Superblock Stewardship Advisory Committee Meeting
Meeting Summary

Meeting Date: Tuesday, October 21, 2014

Members in Attendance: Rachel Belsky, Lynne Brown, Sewin Chan, Jeff Goodwin, Anne Hearn, Michael Hengerer, Alison Leary, Kenny Lee, Larry Maslon, Allen Mincer, Julia O’Connor, Michael Patullo, Rosemary Scanlon, Heather Skolnick, Eero Simoncelli

Members Not in Attendance: Barbara Albrecht, Neal Herman, Angela Kamer

1. Comments from the Chair

Chair Larry Maslon convened the meeting and called on Senior VP Lynne Brown for an update on the recent court ruling and on the deadline on which the Schools Construction Authority must exercise its option to commit funding to locate a public school on the Bleecker Building site.

2. Lawsuit and SCA Update

Brown provided a summary of the ruling issued by the First Department of the Appellate Division of the New York State Supreme Court on October 14. She indicated that the court issued a unanimous decision in the City’s—and, by implication, NYU’s—favor, which stipulated that the three strips of land in contention do not constitute parkland by implication and affirmed the validity of the ULURP process. The petitioners, Brown noted, have 30 days from the date of the decision to petition the New York State Court of Appeals to hear an appeal, though the Court of Appeals is not obligated to do so (the Court’s decision process could take approximately two months from the date of the petition). There is no legal barrier that currently prevents NYU with proceeding with the plans for the Coles Redevelopment, Brown affirmed.

Regarding the Schools Construction Authority (SCA), which—as negotiated during ULURP—has until December 31, 2014 to exercise the option to construct a public school on the Bleecker Building site, Brown indicated that NYU has been asked to extend the deadline. While NYU was reluctant to consider any changes to that deadline while the litigation was pending, the University has agreed to grant an extension to allow enough time for the SCA to include the project in its next capital plan. Brown said that a copy of the official letter communicating this extension to Council Member Margaret Chin will be shared with the
Committee. It is important to note, Brown raised, that no construction is permitted on the Bleecker site until the completion of the Coles Redevelopment.

Committee members inquired about the relationship between this extension and the decision to include a supermarket in the Coles Redevelopment building. It was noted that any new building on the current site of Morton Williams does not allow for a supermarket, due to zoning restrictions, and that the Committee will continue to be involved in providing input into any decision that is reached regarding a supermarket on the Coles site.

3. Architect Selection Update

The process of selecting an architect for the Coles Redevelopment building has continued since the Committee’s last meeting. Members of the University Leadership and project team, as well as Chair Larry Maslon (on behalf of the Committee), have held working sessions at the offices of each finalist firm and have visited completed projects in New York City. In addition, Kenny Lee and others have conducted due diligence reviews, including checking references and discussing fees.

Maslon shared that he believed that both finalist firms have the requisite experience to produce an outstanding building for NYU. He also indicated that both firms interacted well with the NYU team and seemed likely to interface with the community in a respectful and productive way.

Upon the completion of this comprehensive evaluation process, including feedback from Maslon, a decision will be made. The project is expected to be awarded in November.

[NB: The names of the architectural firms are not included in this summary, due to the sensitive and confidential nature of the selection process.]

4. Superblock Demographics

Executive Vice President Alison Leary provided the Committee with information about the demographic makeup of the superblock’s housing units, including data on number of apartments, affiliates and non-affiliates, length of residency, apartment size, pets, children, and vacancy rates. The Committee had previously requested this information in order to better understand the constituencies represented.

5. Security and Upgrades

Looking ahead to the Committee’s increasing focus on issues related to ongoing Stewardship, Maslon raised that the security and ongoing improvements of various areas on the superblocks should be considered by the Committee.
In particular, Maslon asked for further information related to the activation of and future plans for the retail strip on LaGuardia place. Brown noted that, historically, it has been a challenge to manage and retain viable businesses there, due to the setback from the street and the inability of some former businesses to keep up with rent payments. Leary reminded the Committee that NYU new uses are planned for the currently-vacant storefronts. She noted that planning has begun for renovations that will allow the spaces to accommodate an ITS computer lab and a 3D printing lab. Renovation work, she said, will begin later this year and work is expected to be complete sometime next year.

In the meantime, NYU Operations has already cleaned up the vacant storefronts, including the removal of graffiti, painting, and backlighting during the evening hours. It was suggested that the community be informed about the plans for the vacant retail via signs, mentions in the faculty news brief, or via other mechanisms.

Issues related to the integrity of the pavement on the north-south walkways in the interior of Washington Square Village were also raised. Members noted that the curbs and sidewalks had deteriorated in some places and that the current conditions could pose a safety risk. Leary noted that to be done correctly, the walkway improvement project will be extensive and costly. Based on the information received from the Committee earlier this year, she said, the reconstruction of these areas is slated for FY15-16, once the window replacement project—which includes sidewalk bridging that would interfere the ability to complete this project—is completed. Leary did indicate, however, that continued short-term repairs could continue to be applied until the major capital project is undertaken.

Leary explained that desired improvement projects, which require significant funding, could not all be completed simultaneously or immediately. She welcomed input from the Committee on the relative priorities of these projects so as to better understand the desires of tenants and improve quality of life, while adhering to the funding constraints. Maslon reiterated the need for attention to the north-south walkways and reminded NYU Operations that a request had been made to prioritize those repairs during the July SSAC meeting.

6. Committee Organization

Maslon proposed that dividing into two subcommittees—one focused on construction and mitigation (with respect to the Coles project) and the other dealing with ongoing stewardship issues—could be an efficient way to undertake some of the Committee’s upcoming tasks. Members were asked to provide their subcommittee preference, which will be used to inform the composition of the groups and the agendas of future meetings.