



NEW YORK UNIVERSITY

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Government Affairs and Community Engagement

University Relations and Public Affairs
70 Washington Square South, Room 1107
New York, New York 10012-1019
telephone: 212 998 6859
fax: 212 995 4849
alicia.hurley@nyu.edu

Alicia D. Hurley, Ph.D. *Vice-President*

March 10, 2011

Jo Hamilton, Chair
Community Board 2, Manhattan
3 Washington Square Village, #1A
New York, NY 100-12-1899

Dear Chairwoman Hamilton,

On behalf of President Sexton, I would like to take the opportunity to respond to the Community Board's thoughtful resolution of December 3, 2010 about open space and NYU's proposals for the strips of land now owned by NYC Department of Transportation (the DOT Strips). Please forgive the delay; as you may appreciate, the plans for the superblocks are complex, the various pieces inter-related (involving multiple stakeholders) with each other, so we wanted to ensure that the information we are providing you was comprehensive, dealing with all of the strips and reflective of the overall plan. We plan to share with you the full details of the overall plan for the Core area at Community Board #2's scheduled March 21st Institutions Committee meeting. But generally, what you will find in our proposal is that our plan is responsive to the overarching request of the Community Board to help address the lack of green/open space in the Community Board #2 district.

As you are well aware, these DOT strips are a legacy of the urban renewal actions of the 1950s – 60s when original plans to widen LaGuardia and Mercer Streets were contemplated but never executed, leaving extra-wide sidewalks and major thoroughfares with no programmatic plans by the City or resources to develop these sites. Into that vacuum over the years various community and civic leaders stepped in to turn them into a range of community amenities (with play spaces, landscaping, community gardens, etc.). Their efforts helped transform barren plots of land into areas better enjoyed by the public. It is in that spirit that NYU offers this plan. It does so: first, with the recognition that our past record of participation in these enhancement efforts ranged from poor in earlier years to willing partner in recent years; and second, with a clear invitation to community stakeholders to join with us in planning for the new open spaces throughout the superblocks with an aim of ensuring that they are of continued, indeed enhanced, value to the community.

Our plans for the superblocks call for adding a full 130,000 square feet (3 acres) of publicly accessible open space to the area, space that will be programmed as both active and passive. Our aim is to work with the Board and the community in the coming months to ensure that we have struck the right balance of active and passive spaces to be used by the residents of the blocks, the university community and our neighbors. Generally, the two superblocks are intended to remain a respite from the noise and bustle of the city streets and provide a measure of both calm and activity. The plan emphasizes a

comprehensive approach to the blocks which knits the blocks back into the urban fabric allowing the public, as well as our residents, community and neighbors to enjoy them.

In order to accomplish a comprehensive and integrated site plan which allows the University to increase the open space on the blocks to a full 180,000 square feet, we propose to acquire from the city four of the six DOT strips on the superblocs:

1. Mercer Strip between 3rd and 4th Streets

Current profile: Below ground, the area is the site of the University's new \$125 million green cogeneration plant which went fully on-line in January 2011. At grade, there is a new planted/plaza area above provided by NYU which was designed with community involvement.

NYU proposed changes: The plans do not call for any significant modifications to the area. The planted, seating area will remain open to the public.

Rationale for de-mapping: long-term security of owning the property of our cogeneration plant, the University will commit to keeping the above-grade space publicly accessible open plaza space. The University will be responsible for the ongoing maintenance of the plaza.

2. Mercer Strip between 3rd and Bleecker Streets

Current profile: At grade are three gated-off sections, with the middle, larger section serving as the LMNOP play area. The middle section is used both as a seating area as well as a large paved area where children can learn to bicycle, roller skate, and generally engage in active play. There is a water feature that is used by children in the summer.

NYU proposed changes: The plans call for adding below-grade academic space, the proposed Mercer building would slightly impinge on the strip, and the current uses (public seating, bicycle training, play) would be integrated back into the site in a slightly larger area (currently, the LMNOP active area is 14,500 square feet; the proposed new space would be slightly larger). The plaza and play space would be maintained by NYU and open to the public.

Rationale for de-mapping: The university seeks the ability to add below grade space on the strip, to build a new building which slightly impinges on the current DOT property; and the fundamental principle of the site planning is to "open up" the block for the public to be able to traverse the site and maximize the utility of the open spaces (programmed between both active and passive). The integration of the LMNOP activities into the new site plan and the removal of a large, block-long fence, will allow the site to still accommodate the current active uses, but allow mobility across the site. The area will also be needed by the University during construction.

3. Mercer between Bleecker and Houston Streets

Current profile: A small (closed) play area that is structurally unsound, and a publicly used --but with membership-restricted access -- dog run, which is managed by the Mercer Houston Dog Run Association.

NYU proposed changes: NYU proposes a new significantly sized building placed on the footprint of the current Coles sports center; however, the University proposes to shift the building to the east to allow for better pedestrian thoroughfares on either side of the new building, to provide additional space between the new building and the landmarked University Village complex, and to introduce a new expanded walk-way along the former Greene Street. The plans envision retail and other entrances at the street level of the new building which will be accessed from both sides (east and west) of the site. The university proposes to shift the 7,000 square feet of (currently closed and unused) play space to the west side of the new building (on the University Village landmarked site) and build a new 11,000 square foot publicly accessible play area. The addition of the playground on the site is subject to Landmarks approval and currently before Community Board #2. The dog run would roughly be the same size (3,200 square feet) and also shift to the west side of the new building. NOTE: There is a standing offer to the Mercer Houston Dog Run Association to continue to manage the dog run in this new location, which they have declined. In any case, plans call for a dog run to be built and if not run by the Association or another such group, would be open to the public without restricted access.

Rationale: This strip is critical to the site plan which calls for shifting (not expanding) the footprint of the new Zipper building to the east, allowing a wider pedestrian flow on both sides of the new building (both on the Greene street walkway and the Mercer Street side). The new building shifting east also gives the landmarked University Village complex some breathing space from the new Zipper building. Current uses (dog run and play areas) are relocated to the western side of the new zipper building. The area will also be needed by the University during construction. The dog run can be replaced prior to construction of the new Zipper building and the playground would be replaced as part of the building construction.

4. LaGuardia between West 3rd and Bleecker Streets

Current profile: A passive green open space with a statue of Mayor Fiorello LaGuardia and a planned new play area called Adrienne's Garden.

NYU proposed changes: NYU proposes to use only the below-grade space as academic space. In response to the Community Board and the request of the elected officials, the proposed building has been modified so not to encroach on the strip above grade. And, except during construction, which is slated for at least 15 years from now, the area would be planned going forward as a public open space programmed with passive garden and seating space, active open space (Adrienne's garden would be expanded and relocated on the strip), and the LaGuardia statue would remain in his location. The size of the Adrienne's garden/play area would more than triple in size to 13,100 square feet. The plaza and play areas would remain open to the public.

Rationale: The University seeks to build below-grade, under the DOT strip, and also will need the space for the eventual construction. In addition, the proposal is for integrative site planning, the ability to maintain access-ways and to complete a comprehensive open space plan, which will include a public Adrienne's Garden / play area, and the statue of Mayor LaGuardia.

Finally, while the University does not propose demapping the other strips, it offers to work with the City and community groups on site enhancements that can be of mutual benefit (i.e, re-landscaping plans, removing or replacing fences, etc).

We thank the Board for allowing us the opportunity to articulate the plans for the open space on the superblocks. We think that our proposal, by bringing on a significant amount of green, open, public space (adding about 130,000 square feet or 3 acres) addresses the overarching concerns of the Board which is to bring publicly accessible open green space to the area and to ensure that the plans for the superblocks do not remove the current opportunities that exist.

We look forward to the meeting on March 21st where we can further the conversation about the comprehensive site plan for both the new proposed buildings and the open space, as discussed in this response. We will also be outlining an outreach plan which will allow members of the Community Board and the broader community to have more in-depth briefings and sessions with the designers and architects, all to be sited at our Open House space at 528 LaGuardia where large models and other in-depth visuals will be available.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Alicia D. Hurley". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Alicia" being more prominent and the last name "Hurley" following in a similar style.

Alicia D. Hurley, Ph.D.

Cc: Honorable Scott M. Stringer, Manhattan Borough President
Honorable Christine C. Quinn, New York City Council Speaker
Honorable Thomas K. Duane, New York State Senator
Honorable Deborah J. Glick, New York Assembly Member
Honorable Margaret Chin, New York City Council Member