Superblock Stewardship Advisory Committee Meeting
Meeting Summary

Meeting Date: Thursday, June 19, 2014


Members not in attendance: Franklin Diaz, Angela Kamer

1. Comments from the Chair

Chair Larry Maslon called the meeting to order and emphasized, in preparation for a discussion about assessing the qualifications of architectural firms, that the Committee be mindful of its ability to take advantage of the opportunity to contribute to attracting a prestigious architectural firm. In addition, he emphasized that the Committee members take seriously their roles as representatives of particular constituencies.

At the request of the Chair, Lynne Brown, Senior Vice President for University Relations and Public Affairs, outlined the structure of the architect selection process and where the SSAC fits in. She indicated that the decision team includes University Leadership (President, Provost, EVP Operations, EVP Finance, and others) and that the SSAC will be providing valuable input and advice at key decision points that will be given strong consideration by the decision team. It is important, she noted, that the Committee be clear in expressing its values, especially at key project decision points.

2. Independent Consultant RFQ Draft

Senior Director Kenny Lee introduced a set of guiding principles that would inform a Request for Qualifications (RFQ) for the independent consultant that was recommended in the University Space Priorities Working Group’s final report. He invited the feedback of Committee members via email. One member emphasized the need for the consultant to conduct its analysis in an independent manner, separate from the university, and for the firms to identify their connections and prior working experience with NYU.

Lee will incorporate the feedback received and will share an RFQ document with the Committee for their input at their next meeting. The RFQ, Lee noted, will be distributed to 10 firms that seem likely to have the necessary qualifications for this project.
3. Window Replacement

The Committee discussed the status of the window replacement project. Kenny Lee provided an update on the project for Washington Square Village, indicating that windows will be replaced with a new, double-paned window. The Division of Operations, he noted, is in the process of creating a strategy for notifying residents and gaining access to apartments to measure windows. Work on Washington Square Village window replacement is expected to begin in the fall, starting with Building #4.

Regarding Silver Towers, Lee noted that the process is more complicated because of the landmark status of the building, which necessitates that the Landmarks Preservation Commission (LPC) approves any changes. Members raised questions about the replacement of narrow windows in some corner apartments, as well as the size of the proposed new PTAC units. Lynne Brown agreed to obtain answers to the Committee’s questions.

4. Presentation: Hilary Ballon, Overview/Principles of Urban Design

Hillary Ballon, Professor of Urban Studies and Architecture, presented a historical overview of the superblocks, describing the site’s origin as an urban renewal project through to the present day. She detailed the acquisition of the Washington Square Village apartments by NYU and the University’s building of Silver Towers.

She explained how architectural trends and best practices in urban design have changed over time, from the “tower in the park” idea reflected on the superblocks to the current preference for increasing density and re-connecting to the street grid. Ballon also provided information on recent development on other former urban renewal sites where open spaces have been filled in with new multi-use buildings.

5. Ongoing Stewardship Issues

Committee members were invited to share any stewardship issues that they have personally observed or heard about from their constituents. The matter of the lack of adequate signage in garden areas was raised again (continuing a discussion from the previous SSAC meeting on June 9, 2014). Concerns were also raised about the state of the green space behind Citibank that is often used by student/school groups to grow vegetables. It was agreed that these places should be visited during this Committee’s planned walking tour of the area at the next meeting on June 26, 2014. Chair Larry Maslon invited Committee members to email him with any further concerns.
6. Review of Architect RFQ Responses

Lee presented the project team’s preliminary assessment of the qualifications of each firm that submitted a response to the RFQ for architects. The firms were divided into three categories based on the overall “quality” of their submission as indicated by their responsiveness to the guiding principles set forth for architect selection and gauge of their capacity to handle a project of this size and scope. The Committee discussed the qualifications of these firms and signaled their general agreement with the project team.

Committee members raised questions and asked for further information about the project team’s assessment of two firms, in particular. Lynne Brown agreed to follow up and report back with responses to the Committee’s outstanding questions.

It was agreed that the final list of firms would be revisited at the next meeting on June 26 and that further feedback was welcomed via email in the interim.

7. Gym Replacement

Michael Patullo, Deputy Chief of Staff, provided an update on the status of the gym replacement. He noted that a Coles Advisory Committee (CAC) has been formed to provide input on this process. Patullo noted that the CAC had been presented with a general outline of the plan to meet fitness needs during the interim period. This plan, he said, would include the creation of a temporary fitness facility at 19-25 West 4th Street, in addition to extended hours of operation at the Palladium Athletic Facility and expanded fitness offerings in Brooklyn. He also indicated that faculty, retirees, administrators, staff, and their family members who are current Coles members would be eligible for memberships to local gyms at a preferential rate. The specifics of the fitness plan, he noted, are still under discussion. A further progress update on the status of meeting the needs for pool users, athletes, and other users will be provided as details become available.