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CONTACT:

Rachaele Raynoff, Press Secretary -- (212) 720-3471

STATEMENT BY CITY PLANNING COMMISSION (CPC) CHAIR AMANDA M. BURDEN AT THE CPC VOTE ON COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY EXPANSION AND COMMUNITY BOARD 9 197-a PLAN

November 26, 2007 – City Planning Commission Chair Amanda M. Burden made the following remarks at today's City Planning Commission Special Public Meeting to vote on the Community Board 9 197-a application and Columbia University's plan for Manhattanville.

"Today, we are nearing the end of a long and intensive review process for two land use plans – the Community Board 9 197-a Plan, and the Columbia University applications for Manhattanville. I believe that the modifications that we will be voting on today substantially reconcile the differences between the two, and I am pleased to be able to support not one, but both plans, with modifications to each.

"First, I would like to talk about the Columbia applications. The report and consideration before the Commission today make significant modifications to Columbia University's applications to ensure that the University's expansion and future development in Manhattanville better respects and reflects neighborhood scale and character. These modifications will also help promote the vibrancy of the critical Broadway corridor as well as to provide for improved open spaces that are accessible and inviting to all.

"To that end, the modifications eliminate two of the planned academic research buildings along Broadway and replace them with university housing and academic facilities.

"The Commission has been particularly concerned that the proposed concentration of six academic research buildings fronting along Broadway would potentially diminish the ability to create a vibrant and active corridor. We have also been concerned by the scale and character of the proposed buildings in the northern portion Broadway and their relationship to the surrounding residential context. Therefore, for the northernmost site on the east side of Broadway, the permitted height will be reduced by half from 240 feet to 120 feet. And, on the northernmost site on the west side of Broadway, the maximum height will be reduced from 260 feet to 180 feet. These changes are significant and will provide a more balanced transition from the academic research cluster near 125th Street to the uses and scale of existing development to the north, while helping ensure a livelier, more varied character along this corridor.

"Modifications to Columbia's applications will also improve the quality and accessibility of the proposed open spaces. It is essential that the public open spaces and open space network built under the plan be inviting and welcoming to all members of the community and to the public at large. The modifications substantially improve the physical design of these spaces and connections to them. These include increasing the width of the north/south public passage from 125th Street to the Large Square and requiring that it be landscaped, open to the sky, and furnished with pedestrian amenities to make it a true public pedestrian way. Regulations will prohibit any gates or fencing within or around the perimeter of the open spaces, require plentiful amenities and seating, and mandate street tree planting throughout the special district.

"The Columbia applications have also been modified to establish a light manufacturing zone to the area west of 12th Avenue, thus making it more consistent with the 197-a plan. It is hoped that these changes will promote a unique mix of uses including the types of local businesses that could have both production and a retail presence, which could be anything from a bakery to a specialized graphics firm, all adding to the vitality of the west side of 12th Avenue.

"In order to address indirect displacement, the Borough President has secured commitment for a \$20 million affordable housing fund which will be leveraged to generate an estimated 1,110 affordable units. The Department has ensured that these funds are put to work early, requiring that \$10 million be released before Columbia is issued its first building permit. In addition, Columbia has agreed to provide \$4 million to fund an anti-harassment legal assistance program to further address indirect residential displacement.

"Now, I would like to turn to the Community Board 9 197-a plan. The report before us endorses many of the community

board's recommendations and objectives that include strategies for green roof, waste reduction, and green building standards. The recommendations for environmental protection and sustainability are notable and forward thinking ideas, as are such recommendations as intensive street tree planting, streetscape improvements for the Broadway malls, the creation of new green areas, and transportation improvements. As Director of the Department, I look forward to working with Community Board 9 in our follow-up zoning study to address issues raised by the Board for other areas in the district.

"Many people may not be aware that at the end of the Community Board's review period in September, the Community Board significantly revised its own plan. The most significant changes were to allow for the same 6 FAR density for community facilities as that proposed by Columbia and to eliminate the mandatory requirement for manufacturing uses on the ground floor. As a result, the Commission was no longer presented with diametrically opposed visions for the area, but instead with two plans that differed primarily in the pattern in which development would take place and specifically in whether or not a central below-grade space would be permitted.


"Because the provision of the below-grade space will foster a less irregular and more coordinated growth strategy for the area, and because it will minimize service activities on the streets and sidewalks, the report before us modifies the 197-a plan to permit the construction of that underground infrastructure network. As explained in the report, this space will accommodate much of Columbia's program underground, thereby reducing its scale and presence above grade. The below grade network will not only maximize the space available for active ground floor uses but it will also enable the development of a substantial open space network. Additional modifications have been made to the 197-a plan where its proposals conflict with established city policy and in cases where feasibility was in question.

"Throughout this process, the Commission has been guided by the principle that the two plans should be reviewed in parallel and afforded equal treatment in the public review process. During that process, both applicants have been afforded multiple opportunities to present their views to the Commission, above and beyond the hearing and other requirements of land use and environmental review procedures. Through this intensive process, the Commission has gained a detailed understanding of the two plans, and of the respective viewpoints of the applicants. The consideration of the two plans has been full and robust and has benefited from extensive input throughout the process. The discussion among the Commissioners has been spirited and engaged, and their issues and concerns are reflected in the reports.

"I want to close by also acknowledging the extraordinary work of Community Board 9 in preparing the 197-a plan, presenting it to the Commission, and modifying it in response to the discussions that have taken place during this process. The leadership, commitment, and thoughtfulness of all who contributed to the Board 197-a Plan should be recognized, and the Department looks forward to working with the Board as we help implement aspects of their plan in the future.

"With the modifications I have described for both the Columbia University Plan and the Community Board plan, I am pleased to be able to support and vote in favor of both plans. They are now consistent with each other, and they represent a vision for the future of Manhattanville that meets the shared objectives of addressing the needs of an institution of major importance to the city while building on the strengths of the neighborhood and providing for new investment, jobs and public open space.

"I am therefore voting "yes" on the Columbia applications as modified and "yes" on the Community Board 9 197-a plan, as modified."

-  Read the CPC reports for [Columbia University/Special Manhattanville District](#).
-  Read the CPC report for [Community Board 9 Manhattan 197-a Plan](#).

Department of City Planning

The Department of City Planning is responsible for the City's physical and socioeconomic planning, including land use and environmental review; preparation of plans and policies; and provision of technical assistance and planning information to government agencies, public officials, and community boards.