommendations that can be made, based on sound principles and reliable data, then we will make them.

Can the USPWG recommend that there should be no construction on the superblocks?
Yes. Our March 20, 2013 communiqué to the University says that the “Working Group is also considering whether space needs might also be met by purchasing or leasing new real estate elsewhere, instead of, or in combination with, construction on the superblocks.”

The NYU Core Plan
• Is the building plan “written in stone”? Is there a possibility that it may be reversed on a number of different grounds?
   The building plan is not yet fixed or finished. Our charge gives us considerable latitude to make recommendations with respect to what gets built, when, and where. As of now, the
plan is in our hands: the University is waiting for our report before making any decision on construction (other than routine maintenance and required grounds improvement).

- Why can’t NYU build or acquire space elsewhere, such as Brooklyn or downtown?
  NYU could build or acquire space elsewhere, and has already done so in Midtown, the health corridor, and Brooklyn, for instance. The Working Group’s sole focus is the space allocated to the University for construction on the superblocks, specifically the southern superblocks in the core (i.e. the “zoning envelope”). We are addressing the following questions with regard to that southern superblock: Is that space needed? If so, for what specific needs, and can these needs be served without construction on the southern superblock? In assessing alternative spaces outside the core, the Working Group is considering such issues as the cost of acquiring such space, as well accessibility to the core. We are also taking into account the responses that schools and departments have had in the past to suggestions that they relocate further from the core, and the difficulties encountered in acquiring and renovating suitable space.

- Could NYU build only classrooms and performance spaces, and reduce the size of the construction?
  Yes. The Working Group could recommend a reduction in the size or scope of construction.

- Why can’t NYU lease more space in the area?
  NYU could lease more space in the area, though at present there doesn’t seem to be a lot on the market. Leased space is expensive and the cost of leasing space should be assessed in comparison to the cost of owning space. Also, leased space creates its own uncertainties: Wagner and Sociology are currently housed in the Puck Building, and their lease expires in 2019. The lease could be renewed for a further five years, but only at a very substantial increase in rent. Finally, the Greenwich Village neighborhood imposes many restraints in terms of zoning regulations and landmark designations that preclude classrooms, labs, and other uses that are part of the space needs of the University.

- Did the city give permission to NYU to do whatever it wants?
  The city-approved plan is scaled back from the original proposal. For example, the city-approved plan does not allow NYU to build a hotel anywhere on the superblocks and calls for dedicated public open space and some community uses.

- Will a temporary gym be constructed in the Washington Square Village courtyard?
  There will no temporary gym in the WSV courtyard or anywhere on the superblocks. The city-approved plan does not allow it.

- Why do we need an undergraduate dormitory on the superblock?
  A significant number of undergraduate students still live in leased dorms away from the core. In the long run, dorms owned and operated by NYU are a more cost effective alternative.
• When will construction begin on the “northern superblock” where Washington Square Village is located?

No construction, beyond some required open space improvements, required construction to create community uses on the ground floor of Washington Square Village and general maintenance, will take place on the northern block until 2022 at the earliest.

• Is the University building a hotel?

The city-approved plan does not allow a hotel anywhere on the superblocks. There will be no hotel.

Construction and Quality of Life

• How long will the construction really take?

It depends on the construction plan, the site and the size of the building. A general guide would be about 24 months for exterior work, which is the major source of noise, dust, and traffic disruption, and another 18 - 24 months for interior work.

• What will the University do to reduce the disruptions from construction for NYU residents of Silver Towers and Washington Square Village? Will the University give a subsidy to those who want to move out of University Housing into the private housing?

The Working Group will make extensive recommendations to mitigate the impact on NYU residents of any construction on the superblocks that will go well beyond the measures mandated by the city for any construction site.

• When is the earliest that construction on the superblocks would start?

Construction on the superblocks cannot begin until our report is submitted and reviewed by the University and construction plans are drawn up. In order for the City-approved plan to be vested, some construction needs to take place within 10 years of the date the plan was approved (July 2012), plus any time the plan is being reviewed in the courts. Our current estimate is that construction on the southern superblock could begin no sooner than summer 2015 at the very earliest.

• What do we say to faculty we are recruiting about the construction?

We should be scrupulously straightforward about the kind of construction that might take place, what it’s for and where it will be. Right now, it seems reasonable to explain that the university is struggling with issues of academic space and student and faculty housing, and has put forward a plan for extensive construction on the two superblocks. This plan is currently the subject of much controversy and discussion, and is under review by the Working Group. The overarching goal of everyone involved in the process is to assure the necessary academic, housing, and administrative space needed for the university to serve its students and faculty well now and in the future.
• What happens to available gymnasium facilities if Coles is demolished? Will we get stipends to go to private gyms?
   The Working Group will consider various options to address the loss of the Coles facilities to student athletic teams and clubs, as well as student, faculty, and staff users during construction, and make appropriate recommendations.

• What will happen with the retail spaces on LaGuardia Place?
   NYU owns the LaGuardia Place commercial strip from Bleecker St to 3rd Street. Existing retailers along LaGuardia will remain in place (subject to the conditions of their leases) until at least 2022, the earliest point of construction on the northern block.

• Will a public school be part of the Bleecker Street building?
   The City approved plan gives the School Construction Authority until the end of 2014 to decide if it wants to partner with NYU to undertake construction on the current site of Morton Williams. If the SCA exercises that option, a public school (K-8) would occupy the above grade space (up to 100,000 sq. feet), and NYU would have access to 70,000 sq. feet of below grade space. SCA would pay the cost of constructing and outfitting the school space.

   If the SCA decides not to build a school, the site reverts to NYU which, if it chooses to build on the site, would be obligated to dedicate a minimum of 25,000 square feet of space for community use and to cover the entire building’s construction costs.

Allocation and Use of Current and Proposed New Space
• What are the criteria or principles for determining space needs and for allocating space?
   The Working Group is taking a multi-dimensional approach to this question. First, we are assessing space needs by type: classroom space, study space, department and office space, laboratories, studios, performance space, event space, athletic and recreational space, and residential space (faculty and student housing). Second, we are assessing space by the needs of constituents, primarily faculty, students, and administrators. Third, we are assessing space needs in relation to proximity to the core: what types of space and what needs should be given priority in and around the Washington Square core?

• Why can’t we teach on Saturdays and Sundays as a way to deal with the classroom shortage?
   Some schools already teach on Saturdays and Sundays, primarily at the graduate level with a focus on professional training. The Working Group is considering the possibility of an all-University weekend schedule for undergraduate classes.

• Are you going to make recommendations on what is going to be included in any new space?
   Our recommendations will be specific about types of spaces and how we think they should be prioritized.
• Will there be student study space and club life space in the new buildings?  
We are very conscious of the need for student study space and extracurricular space for student life.

• Does the committee plan to address the residential and communal needs of graduate students?  
The Working Group is looking at residential options for all students.

• Why can't we use the buildings that NYU owns already?  And what buildings does NYU own already?  
NYU has been relocating administrative offices to buildings outside the core for the past decade, freeing up space near Washington Square for classrooms, academic departments, and labs. NYU's real estate holdings and leases are available here and the potential of recommending new uses for these buildings is within the purview of the working group.

• Is there really a need for more faculty housing in the core?  
The total vacancy count in units was reported at 122 in February 2013 -- with many units currently undergoing renovation, primarily to combine a number of smaller units into 2 or 3 bedroom units. Based on current departure and retirement rates, the Office of Faculty Housing projects that NYU needs an additional 90 units of faculty housing. The general view of the Housing Office is that the current supply of two- and three-bedroom faculty apartments may be insufficient to meet the needs of faculty with young children and families. Faculty housing raises important questions: Even if new units are needed, do they have to be built in the core? Might the need for larger units be better addressed by asking “empty-nesters” – faculty whose children no longer live at home full-time – to downsize to smaller units? Should the University consider a new loan program to encourage faculty to purchase housing elsewhere?

Enrollment and Tuition

• What are the enrollment assumptions built into the financial plan?  
The University’s plan envisions a 0.5% annual growth rate in undergraduate enrollments, which would mean approximately a 5% increase after 10 years and approximately 10% after 20 years. There are no projected increases in the numbers of graduate students.

• What will happen to tuition?  
There are no explicit tuition numbers in the University’s plan, but the University generally assumes that tuition increases would still rise somewhat faster than the general rate of inflation, though at a more moderate rate of increase than in the recent past.

• Why can’t NYU admit fewer students?  
While it is certainly reasonable to assume that NYU would need less space if the University became significantly smaller than it is, any serious analysis discussion of significant reductions in enrollment raises fundamental questions about NYU’s academic and
in institutional mission. These are questions for the University Senate, the Administration, and the Board of Trustees to consider.

Finance

More detailed information on the questions below can be found in the presentation to the Working Group by NYU Exec VP Martin Dorph on November 29, 2012:
http://www.nyu.edu/content/dam/nyu/spacePriorities/documents/Dorph_Presentation_11.29.12_Final.pdf

- Will NYU 2031 bankrupt the University?
  NYU has been running annual cash surpluses and expects to be able to continue to do so. The Finance Subcommittee expects to receive more information about contingencies and stress tests. The NYU plan is not envisioned as “an all-or-nothing” project. In fact, the financial plan above puts the NYU core project into a larger context. The plan describes overall University capital requirements over the next ten years of approximately $3 billion (about the same rate of capital investment that has occurred in the past ten years). Of that amount, the NYU core plan accounts for about 25% of the total investment. The remainder goes for ongoing capital maintenance, renovations of existing facilities, and new construction in locations other than NYU’s core campus (notably in Brooklyn and at the Medical Center campus). This plan was vetted by the University’s Board of Trustees, which put clear limits on the financial “envelope” within which it must fit.

- How will NYU pay for the construction?
  NYU will borrow, do fundraising and use operating surpluses to fund the construction. According to current University estimates, if the first project on the southern block was built to maximum density, (the “Zipper Building”) the capital cost would be $834 million, with debt of $784 million (again, more aggressive fund raising would reduce the debt). The aggregate annual debt service would be $56.9 million; with revenue offsets (from student dorms, and some commercial leasing), the net annual cost would be $37.2 million. With aggressive and successful fund raising, these annual numbers could decrease to $38.8 million and $19.7 million, respectively, but the University has not used these more aggressive assumptions in its modeling. These payments would come from NYU’s annual operating budget.

- Will salaries have to be reduced or annual increases limited to cover the costs of construction?
  NYU’s own financial projections envision that salaries would stay competitive, and that salaries would rise at a rate that is slightly less than the rise in tuition, which is consistent with recent history.

- Will there be cost overruns on buildings like those that happened at the New School and Cooper Union, which resulted in tuition increases and salary constraints?
It is hard to predict cost over-runs. NYU current construction planning includes contingencies for added costs of design and engineering and for possible added costs of construction, as well as an allowance for cost escalation due to inflation. The Finance Subcommittee has asked for more information about this. Some of NYU’s recent construction projects – most recently, the Kimmel Center and Global Center for Academic and Spiritual Life – have come in at or below budget.

**Online and Technology-enhanced Education**

- How is the Working Group taking account of online education as a factor in assessing current and future needs for space?

While the impact of Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs) and online education is difficult to predict, the Working Group is making the assumption that online education will be not be used to supplant face-to-face contact in classrooms, labs, and studio space. We will develop proposals that we believe are prudent both in terms of the University’s current academic mission and its fiscal well-being. It’s important to remember that the Working Group is focused on making recommendations for a little more than 50 percent of the projected space needs for the core.