



New York University

Response to the Findings and Recommendations of the
Community Task Force on NYU Development

July 2010

Summary

In 2006 Borough President Scott Stringer proposed the idea of a special task force, to be operated out of his office, that would focus solely on NYU's growth and development with an aim of trying to integrate better community input into the University's plans. The University readily agreed as did a wide array of community organizations, elected officials and civic groups.

The goal of the Task Force was to provide a forum for the University to have a constructive and civil dialogue with its community, to share its plans and think through its options with input from the Task Force members, and to plan for a future that brought the community and NYU to a point where, even if not always agreeing, they at least would better understand one another and search for compromise solutions to difficult issues.

The successful work of the Task Force involved time, hard work and commitment by all the parties involved, and a firm but fair and guiding hand from the Borough President's Office. In the course of the last 40 months the Task Force can look back on a series of major accomplishments:

- In over 55 separate meetings, maintaining a flow of candid, even at times difficult discussions between the community and the University, as the University shared its ideas and plans in real time.
- The creation by NYU of its first-ever long-term strategy for growth, which provides the community with a framework for understanding the University's growth needs, options for locating growth, and a more transparent and predictable sense of when and how that growth may take place over time.
- An unprecedented level of communication flow between NYU and its community that started with the Task Force and then was reinforced by a number of new processes and systems, including a comprehensive construction website, monthly "Informed Neighbor" sessions held by NYU, and various tools for improved communication to various groups and constituencies that constitute our community.
- The University's commitment to locate fully half of the 6 million square feet it needs over the next 20+ years outside of the Greenwich Village area. This is a significant departure from the University's prior approach to growth, and a significant achievement by the Task Force.
- The University's decision to minimize its impact on the neighborhood by concentrating development on its own property, and its willingness to take the necessary extra steps to seek approvals. The University's plan calls for sensitive interventions on the superblock sites that allow the addition of facilities over the next three decades and also seeks to improve the blocks by reintegrating them back into the city in ways that make them more publicly accessible and welcoming.
- The University's inclusion in its plans of a range of environmental and community sustainability initiatives, from building to LEED standards, to leaving development rights "on the table" on select projects, to the University's allowance for a portion of the space on superblocks to be donated to the City to allow for a public elementary school to be built.

- And, critically important, the Task Force and University agreed to a set of planning principles in 2008 that have and will continue to help shape the thinking and implementation of the *NYU 2031* planning and projects.

These are all results that can be traced directly back to the work of the Task Force.

In addition, with the Task Force's help, several NYU projects have been undertaken since 2006 which demonstrate a different approach to planning that allows for community involvement, makes changes based on that input, aims for more contextual building, and still accomplishes the University's goals and needs.

- **COGENERATION PLANT AND PARK:** Though it was not required to do so, the University left it to Community Board #2 to decide the appropriate location to install its new energy-efficient cogeneration plant. In addition, a community advisory group assisted in the design of the new garden for the area above the plant. The process for designing the open space – to open in fall 2010 -- was lauded by the Community Board as a “model for community involvement.”
- **NEW GENOMICS CENTER:** To add space for needed science facilities on campus, NYU decided to repurpose buildings it already owned on Waverly Place, kept and restored the historical façade of that building, and was able to create a new state-of-the-art genomics center, to open next semester.
- **MACDOUGAL ST. AND PROVINCETOWN PLAYHOUSE:** Although it was an “as-of-right project,” NYU took the plans for this building to the Community Board and won the approval of a majority of the Board. Through the planning process, the University – for the first time– left FAR/square footage on the table. In addition, the University committed to keeping the footprint and volume of the culturally significant Provincetown Playhouse and is rebuilding a new, better-working theater in that site so that the legacy of the Playhouse can live on.
- **CENTER FOR ACADEMIC AND SPIRITUAL LIFE:** With this project, for the first time in many years, the University did not pursue the “as-of-right” option; instead NYU chose to seek approvals from the Board of Standards and Appeals to build a shorter, more contextual building, and again forfeited some of the available square footage as a result.
- **NEIGHBORHOOD AND REMOTE PURCHASES:** Consistent with the Task Force's Planning Principles, over the past five years the University has also purchased three existing buildings: 730 Broadway, the Forbes building, and a new student residence hall on 23rd Street and 3rd Avenue.

Through these projects, the University has added an additional 800,000 square feet (counted against the total 6 million), and we believe have done so in a manner consistent with the goals and priorities set forth for us by the Task Force.

The work and investment of time and effort of the Task Force will continue to be integrated into NYU's long-term planning as we pivot now to the review of specific projects, working with relevant city

agencies, community organizations and Community Boards, as we plan our strategies for the remote sites and as we seek land-use approvals for the Core.

This response to the recommendations confirms the University's commitment to staying fully engaged with the community as *NYU 2031* evolves, to setting high standards for ourselves in approaching projects with sensitivity and community sustainability goals in mind, and – even if we do not always agree – to ensure that the communication flow is vigorous, continual and comprehensive.

Process Recommendations

The Task Force recommendations focusing on process will help guide the University as we now move to implementing individual projects, planning for remote sites, and seeking approvals for the Core.

Having thoroughly reviewed the Task Force recommendations, the University will:

- Endeavor to bring matters to stakeholder groups at the earliest realistic conceptual stages to allow time for input. We note here that the University will always have more latitude to do that when a site is already owned by the University, as opposed to when we are purchasing a new site or building.
- Bring major projects (including as-of-right) to the community for review and input.
- Strive to continue to follow the spirit and intention of the principles agreed to with the Task Force.

Core and Neighborhood Recommendations

The Task Force recommendations focusing on Core and Neighborhood have helped shape much of what is already incorporated in *NYU 2031*:

- Not all of NYU's needs will be accommodated in and around the Core and its surrounding neighborhood; *NYU 2031* recognizes the limitations of available space in the area and calls for fully half of the projected square footage to take place outside of the area.
- The University has undertaken analyses that allow us to understand where we have concentrated uses and facilities in the neighborhood with a view to take greater care to not over-saturate areas. Our intent is to develop in ways that do not have a deleterious effect on the neighborhood.
- The University is committed to a disciplined prioritization of uses that are essential to be located in the Core (classrooms, faculty offices, departments, teaching labs, first year student residential, student services, some additional faculty residences, support structures for NYU's global academic network).
- Concurrences with the Task Force's emphasis on rent-regulated housing for the community. Nearly one-fifth of the residents of NYU's housing stock are rent-regulated, non-NYU residents, and the University's plans for the superblocs call for all residential buildings to remain. Possible

plans for other residential facilities in the Core (i.e., 15 Washington Place) have been placed on the back-end of the planning effort. The University will continue to make every effort not to displace residential tenants.

- In response to concern that retail uses in NYU facilities are not oriented to the existing community or lacking altogether, NYU is proposing a rezoning that will allow greater flexibility in where and what type of retail can go in the storefronts of our Core buildings.

While the Task Force raised a series of questions about the appropriateness of adding square footage to Greenwich Village, the University takes this opportunity to clarify that:

- The projected growth in facilities is NOT based upon significant growth in our student body. The University is planning on a modest 0.5 percent annual enrollment growth, leading over the 25-year period to an additional 5,500 students.
- The proposed growth is needed to sustain NYU's academic momentum.
- NYU has considerably less square footage of academic space per student than other major research universities – ½ that of Columbia (before Manhattanville), ¼ that of Harvard (before Alston), and 1/6 that of Yale. NYU falls short to other urban campuses as well (e.g., George Washington University, Boston University).
- While areas of Greenwich Village – particularly those protected by the important historic districts – are “lower density character” and mainly residential, the campus Core around Washington Square Park exists on the spine of Manhattan, where there is a greater diversity of sizes of buildings, types of uses and diversity of architecture (from townhouses to larger residential buildings to 19th century loft buildings once used as manufacturing centers). In addition, the neighborhood boundary is comprised of a vast mix of micro-communities, where a diversity of university needs may be well accommodated in a contextual manner with the area. The conversation deserves to be more nuanced than a simple, single portrayal of Greenwich Village.
- Full utilization and efficiency of existing spaces is a high priority for the NYU campus. We note here that most of the construction performed over the past decade has been to rehabilitate and improve our existing facilities throughout the campus Core and beyond.
- NYU has worked hard to ensure that we do NOT have a “four-day undergraduate curriculum,” but instead fully utilize our facilities throughout the week. In addition to courses and seminars on weekends, over 10,000 students attend over 500 classes on Fridays.
- Plans for the superblocks – which already contain 5 large buildings and two shorter buildings -- aim to add three buildings, replace one (Coles), and turn another into green space over a period of two to three decades, as well as create and integrate new and inviting public open spaces for a range of passive and active uses to be enjoyed by the community at large. As we proceed with our approvals, we will be working toward a solution that maintains a balance of community access to a range of amenities on the block.
- A full city-mandated environmental assessment will be conducted for any development proposals for the superblocks.

Remote Sites Recommendations

The remote site recommendations have already helped shape much of *NYU 2031*.

- When NYU launched its planning process in 2007, NYU had had some modest experience with facilities sited in remote locations, but no focus or overall strategy as to how these fit into its long-range needs. Now, the University's plans call for half of the square footage to be developed over the next 20+ years to be in remote sites. Indeed, NYU:
 - has already announced that it is moving its College of Nursing out of Greenwich Village and uptown to the Eastside Health Corridor.
 - is moving steadily towards a full merger with Polytechnic Institute, thereby providing an array of growth opportunities for compatible and new academic areas in Downtown Brooklyn.
 - has also purchased or rented individual remote site facilities such as a new student residence hall on 23rd and 3rd, a student residence hall in Brooklyn, and a block of faculty apartments on Roosevelt Island.
- The University also participated in an effort organized by the Economic Development Corporation to explore locations for collaborative projects with other colleges and universities throughout New York.
- From 2006-2008 NYU intensified its exploration of the idea of locating "remotely" in New York City and New Jersey. Teams visited sites in Hoboken, Queens, Brooklyn, and Governors Island looking for opportunities in student housing, faculty housing, and academic space.
- NYU and its planning team outlined characteristics for successful remote sites, modeled off our existing examples. We identified two different typologies: the single-use center (such as our Institute for Fine Arts on the Upper East Side and our School of Continuing and Professional Studies instructional sites in Lower Manhattan and Midtown), and the mixed-use center (Health Corridor, Downtown Brooklyn), where a variety of academic programs reinforce one another. While we have not ruled out the single-use center, we recognize that such developments are site-specific in terms of academic program. For example, the Institute of Fine Arts – NYU's renowned graduate program in art history and art conservation -- finds itself successfully located on Museum Mile adjacent to the Metropolitan Museum because of logical and compelling programmatic and cultural connections. This would not be true if we were to move NYU's College of Nursing or NYU's Institute of Mathematical Sciences to that site.
- As a planning tool, we found the mixed-use center to be the most advantageous for a number of reasons. We find that an important part of the success of NYU academic program education is the proximity of living and learning for both our faculty and our students. This enables a vibrant intellectual exchange, as well as offering the opportunity to provide common services and infrastructure to support a sustainable environment. As such,

these mixed-use centers demand an academic anchor, and such programs need to have synergies with their location within New York City.

- At both the Health Corridor and Downtown Brooklyn we already had a significant academic presence and to some extent a residential community. Thus we thought our best initial investment in remote sites would be to bolster the sites where we already have a presence and capitalize upon their existing academic strengths as a way of drawing new academic programs and residential communities. We've already begun to see how this could be successful, with plans for our College of Nursing to move from Washington Square to the Health Corridor to be co-located with the College of Dentistry. At Downtown Brooklyn we are just beginning this dialogue as we plan for expansion with our new partner, Polytechnic Institute of NYU.
- In identifying new mixed-use remote sites, we prioritized locations that 1) were in New York City, 2) were approachable within a reasonable commute from Washington Square, 3) had a strategic advantage in terms of existing buildings that could be utilized and repurposed for academic and residential uses, and 4) had the potential for expansion of a critical mass. Among the locations considered were Long Island City, Williamsburg, Hudson Square, Hudson Yards, and Governors Island.
- Governors Island emerged as a leading focus of our remote site strategy for a number of reasons. First is the fact that it feels collegial by virtue of its island condition, historic architecture, and campus-like setting. Though such an environment could not be more different from NYU in Greenwich Village, we saw this as a tremendous asset, bringing a very different kind of academic and residential community to the NYU experience. The Island also offers an unprecedented opportunity to work with the City of New York to create a vibrant intellectual environment.
- The other remote locations were not eliminated from future consideration; each met the first two criteria, and each remains a place that might merit consideration should the right confluence of circumstances come together. However, we felt that for the next 25 years focusing on sites where we had an existing presence and then making one significant investment in an additional location would lay the groundwork for a University "In and of the City" in the most meaningful way for NYU and New York.
- Finally, based on the recommendation from the Task Force, the University has sought an opportunity to sit down with the Port Authority and LMDC to understand their plans and visions for lower Manhattan and to present our 2031 planning effort to see if there is any potential for future growth in the area as part of NYU's remote strategy.

Sustainability and Community Amenities Recommendations

The Task Force recommendations on sustainability and amenities were far ranging and a very useful guide for the University's future planning efforts. While the recommendations seem somewhat focused on Greenwich Village, and *NYU 2031* is far broader than the Village alone, we will look to embrace the recommendations, as appropriate, across our city-wide strategy for growth.

- Our plans call for sustainable building as a way of the future.
- In our recently announced Climate Action Plan, NYU sets itself on a track to be carbon neutral by 2040. We encourage the Task Force to review this comprehensive document as it serves as a solid framework for the series of recommendations made by the Task Force. The document can be found at: <http://www.nyu.edu/sustainability/pdf/capreport10.pdf>.

In specific response to the Task Force's recommendations and work over the past few years, the University's plans in its Core proposals call for:

- The incorporation of space for a new public school to be built and run by New York City as part of the development of the superblocks.
- The reintegration of existing uses into any new plans, including a dog run, playgrounds and other areas.
- An approach of designing the public spaces to be more open to the broader community, providing more green space that is easily accessible and can be enjoyed by the diverse range of ages that reflect the neighborhood and the NYU community itself.
- In general, the University believes that over the next two to three decades, as it and the community evolve, we can work together to ensure that as NYU's space needs are fulfilled, the plans for reintegrating the superblocks into the city can greatly improve the experience for the entire community.

Conclusion:

New York University is grateful for the tireless efforts of the Task Force, many of whose members volunteered countless hours to help guide and shape our strategy for growth. With such a wide variety of stakeholders, it is not unexpected that there were members of the Task Force who recognized the importance of the University's growth to City, as well as those who strongly believed that any additional development, particularly in the neighborhood and core, was inappropriate. It is those varying and strong opinions in all directions that gravitated the University towards a thoughtful and sensitive strategy that increases transparency and predictability, integrates community ideas, and allows the University to continue to strive to be one of the best higher education institutions in the country.

The trailblazing work of the Task Force must be commended. The success of this Task Force undoubtedly will serve as a model for other institutions interested in community-based planning.