Superblock Stewardship Advisory Committee Meeting
Meeting Summary

Meeting Date: Monday April 27, 2015, 3:30-5:00PM

Meeting Location: President’s Conference Room, Bobst Library, 12th Floor

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

Members Not in Attendance: Jeff Goodwin, Allen Mincer, Angela Kamer

Invited Guests: George Reis, NYU Sustainable Landscaping

1. Comments from the Chair

Committee Chair Larry Maslon opened the meeting asking for feedback on the University wide “Meet the Architects” forum which was held earlier that afternoon in the Kimmel Center. The Committee commented that attendance was very good and there were a cross section of participants from different parts of the University. Malson thanked those who organized the event. It was noted that the architects present very well and are able to glean information from meeting participants in a structured way. The Committee agreed these important skills further validated the selection of the Davis Brody Bond and KieranTimberlake architectural partnership for the project.

One Committee member reacted to an athletics coach who was unaware of the department’s collaboration with the architects and expressed a potential need to provide additional opportunities for members of the University to review and comment on the architects’ programming process. It was also noted that not all end users will have the same access to input due to logistics and departmental assigned involvement.

Maslon noted that the Committee is nearing its one year anniversary and ongoing stewardship issues around the superblocks will be the upcoming area of focus.

2. Debrief Discussion: Stewardship Roundtable

Malson asked the Committee to reflect on the outside expert roundtable panel discussion, which was held on March 30, 2015, and comment on any ideas that resonated with the group to improve life of the superblocks. Malson added there were
two aspects of stewardship that he drew from the roundtable panel discussion: programming and enforcement.

Programming resonated as positive way to promote community and encourage neighborly behavior. Organizing activities that promote a sense of ownership for the open spaces around the superblocks was viewed as a good step toward creating the types of community outcomes desired by the Committee.

Other members of the Committee agreed that programing may be a more effective way to foster a sense of community on the superblocks by promoting ways to engaging neighbors, getting to know one another, and encouraging the use of open spaces around the blocks. It was suggested that a Committee be convened to review rules on the superblocks with an eye toward identifying spaces that could be used appropriately for programming. This Committee could also establish a process for program approval.

Regarding enforcement, Malson reflected on approaching a fellow resident and requesting that he refrain from using the Bust of Sylvette as a back stop to a game of soccer. The response was less than neighborly, with the resident expressing there was no other options for soccer playing around the blocks.

Alison Leary, Executive Vice President for Operations, echoed Larry’s concern on enforcement. Leary explained that the rules and regulations for residents on the superblocks lack consequences for misbehavior; specifically with regard to such things as smoking, dog owners who do not pick up after their pets, bird feeders of terraces, etc. NYU Public Safety officers are authorized to ask people to adhere to the rules, but cannot write summons or physically remove people from open spaces around the superblocks. Reflecting on the roundtable panel discussion, it was noted that Battery Park City for example, is considered a public park with Park Enforcement Patrol (PEP) officers who can enforce the posted park rules through written summons.

Leary confirmed that a “Rights and Responsibilities” handbook is distributed to tenants both when they move into NYU Faculty Housing and during lease renewals.

It was suggested that the Committee think about a fine system for infractions that could be tied to rent bills. Proceeds from fines could possibly be used for program funding.

It was also noted that the “roll out” of new policies should be strategic to ensure the residents and neighbors who use the spaces on the superblocks understand why the policies were adopted, to encourage compliance and ideally generate a sense of community respect.
Surveillance cameras were suggested as a way to monitor infractions.

Lynne Brown, Senior Vice President for University Relations & Public Affairs advised that the committee focus on a list of general recommendations that can be offered to university administration to structure and submit back to the committee for approval for implementation. She also noted that the open spaces on the superblocks do not have the same issues and jurisdiction of Battery Park City. The guidelines should be tailored to the needs of the superblocks.

It was suggested that guidelines be developed in a way that is community focused. Develop programming that will encourage positive, neighborly behavior; policy recommendations that are enforceable and can be communicated; and prioritizing education over punitive enforcement.

Leary offered to bring renderings and cost estimates to the Committee based on a study performed by Operations on ways to physically improve the superblocks (e.g. fence removal, strategic sign placement, and driveway sidewalk widening).

Michael Patullo, Deputy Chief of Staff, emphasized looking at priorities and providing general direction and recommendations. From those recommendations, the University could make suggestions for implementation, which the Committee can review and react to.

3. Open Space Update

George Reis, from NYU Sustainable Landscaping, presented on landscape updates that are taking place this spring including, tree removals, replanting, lawn seeding, and walkway improvements.

A discussion about the Landmarks Preservation Commission as related to the width of the diagonal walkway from Bleecker Street into the Silver Towers plaza ensued. Leary noted it is possible to obtain variances on Landmark status; however it is time consuming and could be costly.

Rachel Belsky, Project Director, provided an update on the open space improvements planned for the two strips of parkland on Bleecker Street and LaGuardia Place. Walkways will be revamped for more accessibility; vegetation will be native and varied; and fences and benches will reflect materials from the adjacent areas to make the space feel connected.

4. Final Thoughts
Lynne Brown announced that an Independent Construction Monitor has been selected and now needs to be approved by New York City Planning Commission. This is a ULURP required position, which is paid for by NYU and reports to the City. The firm HDR was selected for their extensive experience, having performed monitoring for NYC City Planning on projects at Columbia University and Atlantic Yards.

As we are coming up on an anniversary, an end of year reception dinner was mentioned and tentatively scheduled for 5/11 following a regular meeting.