“The neatness of architecture is its seduction; it defines, excludes, limits, separates from the ‘rest’—but it also consumes. It exploits and exhausts the potentials that can be generated finally only by urbanism, and that only the specific imagination of urbanism can invent and renew.”

—Rem Koolhaas

(From S, M, L, XL: Small, Medium, Large, Extra-Large)
6. The Core
At its heart, NYU 2031 recognizes the primacy of the University’s central location at Washington Square. Its home there is fundamental to NYU’s identity and mission.

NYU seeks to concentrate both academic and residential growth in its core. The plan defines seven districts within the area—an entirely new way of thinking that serves both as an organizing principle and as a way to determine appropriate modifications. The largest changes are proposed for the two southern superbblocks. Combined with continued reuse and some new development and focused improvements to open spaces in the other districts, which will be revitalized based on the strengths of their individual characteristics, the strategy is to forge a clearer link between NYU and the neighborhood.
Development Approaches

In the core, the basic development approach is tailored to the already-diverse contexts that constitute NYU’s location at Washington Square.

1 Seven Districts
A diverse array of urban contexts exists within the core, from early 19th-century town houses north of Washington Square Park, to late 19th-century loft buildings east of the park, to 20th-century superblock developments to the south. By considering the core as seven distinct districts and indicating the appropriate approach, the plan respects and preserves this diversity, breaking down the apparent scale of NYU and enhancing the University’s integration into the surrounding city.

2 Mixed Use
Many of NYU’s buildings in its core suffer from inactive ground floors. The plan seeks to identify appropriate locations to add mixed-use buildings or introduce new uses into existing buildings with a particular focus on active ground floors, whether retail, performance spaces, galleries, or other places of public invitation into NYU buildings.

3 Enhanced Public Realm
The plan leverages the large-scale projects proposed for the superblocks to reimagine their extensive but fragmented and often underutilized public open spaces. In addition, the plan seeks to create new or enhance existing University landscapes, a new type of open space that is distinct from but complementary to the city’s public parks. These landscapes and targeted streetscape improvements will give a new sense of place to NYU, to the benefit of everyone.

4 Pedestrian Network
While this plan takes a contextual approach to University growth in different districts in the core, NYU is mindful of the need to create and enhance the network of pedestrian routes that stitch these districts together. Much of this network will exist on city streets, whose vitality and integration with the city NYU seeks to enhance. On the superblocks, strengthened pedestrian-only routes will break down the scale of the superblocks and knit them back into the city.
Rethinking the Core as Distinct Districts

To begin with, NYU 2031 recognizes and addresses seven separate and distinct areas within the core, each specific in its urban context.

1. **Washington Square North**
   Encompassing four- to five-story town houses and Washington Mews, many of the buildings on these blocks date to the 1830s as residences for New York’s wealthier citizens. Over the years, the University has incorporated academic departments and programs into several of the buildings while also housing NYU faculty.

2. **Washington Square West**
   In an area characterized by several prewar buildings, NYU acquired former hotels and apartments for residential use in the 1950s as part of an effort to attract more full-time and out-of-city students as well as to offer housing for faculty.

3. **Washington Square East**
   NYU began to adapt the late 19th- and early 20th-century commercial buildings here as early as the 1920s. Many of these former garment industry buildings today house academic departments and classrooms, constituting the University’s academic heart.

4. **Washington Square South**
   NYU developed these blocks over the years and in varying architectural styles. Vanderbilt Hall to the west was built in the 1930s as home of the School of Law. NYU’s Hagop Kevorkian Center for Near Eastern Studies and King Juan Carlos I of Spain Center share the block with Judson Memorial Church (not University-owned). To the east is the Kimmel Center for University Life, built in 2001.

5. **Academic Superblock**
   The University developed this area from the 1960s to 1990s as NYU transformed itself into a cohesive academic community. The centerpiece of this block is Bobst Library, built between 1967 and 1973. Also here are buildings housing the Courant Institute, constructed in 1965-66, and a complex of buildings, plazas, and underground classrooms for the Stern School of Business. This is also the location of the University’s new “green” cogeneration plant.

6. **Washington Square Village Superblock**
   The two buildings that comprise Washington Square Village house NYU faculty, non-NYU residents, and a small number of graduate students and postdocs. The site was built in the late 1950s by private developers and sold to NYU in 1964. It also includes a strip of retail on La Guardia Place.

7. **University Village Superblock**
   NYU developed University Village between 1964 and 1966. Three towers—two for University faculty housing and the third a non-NYU, middle- and moderate-income residential building—surround an open plaza evoking the “towers in the park” style popular at the time. I. M. Pei designed the towers and the site, which was recently named a New York City landmark. The block also includes the Jerome S. Coles Sports and Recreation Center and a grocery store (which are not part of the landmarked site).
Core Districts
The Core / Districts

Subtle Interventions, Internal Enhancements, and Limited Opportunities

Ringed by historic districts and already well utilized, the five districts immediately surrounding Washington Square Park will see minimal changes by 2031. Each district merits different treatment, based on appropriate uses and immediate urban context.

In Washington Square North and West, the plan calls for historic preservation and continued stewardship. In Washington Square South and the Academic superblock, the plan primarily sets forth streetscape and public space improvements. Washington Square East will see the introduction of more active ground floors, such as retail.

Within these five districts, Washington Square East and the Academic superblock offer the only opportunities for development. The potential sites, which would yield limited square footage, are 15 Washington Place, 25 West Fourth Street, and the Cantor Film Center at 36 East Eighth Street.
Core Districts: Washington Square North

The north side of the park is an area of low-scale, residential buildings along Washington Square North, Washington Mews, and East Eighth Street, and restricted by the Greenwich Village Historic District. In its plan, NYU will focus on stewardship and preserving the existing historic character of the area, making little physical change beyond restoration, internal renovations, transformation of use, and improved accessibility.

Now a mix of residential and administrative uses, over time NYU will convert some of the current housing to academic and other programming that engages the public. Such a change is exemplified by current projects at 19 Washington Square North and 22 Washington Square North, where small houses were beautifully renovated internally and restored externally and are now homes to important academic programs. Such international departments and academically oriented centers are well suited to these smaller, individual sites.

Profile
— Small-scale residential buildings along Washington Square North, Washington Mews, and East Eighth Street

Constraints
— Greenwich Village Historic District

Opportunities
— Internal renovations for both academic and residential use
The west side of the park is home to 29 and 37 Washington Square West, a pair of gracious residential buildings constructed as apartment houses two years apart in the 1920s and designed by the firm of Gronenberg and Leuchtag. NYU purchased the buildings in the 1950s. Both have been well maintained and are currently used as residences for faculty and administrators. Between them, at the corner of Washington Place, is Hayden Residence Hall, an undergraduate residence. NYU purchased the 1929 apartment hotel in 1954, renovating it and adding nine stories.

There are no active ground-floor uses within these buildings, which is appropriate given their location on the park and the street’s residential character. As this area falls within the Greenwich Village Historic District and its uses are appropriate, change will be limited to proper maintenance, upgrades, and stewardship, and other internal renovations as needed.

Core Districts:
Washington Square West

Profile
— Residential buildings along Washington Square West for faculty and student housing

Constraints
— Greenwich Village Historic District

Opportunities
— Internal renovations to enhance quality of accommodations for faculty and students
In the blocks east of Washington Square Park stand an impressive array of 19th-century loft buildings that serve as the University’s major academic hub, particularly for classrooms, school and faculty departments, and laboratory space. Some residential housing is also located here. The area lies partially in the NoHo Historic District, and current zoning does not allow retail on bottom floors. The plan for this district is to maintain its architectural and historical qualities while better integrating academic buildings, many of which have underperforming ground floors, into city life where possible. In this area, already compact and well utilized, the strategy is to undertake internal renovations and repurposing to meet the critical academic functions of the core. Such renovations will follow key planning guidelines, such as shifting classrooms from upper floors to lower floors and adding faculty offices and laboratories to the upper floors. NYU owns three sites—13 Washington Place, 23 West Fourth Street, and the Cantor Film Center at 36 East Eighth Street—that remain viable for development in the near or longer term, including partial or complete rebuilding.

Profile
— Large loft buildings that serve as the University’s academic heart, composed of converted 19th-century buildings

Constraints
— NoHo Historic District on some blocks
— Zoning does not allow commercial retail

Opportunities
— Repurposing and renovation of buildings for academic functions
— Only three sites remain viable for expansion / redevelopment
Core Districts:

Washington Square South

The south side of the park features a range of larger institutional buildings constructed in the later half of the 20th century for academic use and student support. These include the NYU School of Law’s Vanderbilt Hall and Furman Hall as well as the Kimmel Center for University Life.

In this area, the University acknowledges the sensitivity of its position adjacent to Washington Square Park and will demonstrate a better appreciation for context and appropriate scale. Current projects include the Center for Academic and Spiritual Life and the law school’s new MacDougal Street facility, Wilf Hall. Following their completion, the district offers no potential for additional development.

Profile

— Southern border of Washington Square Park containing academic and student support buildings

Constraints

— Partially within the proposed Historic District

Opportunities

— Development of the Center for Academic and Spiritual Life and Wilf Hall
Core Districts:
**The Academic Superblock**

Part of the urban renewal plan of the 1950s, this superblock was created specifically for educational use. With the exception of Shimkin Hall (the only pre-1960 building not demolished at the time), it consists entirely of buildings that were purpose-built for NYU between the 1960s and 1990s, including Bobst Library as well as facilities for the Stern School of Business and Courant Institute of Mathematical Sciences.

Projects under way involve internal renovations and improvements. These include the addition of classrooms and student gathering spaces in the basement of Bobst, renovation of Tisch Hall’s classrooms beneath Gould Plaza, the expansion and modernization of the cogeneration plant beneath Warren Weaver Hall, and the creation of a new public space on the corner of West Fourth and Mercer streets.

---

**Profile**

— Academic buildings developed between the 1960s and 1990s, including Bobst Library, Stern School of Business, and Courant Institute of Mathematical Sciences

**Restrictions**

— Part of the urban renewal plan

**Opportunities**

— Internal renovations and improvements creating additional research and teaching facilities
— Enhancements to the public realm
Following the completion of the new “green” cogeneration plant housed under 253 Mercer Street, NYU would create an inviting green public space, improving an important north-south passage that connects Washington Square East to the southern superblocks.
Looking to the Southern Superblocks

The five core districts that ring Washington Square Park, each with its distinctive scale and set of purposes, have served the University in meeting a range of needs crucial to its mission: libraries, classrooms, laboratories, student clubs and services, dining halls, faculty offices, and residences. But with the exception of the three sites mentioned (15 Washington Place, 25 West Fourth Street, and the Cantor Film Center at 36 East Eighth Street), NYU has for the most part fully utilized these districts, and they offer no more opportunities for development.

Furthermore, the historic districts of Greenwich Village, SoHo, and NoHo surround the core districts to the west, south, and east, and current zoning rules do not allow classrooms or faculty or student residences in some areas east of Broadway.

If the University is to be able to add academic programs and residential capacity at its core, the two southern districts, or superblocks, offer the only significant opportunity.

There are only three remaining sites in the Core available for development, yielding very little additional square footage (approximately 180,000 GSF) for the University’s future. The projects currently under construction are accounted for in the six million square feet.

Based on remaining Core opportunities and the surrounding historic district and zoning restrictions, development of the superblocks, becomes a critical component as the University contemplates its future growth needs.
The Superblocks
A New Academic and Residential Center

The two southern superblocks present the most significant opportunity for NYU to accommodate future growth on its own land. The addition of vital new academic and residential centers here will transform the overall experience of NYU’s presence at Washington Square.

The approach is a contextual strategy that builds on the existing assets of the superblocks, avoiding one-size-fits-all interventions. It also provides an important opportunity to weave the superblocks back into the city, introducing mixed uses and active ground floors, improving streetscapes, and consolidating the site’s existing scattered and often inaccessible open spaces.
The Legacy of Urban Renewal

Washington Square Village and University Village are examples of urban renewal in New York City, bearing all of the aspirations and pitfalls of a radical and, at the time, untested ideal.

Through the National Housing Act of 1949 and its provisions for “slum clearance,” New York City cleared a full nine city blocks to form the three superblocks that stand today. The Washington Square Southeast redevelopment project, as it was named, began in 1954 and removed existing buildings from Houston to West Fourth streets and from West Broadway (La Guardia Place) to Mercer Street. In 1955, NYU took ownership of the northern block between West Third and West Fourth streets for educational purposes. This block continues to be the academic center for the University. The privately owned Washington Square Village Corporation developed the two southern superblocks. Designed by Paul Lester Wiener, the planned residential project was set for completion in 1958. But after constructing the middle superblock (the existing Washington Square Village), the developers sold the unbuilt portion, the southern superblock, to NYU in 1960.

NYU hired I. M. Pei and Associates to design three towers on the southern superblock, to be known as University Village. Two of the towers were built for NYU faculty; the third tower, 505 La Guardia Place, is a Mitchell-Lama cooperative apartment building. The towers were completed in 1964, and in 2008 the New York City Landmarks Preservation Commission designated them and the site as a landmark. Two additional buildings on the superblock are not part of the landmarked site. These include the Morton Williams Supermarket site at the northwest corner of the block. It was owned by Grand Union Company and developed as a supermarket in 1961, as part of the Washington Square Village project; in 2000, NYU acquired it. The University completed the one-story Coles Sports and Recreation Center, on the eastern portion of the superblock, in 1981.

The Superblock Typology: Model for a Modern City

Proposed in the early era of the modern architecture movement, the superblock idea was a bold new approach to urbanism. A notable example is French-Swiss architect Le Corbusier’s vision, published in The Radiant City in 1935 and constructed most famously in Marseille. The “towers in the park” approach was a rational way of accommodating urban density, through the use of large buildings offset by surrounding vast open spaces. This new experimental and idealistic paradigm reconsidered the low-rise, low-density pre-industrial typology that dominated much of urban housing. By building vertically, the superblock minimized the building footprint, maximized the density of residential development, and provided greater distances between buildings.

The new model also aimed to improve ventilation and access to daylight in order to promote general health, sanitation, and well-being—driving principles of modern architecture. During Robert Moses’ tenure in New York City public housing, he encouraged this “towers in the park” idea as the new prototype for urban renewal and future housing projects.

Relationship to Landscape and Neighborhood

As an idealized model, the relationship between a building and its ground plane remained an unresolved problem. The superblocks were unable to relate to existing streets, thus creating an isolated entity within the urban fabric. Because of this inability to connect with the surrounding context, many “towers in the park” typologies were unsuccessful and eventually abandoned, demolished, or became blighted. Despite these disjunctions, both Washington Square Village and University Village remain vital, due in part to the proximity of vibrant neighborhoods and NYU’s academic core. In addition, the University’s continuous ownership, occupancy, and stewardship have contributed to this success.

Contemporary Need

After nearly 50 years, a contemporary understanding of the “towers in the park” typology has benefited from past failures. Although successful in many ways, the NYU superblocks struggle with some of the same issues that trouble many peer developments: lack of clear territorial definition, security, and a connection to the surrounding context. A rethinking of its urbanity and integration with the intimate Village context requires an innovative design approach.
Engaging the City

Since its founding, NYU has been embedded physically, culturally, and socially in the urban fabric of New York, to the enduring benefit of both the University and the city.

Preserving and enhancing the interdependence between the University and city is one of the principal tenets of this plan’s urban design strategy. As a primary objective, it fosters an increased engagement with the city. NYU 2031’s contextual approach draws from the urban fabric of the existing site. The intent is to preserve variety, differentiate rather than homogenize urbanity, and promote and celebrate the eclecticism of the city.

The northernmost superblock is an assembly of academic buildings. The Washington Square Village and University Village superblocks are residential developments of two different types. The Morton Williams supermarket and Coles Sports and Recreation Center were not part of the original site plan.

Lining the superblocks on the east and west sides are extremely wide sidewalk setbacks, the result of an urban renewal street-widening plan that never transpired. These were later programmed in a piecemeal fashion as a playground, dog run, community garden, Time Landscape, and La Guardia Gardens. In essence, the NYU superblock site is an eclectic urban collage, an assemblage of buildings and open spaces that came together by circumstance in an unplanned sequence.

The Legacy of Moses and Jacobs

Embedded in the site are the conflicting visions of two titans of modern urbanism: Robert Moses and Jane Jacobs. Moses conceived of cities from the aerial perspective, with large and bold gestures. He promoted large blocks and monolithic buildings with sparsely occupied open spaces and single separate uses. Jacobs’ advocacy of cities came from a street-level point of view. She promoted mixed use, short blocks, varied buildings, and densely occupied neighborhoods. For her, a city’s vitality is generated by the simultaneous existence of multiple scales and their contrasts; the friction produced contributes to the energy of urban life. Following Moses’ philosophy, the existing superblock site is an abrupt break from urban density and the texture of its surroundings.

Conceived as idealized models of urban living, the superblocks’ practical relationship to the ground plane and to street life was never addressed.

NYU’s intention in this plan is to respect and bring into balance these conflicting visions that coexist in the community.

Reorganization of the Site

NYU 2031’s approach defines both Washington Square Village and University Village as historic building types that need to be restored, preserved, and maintained. The site will be regenerated through intervention and addition, and it will be infused with new life and purpose. The different superblock typologies of the residential developments call for different responses. On the Washington Square Village superblock, the plan takes a densification approach by increasing the programming and use of the site; on the University Village superblock, the plan emphasizes contextual development, with a vertical tower to enhance the “towers in the park” idea and with the zipper design to match the buildings fronting Mercer Street.

This intervention is fundamentally conceived as a reorganization of the superblocks’ open spaces, so they operate as an active link to the surrounding University and city. The current ambiguous role of open space is redefined to help clarify its use and program. The design also consolidates and reorganizes existing open space programs to enhance their function. A new pedestrian network will be introduced to divide large blocks into smaller intimate-sized ones, adding more intersections to encourage active social interactions on the street level. This will help reduce the perceived size of the block and connect open space, infusing the site with more life and activity.

NYU 2031 proposes different building and landscape styles that respond to the scale and the context of the sites. Four different building types will be added to the superblock sites: a tower, academic lofts, Light Garden, and zipper building. These diverse types and spatial experiences will improve the quality of urban life.

The Core / The Superblocks

NYU 2031

1. Bust of Sylvette. In the courtyard at the center of University Village is an enlargement of a sculpture by Pablo Picasso. Norwegian sculptor Carl Nesjär executed the construction of the 60-ton concrete bust.

2. Drawing from an Eclectic Site

The three superblocks were developed with different motives at different times.

3. Sheets of facades. In the courtyard at the center of University Village is an enlargement of a sculpture by Pablo Picasso. Norwegian sculptor Carl Nesjär executed the construction of the 60-ton concrete bust.
The University Village Superblock
A Fourth Tower, New Student Residential and Academic Building, and Improved Public Open Space

NYU 2031 approaches the southern, or University Village, superblock with a contextual strategy that reflects the diversity of its development history: preserving its heart, building on its successes, and proposing bold interventions on the least successful portion of the site.

Adding a fourth tower, with space for faculty housing and a University hotel, and an expansive new playground at the supermarket site will enhance and extend the existing “towers in the park” concept of the landmarked site; a mixed-use building of a new type (the zipper building) will add needed student residential and academic space for NYU and will replace the current NYU Jerome S. Coles Sports and Recreation Center on Mercer Street.

The zipper building’s active ground floors (including a supermarket and street wall base) will enliven Mercer Street; its position will permit the consolidation of fragmented landscape elements to create functional and active landscapes that are inviting to the public and engaged with the street. These new landscapes, in turn, will frame and enhance the restored landmarked landscape at the heart of the block.
University Village:

Profile
— Major residential towers containing University housing and nonaffiliates; two other buildings contain the University’s primary athletic facility and a supermarket

Constraints
— Part of Urban Renewal Area Towers and site are landmarked

Opportunities
— Redevelopment on-site for additional University housing and hotel, improved athletic facility, academic, and retail uses
— Potential site of future public elementary school
Site Design Strategy:

A New Typology and an Expanded Landmark

The approach to the University Village superblock allows development on NYU’s property, while preserving and enhancing open space opportunities.

1. **Existing condition**
   On the landmarked site, three towers radiate in a pinwheel formation around a grassy central square; a one-story supermarket building occupies the corner of Bleecker Street and La Guardia Place outside the landmarked site. The one-story Coles Sports and Recreation Center, also outside the landmarked site, is set back from Mercer and Bleecker; its blank facades do not activate the street. The former Wooster Street axis remains as a private drive, while the former Greene Street is marked only by a narrow concrete walkway behind Coles.

2. **Add tower to pinwheel composition**
   The plan proposes a carefully composed addition to the “towers in the park” concept—a slender new pinwheel tower that respects the historic compositional and site planning principles of the original landmark, preserving existing sight lines. By building in this location, rather than on the supermarket site, access to light and views by the original towers can be maximized.

3. **Combine open spaces and expand Greene Street corridor**
   The narrow strip of open spaces at the eastern edge of the superblock—the legacy of an abandoned plan for street widening—is shifted to the west side of the Coles site, buffered from the traffic and loading docks on Mercer, benefiting from their adjacency to the landmarked landscape, and creating a generously planted pedestrian way along the axis of the former Greene Street.

4. **Add mixed-use zipper building**
   With its footprint shifted eastward from the old gymnasium site by the expanded Greene Street corridor, the new mixed-use zipper building’s active ground floors engage and activate Bleecker, Mercer, and Houston streets. It will contain a rebuilt gymnasium below grade; retail at the first level, including a supermarket; an academic podium on its lower floors; and student residences on the upper floors. The narrow profiles of the “zipper” sections above maximize access to daylight and natural ventilation, while echoes the rhythm of the older buildings to the east.

5. **Create major new open space at corner of La Guardia Place and Bleecker Street**
   By moving the existing supermarket into the ground floor of the zipper building, its site is freed to create a major new open space at the corner of Bleecker Street and La Guardia Place, which will extend the park-like setting for the towers and permit views into the center of the landmarked site from its four corners.

6. **Use active and accessible landscape to frame the landmarked site**
   The plan proposes well-dimensioned and richly planted spaces for active recreation at the corners of the landmark site, as well as public spaces for passive recreation along the western, northern, and eastern edges. These public edges will enliven and enhance the preserved landmarked landscape composition at the heart of the residential enclave.
Landscape and Streetscape: Preservation, Rehabilitation, and Regeneration

The superblocks’ large size relative to the small footprints of the buildings create opportunities for the landscape to play important roles only partially realized in the existing design.

With the proposal to remove the low-rise structure that houses the grocery store and add a fourth tower, NYU has an opportunity to rethink street-level relationships and optimize the various roles for landscape on the site.

One limitation of the modernist approach to urban design was an ambiguity of landscape. This has led to confusion between public and private space within the superblock and created spaces that lack a strong sense of ownership from either the community or the tower residents. New landscapes will both strengthen the setting for the towers and increase its usefulness to the neighborhood and residents alike. Strategies to bolster the peripheral open spaces will contribute to an active community life and create a semiprotected interior landscape.

On the site’s eastern edge, a public pedestrian thoroughfare will be created by shifting the architectural edge to the east. The new zipper building and a thickened low shrub layer to the west will frame the Greene Street corridor. This shortcut will be an asset for the neighborhood, encouraging new public use while augmenting the historic park-like surrounding of the landmarked towers.

The Greene Street corridor will be anchored by distinctive public landscape elements within the landmarked portion of the block. To the south, there will be an expanded and newly public toddler playground. At Bleecker Street, the sidewalk will wrap the edge of the existing oak grove to create an enlarged public street front.

At the corner of Bleecker Street and La Guardia Place, the relocation of the grocery store and the removal of the existing structure will allow for a more robust landscape surrounding the towers. A new public playground, accessible from the sidewalk, is arranged along an upwardly spiraled pathway. The La Guardia Corner Gardens will continue to operate in its original location, adding another layer of activity to this corner of the site.

In the southwest corner, Time Landscape, created by environmental artist Alan Sonfist, will be fortified with plant species that reinforce the artwork’s celebration of the original forested condition of Manhattan.

One limitation of the modernist approach to urban design was an ambiguity of landscape. This has led to confusion between public and private space within the superblock and created spaces that lack a strong sense of ownership from either the community or the tower residents. New landscapes will both strengthen the setting for the towers and increase its usefulness to the neighborhood and residents alike. Strategies to bolster the peripheral open spaces will contribute to an active community life and create a semiprotected interior landscape.

On the site’s eastern edge, a public pedestrian thoroughfare will be created by shifting the architectural edge to the east. The new zipper building and a thickened low shrub layer to the west will frame the Greene Street corridor. This shortcut will be an asset for the neighborhood, encouraging new public use while augmenting the historic park-like surrounding of the landmarked towers.
Pinwheel Tower

The plan proposes a carefully composed addition to the “towers in the park” design—a new pinwheel tower that respects the historic compositional and site planning principles of the original landmark. This strategy permits the creation of a significant new public open space on the former supermarket site, extending the park-like setting of the four towers and permitting views to the central space and Bust of Sylvette from all four corners of the site.

Zipper Building

The zipper building embodies a new typology for the superblock, which in effect turns the standard New York City block inside out: rather than a series of narrow lots under individual ownership, which enclose rear yard void space, the zipper building includes a continuous podium that creates a street wall, as well as narrow alternating dormitory segments above which reflect the grain of the older urban fabric across Mercer Street.
The I. M. Pei site plan anticipated a street widening that never took place. Inaccessible fenced planting areas were subsequently added along Bleecker Street. NYU 2031 calls for creating a 15-foot-wide sidewalk, reconstructed as a public landscape edge with seating and shade, which would frame the landmarked oak grove.

Shifting the footprint of the zipper building eastward would allow for a more direct relationship between the public ground floor and pedestrian activity on Mercer Street. An ample (20-foot-wide) sidewalk would provide room for tree planting, bicycle parking, and sidewalk cafes.
The Washington Square Village Superblock
A New Center and a Common Landscape

On the Washington Square Village superblock, the plan calls for preserving the existing superblock buildings with a carefully considered contextual infill strategy to maximize the site’s building capacity, particularly underground.

This will result in a significant new academic center for NYU and create an opportunity to integrate the fragmented open spaces into a true urban landscape that is open to the city, freely accessible east-west and diagonally, in addition to the north-south crossing currently possible. The University proposes two above-grade academic buildings with active ground floors for the eastern and western edges of the site, which will hold the street edges and create a mixed-use block.

The new above-grade buildings will frame a richly landscaped central open space, at the heart of which lies the Light Garden, bringing light and views below grade and creating an NYU student-centered outdoor space. The intent is to break the vast interior of Washington Square Village into smaller and more intimate spaces, promoting a park-like atmosphere. The buildings will be shaped to maximize the introduction of sunlight and minimize their impact on the existing Washington Square Village buildings.
Washington Square Village:

Profile
— Major housing complex for University affiliates and existing nonaffiliates with retail along La Guardia Place

Constraints
— Part of Urban Renewal Area

Opportunities
— Significant below- and above-grade opportunities to meet an array of University needs
— Enhancements to the public realm
— Potential site of future public elementary school
Site Design Strategy:  
A Superblock Response

The superblock scale of the existing buildings at Washington Square Village dictates a superblock response: the composition of the entire space between the buildings is considered as a whole.

1. **Existing condition**
   The existing central garden, while extensive, is elevated above ground level and accessible only by means of the former Wooster and Greene streets, which remain as semiprivate drives isolated from the public realm by the existing buildings through which they pass. Other green spaces are fragmented and often publicly inaccessible.

2. **Create a unified, publicly accessible ground plane**
   The fundamental design approach is to create a unified open space at ground level accessible to the public. The design removes vehicular access and levels the site so it can be seen and traversed on foot.

3. **Maximize below-grade space, use pavilions to define the street wall**
   Taking advantage of the opportunity presented by such a large, contiguous site, the plan proposes to create substantial new academic space below ground. The existing accessory parking for the residential buildings would be relocated to the southern block. Above-grade academic buildings are added at each end, reinforcing a sense of street wall along La Guardia Place and Mercer Street, while keeping the center of the superblock free.

4. **Shape buildings to animate the open space and frame pedestrian networks**
   Shaping the new buildings to create a strong diagonal view corridor across the site will also increase access to its interior, forming larger open spaces at the northwest and southeast corners that help connect the center of the superblock with the street.

5. **Orient site to bring light and green space below grade**
   To bring natural light and green space to the academic spaces below grade, the plan proposes a Light Garden, a generously scaled opening in the ground plane, which includes a gently sloped, richly planted landform. Accessed through the new buildings to ensure security, the Light Garden is an NYU open space.

6. **Fine tune for light and air**
   By curving the above-grade buildings and tapering them so that they become more slender at the top, the design improves access to light and air at the Light Garden and the open spaces at grade. These refinements also reduce the impact on the existing residential buildings, by tapering vertically and curving away from the buildings’ closest point—which is never less than 60 feet, the dimension between buildings on a typical Manhattan side street.
The plan proposes a new central outdoor space. This area will evolve into a key component of NYU’s urban identity, welcoming public use at the same time it creates new locations for the University community’s daily life and special events.

Currently a confusing hybrid space where partially accessible gardens are obscured by small gated entries, blocked sight lines, grade differences, and roadways, the midblock open area between the Washington Square Village buildings lacks clarity: it is difficult to distinguish private from public. This has resulted in a space that discourages many intended users.

In the proposed scheme, strong urban connections draw visitors into a new landscape. Generously scaled entrances on the eastern and western site boundaries create places for sitting and relaxation fully within access of the sidewalk. Park-like settings visible from these entries will draw users into the University space along broad bench-lined pathways.

Taking advantage of the full space alongside the existing buildings, an at-grade landscape, which connects north-south, east-west, and diagonally across the space, replaces the garden set atop a raised parking garage that currently occupies the center of the block. This new University space creates places for private study, small groups, and special events and will be open to public users for visiting or just passing through.

The form of the courtyard space and the arrangement of landscape elements allow for deep views, robust planting, usable space, sun exposure, urban connections, microclimatic comfort, and safety. For instance, the abundance of sunlight in the northwest corner of the central space and the likelihood of afternoon shade along the southern courtyard edge create two distinct opportunities for pocket lawn areas. Washington Square Village Plaza, a wide paved area with tables and chairs, which can also be used as an event space, looks into the Light Garden, sunk below the central courtyard space. A dedicated space for academic and student programming that will be housed in the new underground building, the Light Garden will also add depth and visual richness to the street-level courtyard experience.

The reconfiguration of the architectural space of the northern block creates a series of closely related urban landscapes that support active use by the entire neighborhood as well as providing diverse landscapes to meet the specific needs of the NYU community.
A New University Center

A new center on the Washington Square Village superblock maximizes the use of below-grade space for academics and serves as a new University hub. The superblock’s existing faculty housing buildings as well as the new academic buildings will all include ground-floor retail. The new landscape, which is at the same grade as city sidewalks, is a pedestrian thoroughfare and a “common ground” for interaction between students, faculty, and the public. Like the existing raised garden, the proposed at- and below-grade landscape provides a significant visual amenity for occupants of the adjacent buildings. Proposed plantings are dense close to the existing buildings, creating a natural buffer between residences and the public space.

The position of the proposed La Guardia Place building would create a new active edge along La Guardia Place and a sense of openness to the center of the block. Curving landscape elements would lead from the sidewalk into the site, while renovations to the lower floors of the existing Washington Square Village buildings would make them more transparent and inviting.
The new University landscape would include plantings with multiseasonal appeal that would contribute to the creation of intimately scaled spaces supporting a variety of social activities. Ample benches and lawn seating in a range of settings would draw in multiple users.

A generous public plaza in front of the new Mercer Street building would create a new social space in one of the superblock’s sunniest spots. Plantings would be contained by a continuous seating wall, creating a place for informal meetings, people-watching, and study.
A Core Re-Envisioned

Over the next 20 years, NYU’s core location at Washington Square will undergo significant change in order to mature academically, better serve the University’s community, and be successfully integrated into the city.

By building on the University’s existing property and avoiding a one-size-fits-all approach to its core areas, the plan meets NYU’s needs and programmatic goals while also improving its urban landscape for the public. NYU 2031 takes an important opportunity to weave University property back into the city, introducing mixed uses and active ground floors, improving streetscapes, and consolidating and enhancing existing—and often inaccessible—open spaces.

The addition of vital new academic and residential centers and a University hotel on the southern superblocks will transform the overall experience of NYU’s core. These new centers of activity will help create a more cohesive University form and circulation network, thereby forging a clearer link between NYU and the neighborhood.