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City Planning Commission Approves New York University Core With Modifications

Statement from City Planning Commissioner Amanda Burden:

Today the City Planning Commission is voting on four actions to facilitate the growth of New York University's main campus in the Washington Square area.

NYU is proposing to construct four new buildings – to include academic space, a new athletic facility, student dorms, NYU faculty housing -- and approximately 4 acres of public parks and publicly-accessible open spaces.

Throughout the public review process, including more than 10 hours of testimony at the Commission's public hearing, we heard strong support for NYU's need to grow and modernize its academic core in order to remain a globally competitive institution and economic anchor for New York City. We also heard deep concerns from many stakeholders, including the community and local elected officials, regarding the scale of the proposal, and the project's potential effects on residents' quality of life. Our challenge has been to determine how best to accommodate NYU's physical space needs while at the same time addressing the land use impacts and implications of the proposal.

Accordingly, careful consideration has been given to the proposed uses, to the site plan, to the massing of buildings, to the open space design and to the construction phasing. Today, the Commission will be voting on the application with a number of modifications:

- To make the buildings a better fit for the neighborhood, our modifications include reductions in the heights of both the Mercer and Bleecker buildings and required setbacks for the bulkheads on both the Mercer and LaGuardia buildings. We believe these modifications will make the buildings better relate to the surrounding built context.
- NYU has made a strong case for its academic programming needs – including classrooms and study space; dormitory space; faculty housing and faculty offices. By contrast, we do not think it has been adequately demonstrated that a hotel use needs to be accommodated within NYU's large-scale proposal for the superblocks. Therefore, the modifications include the elimination of the hotel use.
- Many members of the public expressed concerns about the commercial overlay on the loft blocks, while NYU acknowledged that the commercial overlay is not key to furthering its plan. Accordingly, the modifications include removal of the commercial overlay.
- The proposal includes a significant amount of new public open space, particularly on the North Block. In order to help ensure that the open space is inviting and welcoming to all, several modifications have been made to the open space plan:

First, the modifications shrink the dimensions of the Mercer Building lightwell to better facilitate views and access into the site and into the public open space.

Second, the Commission is creating an Open Space Oversight Organization to help to oversee the maintenance and management of the space and assure that it is maximally public. Related to this, the Commission is responding to requests to allow for future modifications to the north block open space, with community input. While we believe that the plan's open space design is successful, we recognize that future modifications may be appropriate, especially as the space is not to be built until 15 years from now. The Commission has therefore included as part of its report, a roadmap for an expedited future open space modification process that would allow for change while ensuring that the fundamentals of what makes the space successful are respected.

Third, we are eliminating the below grade academic space beneath the parkland strips. This will maximize the potential to retain existing mature trees in these areas. This elimination also protects these future park spaces, as it eliminates the need for periodic inspection and repair work to the membrane of the below grade spaces beneath these parks.

Finally, we are removing the temporary gym, which will eliminate all construction on the North Block until phase 2 of the project. This elimination will also preserve the keyed playground until 2029, close to the end of the project when its permanent replacement comes on line.

The Commission's review of NYU's application has been careful and deliberative, and we have greatly benefitted from the thoughtful input from Manhattan Community Board 2, from the Borough President of Manhattan, from residents of the area, and from community organizations. The NYU proposal for the superblocks will provide important new and needed space to one of the City's most important institutions of higher learning, while providing significant open space and other amenity to the surrounding neighborhood. I am confident that these applications, as modified by the Commission, will result in a development that will be successfully integrated into the neighborhood while meeting NYU's significant need for new and modern space.

I am pleased to vote yes.

Read the [City Planning Commission reports](#).

Department of City Planning

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