Superblock Stewardship Advisory Committee Meeting
Meeting Summary

Meeting Date: Tuesday, December 16, 2014

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

1. Architect Selection Update

Senior Vice President Lynne Brown announced the selection of Davis Brody Bond and KieranTimberlake as architects for the Coles Redevelopment project. She and Executive Vice President Alison Leary thanked the Committee for its involvement in the selection process—the most extensive and inclusive architect selection process that NYU has ever undertaken.

Brown indicated that the partnership’s design and sustainability credentials—reflective of two of the most important criteria as developed in conjunction with the committee—made the firms especially attractive to NYU. In addition, she emphasized the firms’ deep academic and institutional client list, proposed front-loaded engagement process, and in-house sustainability research practice as key factors in the selection. An announcement to the University Community, Brown noted, would be released later in the week and would be accompanied by a press release.

Some Committee members who were not present for the latest meetings and site visits with the finalist firms asked those who were present for their reactions to the selection. The Committee members shared their opinions about both finalists, and were unified in their strong support for both firms noting, however, that KieranTimberlake’s location in Philadelphia could present a risk. It was decided that it is among Committee’s duties to hold the selected partnership to fulfilling the high demands inherent to the project, as well as to support the selection to the highest degree possible going forward.

Members then discussed the process for engaging the NYU Community with the architects. The Committee suggested that meetings be set with relevant constituent groups across the University following the start of the spring semester. It was suggested that a balance between public forums and targeted outreach to particularly interested/affected constituent groups would allow for the most productive and inclusive dialogue. Specific
strategies discussed included town hall meetings, a display of the architects’ work in an open-house style space, and student-led conversations.

2. Independent Selection Update

Construction/Mitigation Subcommittee Chair Barbara Albrecht reported that she, along with Senior Project Director Kenny Lee, led STV on a walk-through of the Coles site earlier in the week. Albrecht reported that STV’s approach will center on an extensive matrix that provides a detailed comparison of the mitigation framework outlined in the Restrictive Declaration with NYC Code and other applicable standards, as well as the anticipated effects of construction, commentary and recommendations, and feedback from NYU.

Following an initial analysis and with input from the Subcommittee, Albrecht indicated that STV recommended prioritizing four mitigation categories wherein residents may be most affected—noise, air quality, pest control, and traffic. Less intrusive items that would still be addressed include dewatering, vibration, and historical and cultural preservation.

The Subcommittee noted the importance of completing this analysis quickly. Albrecht noted that STV plans to issue its final report by mid-February, before which there would be several meetings with the Subcommittee to monitor progress and shape the final report.

3. Discussion: Draft Policies Governing Open Spaces on the Superblocks

Larry Maslon, who also serves as chair of the subcommittee on ongoing stewardship, provided an overview of the Subcommittee’s recent work, which has focused on developing a framework for the utilization of existing open spaces on the superblocks. The Subcommittee, he noted, has begun to explore the ways in which existing open spaces on both blocks could be used either actively or passively. He stressed the importance of balancing the creation of passive (i.e. quiet, discreet, contemplative) spaces with those for more active uses (i.e. child play, recreation, events).

Maslon then presented maps of each superblock, overlaid with proposed categories of use. On the Northern block (Washington Square Village), the Committee discussed the following:

- Activating play space for children who “age out” of the Key Park, possibly at LMNOP along Mercer
- Designating Sasaki Garden as a passive space
- Creating an active space on one of the plots behind the retail strip on the La Guardia Street side, access to which could be governed by a committee of residents

On the Southern Block, the Committee discussed:

- Activating the Oak Grove as a play area
- Making the grassy plaza around the Bust of Sylvette a passive space, perhaps with some approved seasonal exceptions
Maslon reiterated that further discussion was needed, especially with regard to dogs, fencing, seasonality, signage/wayfinding, enforcement, and community engagement. He also noted that the planned improvements to the public open spaces on Bleecker Street and La Guardia Place are in the process of gaining approvals—after input from the Open Space Oversight Organization and Community Board #2—from the Public Design Commission. The Committee agreed that consulting with experts would be an appropriate next step in advancing the discussion.