Superblock Stewardship Advisory Committee Meeting

Meeting Summary

Meeting Date: Tuesday, October 7, 2014


Members Not in Attendance: Franklin Diaz, Angela Kamer, Beth Morningstar

*Executive Vice President Alison Leary and Senior Director Kenny Lee also attended.

1. Comments from the Chair

   Chair Larry Maslon proceeded directly to the business items of the meeting.

2. Architect Selection Next Steps

   Senior Vice President Lynne Brown updated the Committee on the recent developments in the process of selecting an architect, wherein the field was narrowed to two finalist firms (from five interviewees). She noted that, as requested, the Committee was provided with a written rationale from Executive Vice President Alison Leary.

   Members of the decision-making team, Brown noted, engaged in a working session at one of the firms’ offices earlier that day [October 7] and a session with the other finalist is planned for October 15. She indicated that both firms will be focused on testing each firm’s weaknesses and gaining insight into the operations of each team. Brown and Maslon, who also attended the October 7 meeting, provided a brief assessment of the meeting. In addition to the meetings with the finalists, NYU is also conducting reference checks, visiting completed projects, and undertaking due diligence.

   Following the October 15 session with the second finalist, the project team will compile a full evaluation of each of the firms to be shared with the Committee for discussion at its next meeting. Lee noted that he expects an architect to begin by mid-November.

3. Next Steps for Review and Evaluation of Independent Consultant Proposals

   Kenny Lee noted that three proposals had been received for the independent consultant role, and that links to view these materials would be distributed to the Committee. It was
explained that a wide range existed in the fees that each firm quoted, which could potentially be attributed to differing interpretations of the scope of work. The Committee was asked to review these proposals in advance of its next meeting, when a strategy for evaluation would be discussed.

4. Communications Update

Communications Manager Heather Skolnick provided an overview of the various strategies and mechanisms employed to communicate and engage stakeholders about projects on the superblocks, including the efforts planned for the Coles Redevelopment. She indicated that the Office of Government and Community Affairs (OGCA) works closely with the Division of Operations to keep apprised of the work undertaken on the superblocks every day, and is charged with interfacing with the local community and other concerned neighbors.

Skolnick noted that a variety of mechanisms are being utilized—including webpages, targeted emails, hard copy notices, etc.—to effectively target information to particular constituents or groups. One example of this, she raised, was the newly-created Superblock Progress Report, which was distributed to the Committee via email to provide a comprehensive update on the various projects that have been recently completed, are in progress, or are planned. Skolnick asked for feedback on the Progress Report and conveyed that it is particularly important for Committee members to feel well informed, so that they will be comfortable responding when constituents ask questions about the status of various projects.

It is anticipated, Skolnick indicated, that a University-wide communication would be sent out sometime in October, which will provide an overview of the various preparations undertaken for the Coles Redevelopment—including the formation of this Committee and information about the architect selection process. The message would also include the link to a newly-created webpage for the Coles Redevelopment. In addition, she said, targeted email outreach would be conducted to follow up on specific elements of the project with affected constituencies.

Members then provided feedback on the effectiveness of the current communications strategy. It was noted that some postings in faculty housing buildings have been left up well beyond their useful lives. Alison Leary suggested that Operations could systemize the removal of these notices to help mitigate that issue. Input was also offered on the accessibility and logical organization of webpages to facilitate information gathering, the availability of hard copies of announcements, and potential enhancements to the notification system(s) in building lobbies.

Members were particularly sensitive to the trade-off between the timeliness and accuracy of messages, as well as to ensuring that all relevant stakeholders (including non-affiliate spouses and neighbors, as well as students) received relevant information.
5. **Stewardship on the Superblocks**

With respect to ongoing stewardship, Maslon called on members to think about the Committee’s transition from construction-related issues to a greater focus on quality-of-life. He offered that the Committee could play a valuable role in creating a set of consistent policies to help govern the blocks. He also urged the Committee to think about ways in which effective lines of communications could be established with the Office of Faculty Housing and Residential Life.

Leary introduced a memorandum describing many ongoing stewardship issues faced by her office and asked for the Committee’s input on guidelines to help address them. She and Maslon emphasized that each of these issues are controversial, involve competing interests, and present possibly contradictory solutions. In addition, even in the face of a well-defined solution, ongoing enforcement was also a matter that needs to be addressed, Maslon noted. Leary offered that Public Safety officers are being added, and that they will be conducting increased walk-throughs on the superblocks. In addition, NYU’s Public Safety department has reached out the NYPD to find ways to strengthen the working ties between the two entities.

As a path forward, Maslon suggested that the Committee begin to discuss each of these issues at upcoming meetings with the goal of offering suggested guidelines to the University. Members suggested that the engagement of experts or consultants could be valuable in understanding some of these issues—which are undoubtedly faced by other residential complexes in New York City—and reaching possible solutions. It was emphasized that decisions must not be undertaken unilaterally, given NYU’s unique position as an employer and a landlord, and that some consultative efforts would assist in determining possible strategies.

6. **Other Business**

As outlined in a previous meeting of the Committee, sidewalk protection is being installed at both Washington Square Village and Silver Towers during the window replacement project. Lee discussed potential coverings to improve the aesthetics of the bridging and presented two possible options approved by the City under its Urban Canvas program. The Committee chose the design that featured a foliage pattern and will be used on the protection once installed.