“New York is the biggest collection of villages in the world.”

—Alistair Cooke
7. Neighborhood
For proximity and convenience, and for their cultural and intellectual richness, the neighborhoods within walking distance of NYU’s core are and will remain vital areas for the University and its community.

NYU 2031 sets limits as well as guidelines for future growth within the neighborhood. With a focus on adaptive reuse and preservation of the urban fabric through site selection and contextual requirements, the strategy is to promote a lively mix of use and habitation so that NYU can contribute significantly to the character of local communities.
Many Communities, Many Characteristics

The neighborhoods surrounding NYU are as diverse as New York City itself.

In this plan, the term “neighborhood” is defined as an area within approximately a 10- to 20-minute walk from NYU’s central location at Washington Square. It is bounded by 18th Street to the north; Canal Street to the south; Eighth Avenue, Hudson Street, and West Street to the west; and Allen Street and First Avenue to the east. NYU’s location near these rich and varied neighborhoods represents much of its appeal to students, alumni, faculty, and visiting scholars. In addition, their proximity to NYU makes them important options for the placement of functions that cannot be accommodated within the University’s core.

Strikingly diverse, these communities include the East, West, and South Villages; Greenwich Village; SoHo; NoHo; Hudson Square; Chelsea; Union Square / Flatiron; Murray Hill / Gramercy; Nolita; Little Italy; Chinatown; and the Lower East Side. Some of their boundaries are obvious even to the casual observer. One can clearly distinguish, for example, the northern boundary of SoHo (even without the help of Houston Street) and the southern boundary of the West Village by the changes in the building scale, materials, and use. Other boundaries, while well known by residents, are more vague to the visitor, such as where Greenwich Village ends and the West Village begins.

These areas, shown here based on the Department of City Planning’s official designation, are overlaid with different zoning, historic districts, community boards, political representation, and populations. As a result, each community has a distinctive character that can vary markedly from block to block. In each case where the University seeks a new location, a responsive approach to site selection and building design will yield results appropriate to these different contexts and, in doing so, help relieve some of NYU’s development pressure in these areas.
A Critical Symbiosis

NYU’s development history, stretching back to the 19th century, relied on the acquisition of commercial and residential buildings in the neighborhood, which proved an affordable way to gain the space necessary for a growing academic institution.

The Importance of the Neighborhood to NYU’s Future

NYU’s presence in the neighborhoods adjacent to its Washington Square location will continue to be an important component of its strategic growth. Over the next several decades, the University will assess opportunities in these areas and secure space that makes sense, taking advantage of such factors as the real estate market and identified academic, residential, and administrative needs. Specific sites and locations cannot be determined at this time, but this plan puts in place guidelines to direct NYU’s decisions and provide its neighbors with the greatest possible predictability.

The neighborhood will continue to provide locations for University uses that have strong ties to its central location at Washington Square. These will include administrative support for academic components; now in the core, support uses, such as offices, will be shifted away to make room for a greater concentration of academic and student-oriented uses there. Academic departments or research spaces that have limited student presence but need to be proximate to Washington Square are also potential uses for neighborhood sites. Student housing for upperclassmen may also be located in the neighborhood; freshmen and sophomores will continue to be located either within the core or within a short walking distance.

Mutual Benefits

For NYU, the benefits of neighborhood locations are clear, not only for proximity but because of the communities, amenities, and services in these urban areas. NYU’s presence has been of benefit to the neighborhood as well. From an economic perspective alone, NYU’s long-term tenancy bridges over economic cycles and brings stability. The University’s presence in the neighborhood also helps NYU achieve greater stability, livelihood, and environmental sustainability. The boundary of a 10- to 20-minute walking distance is meaningful. From all points within, NYU’s core is accessible by foot, bicycle, or a single subway stop.

Relieving Pressure on the Neighborhood

In the past, NYU and its neighbors have come into conflict over Jane Jacobs’ principle of diversity. In other words, can the neighborhood absorb the amount of growth proposed by NYU over the next 20 years and still retain the vitality that each person and institution here values about this unique place in Manhattan? These are real and important concerns for NYU and its neighbors alike; NYU 2031 addresses this issue by several means.

The plan begins by recognizing—for the first time—that the University must acknowledge that not all of its growth can be accommodated in the neighborhood. This approach requires NYU to prioritize what needs to be located in the core, what needs to be proximate to the core in the neighborhood, and what areas of growth are better aligned with one of the remote sites.

Second, from a social and urbanistic perspective, a university’s presence can have little impact on residents. For the majority of properties where NYU is a leaseholder, it occupies single or few floors among other unrelated tenants, and much of this is office space. In most places, an NYU building is the University’s only location on the block. The neighborhood buildings it occupies are a mix of old and new: 24 buildings constructed before 1950 and 10 built after.

Lastly, by establishing effective guidelines on appropriate use, site selection, and design of individual buildings, NYU 2031 creates a flexible framework that allows the University to evaluate future opportunities in the neighborhood. The following pages explain these guidelines, document existing NYU buildings that conform to them, and highlight current projects governed by these guidelines.
A New Way to Develop

NYU 2031 establishes a strategy for site selection and approach to building design that help support existing neighborhood character, avoid over-saturation, and provide for scale and use appropriate to surroundings.

The plan for the neighborhood calls for strategic intervention and a blending with and enhancement of the unique quality of existing architecture and social character. NYU site selection criteria will be based on appropriate scale, use, and fit for the location.

Site Selection Criteria

First and foremost, the University will avoid overconcentration. NYU will refrain from placing too many like uses in one area. The concentration of residence halls along the Third Avenue corridor is an example of what the University wishes to avoid in the future. The plan calls for uses that balance the University’s need to have a critical mass with a caution to not oversaturate. Going forward, NYU will employ a more thoughtful approach, particularly when choosing sites that will involve significant student populations.

Determine Uses Appropriate to the Location

While student residence halls will continue to be located in the neighborhood, other uses that generate heavy student traffic will be prioritized in the central area around Washington Square. Less obtrusive office, academic, and residential components will be located in the neighborhood along major avenues and streets, ideally close to public transportation. The University’s presence on small residential and mixed-use streets should be limited to uses that generate low levels of student traffic.

Prioritize Adaptive Reuse of Existing Buildings

Wherever possible, NYU will adapt an existing building either for academic or residential use and maintain public ground-floor uses. This will ensure that the University’s presence is minimal, development contextual, and street character preserved. NYU has had considerable success with such preservation, since almost half of its properties lie in historic districts. In 2009, it won a Village Alliance Award for its Eighth Street renovation.

Building Philosophy

Small-scale Residential

NYU will primarily seek growth opportunities in larger-scale buildings in the neighborhood, on avenues and larger-scaled side streets. It is possible, however, for NYU to grow appropriately on smaller, more residential side streets as well, by carefully considering uses and respecting neighborhood scale and character. Successful existing examples include NYU’s Lillian Vernon Creative Writers House at 58 West 10th Street, Casa Italiana Zerilli-Marinò at 24 West 12th Street, and the Bronfman Center for Jewish Student Life at NYU at 17 East 10th Street.

Large-scale Residential

While the plan prioritizes the core for first-year undergraduate residence halls, as NYU tries to increase the proportion of its students in University housing, some residence halls will remain in the neighborhood. The University’s Office of Student Affairs has set a minimum viable size for an undergraduate residence hall of approximately 100 beds. To locate such a facility successfully in the neighborhood requires placement on a major cross-street or avenue that will not be overwhelmed by student traffic. Where appropriate to complement the existing neighborhood character, active ground-floor uses, including retail, will be considered. Successful existing examples include Palladium Hall and University Hall, both located on 14th Street.

Manufacturing / Commercial

The plan prioritizes the core location for academic uses that generate heavy student traffic, particularly lecture halls and general-purpose classrooms. Administrative and departmental academic uses that see less traffic but require a connection to the core may be successfully located in the neighborhood. In many cases, these will have a relatively small footprint, especially where the University leases individual floors like any other commercial office tenant. Examples include 10 Astor Place and 156 Mercer Street.
Neighborhood Projects

The following examples demonstrate how NYU can have a measured, appropriate, contributory presence in its neighborhood, determined not by urgency and ad hoc need but by careful site selection and analysis. They serve to guide the University in the future.

1. **Bronfman Center for Jewish Student Life at NYU**
   
Purchased by NYU in 1994 and renovated a year later, this 1887 building at 7 East 10th Street houses the Edgar M. Bronfman Center for Jewish Student Life at NYU. Part of the Greenwich Village historic district, the Center welcomes the University community and the public to lectures, films, and celebrations.

2. **New SCPS Home**
   
This already-owned building at 7 East 12th Street will become home to the School of Continuing and Professional Studies. As part of the overall consolidation strategy, the NYU offices will relocate to the upper floors of 730 Broadway. That move allows this building to become a flagship for SCPS, one located in proximity both to public transportation options and Washington Square.

3. **730 Broadway**
   
NYU recently purchased this 10-story building on Broadway between Astor Place and East Fourth Street. Previously, the University leased a large portion to house the NYU Health Center and other offices. The acquisition provides an opportunity to shift administrative uses away from the core to make room for more academic and student services there. NYU will restore ground-floor retail, which has been vacant for several years, by relocating its bookstore here; with an egress / ingress on Broadway and Lafayette Street, the store will provide a convenient passageway for both University and city pedestrians alike.

4. **Palladium Hall**
   
Built in 2011, this large-scale student residence hall at 140 East 14th Street maintains active ground-floor uses. Its mass and bulk are appropriate to the scale of the area.

5. **20 Cooper Square**
   
Originally constructed as a factory in 1900-01, 20 Cooper Square is home to smaller NYU academic departments including the Department of Social and Cultural Analysis. Maintaining an active ground floor, it is part of the NoHo Historic District.

6. **385 Lafayette (upcoming)**
   
The adaptively reused building at the corner of Lafayette and East Fourth streets, which NYU has leased since 2004, is the future home for the Tisch School of the Arts Institute of Performing Arts.