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## COMMUNITY BOARD No. 2, MANHATTAN

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### **ELECTED OFFICIALS, COMMUNITY BOARD 2, THE COMMUNITY ACTION ALLIANCE ON NYU 2031 AND LOCAL ACTIVISTS DENOUNCE PLANS BY NYU TO GRAB LAND ALONG “SUPERBLOCKS” SOUTH OF WASHINGTON SQUARE**

**December 5, 2010:** A coalition of community groups, elected officials and community members spoke out Sunday against plans by New York University to take more than 2 acres of City-owned land in the heart of Greenwich Village for its own use.

Two weeks ago, Community Board 2 passed a resolution strongly opposing the University’s bid to annex the land. The resolution calls on NYU to remove these strips from any land use changes they will request, and further calls on the City to transfer all seven strips to the Parks Department, noting “the best way to preserve open space is to keep it in the public domain.”

These seven strips of land are currently City-owned--but they are now part of a proposal by New York University seeking to add 2 million square feet of new development south of Washington Square.

All five local elected officials representing the area are strongly supporting the Community Board’s first official position regarding NYU 2031.

“The current resolution builds on the recommendations of the NYU Task Force and signals overwhelming community support for keeping this open space public,” said **Manhattan Borough President Scott Stringer**. “NYU must take these concerns into account and seriously explore alternative proposals that do not include development on these strips.”

**Councilmember Margaret Chin** said: “NYU is a University in a neighborhood, not the other way around. This is why any proposed development must be appropriate and contextual, and must demonstrate their commitment to the neighborhood and its residents. The elimination of these green strips would change the nature of this community for the worse; it would turn large portions of these blocks from open space to dense building and reduce what little green the neighborhood enjoys. The 1<sup>st</sup> Council District is honored to host an institution as important and prestigious as NYU, but there are many other development opportunities that they can use to expand. I welcome NYU and President Sexton to work collaboratively with my office and other elected officials to locate alternative expansion sites. But, when it comes to the Village, I stand with CB2, and support their desire to see green open space preserved

as parkland.”

**Assemblymember Deborah Glick** said: “Living in the Village with NYU has come to feel as though we are living with the Sheriff of Nottingham. The rules for the serfs keep changing for the worse, with the sheriff demanding more and more. Call me Robin Hood – enough is enough, we want our forest back.”

“I stand with the community of Greenwich Village in calling for the DOT strips on the superblocks to be preserved as public parkland and open space,” said **Congressman Jerrold Nadler**. “I urge NYU to remove from its development proposals any request for the DOT strips, and I strongly encourage the City to transfer the strips to the Parks Department. As it now stands, the community already lacks sufficient public parkland, and it would be terrible to lose the strips, which have provided public open space to the community for decades. I thank NYU for its stated commitment to preserving and maintaining open space in its design proposals, but in order for this open space to remain truly accessible to the community, it should stay public land.”

**Senator Thomas Duane** also expressed his concern: “I join Community Board 2 in opposing New York University’s request to acquire six strips of New York City Department of Transportation (DOT) property. I have long opposed relinquishing public spaces to private entities. These strips contain rare open space in park-starved Greenwich Village – which rightfully belong to the people of New York City. To ensure these spaces remain truly public and open in perpetuity, DOT should transfer them to the New York City Department of Parks and Recreation.”

These public spaces were created when land was acquired by the Department of Transportation a half-century ago, as part of a plan by Robert Moses to build onramps for an expressway across SoHo.

The project failed in the face of overwhelming community opposition, and in 1967, the City Planning Commission, the Manhattan Borough President and the Community Board voted to transfer the property to the Department of Parks and Recreation. But the transfer was never completed.

NYU claims that its plan to build on the strips and create new public space between their buildings will improve public accessibility. But **Jo Hamilton, Chair of Community Board 2**, points out that “NYU does not have a great track record in creating or maintaining public spaces. It would be unwise to think that this time will be any different. Two weeks ago, the University withdrew an equally controversial plan to build a 4<sup>th</sup> tower on a landmarked site, because the original architect wrote that it would be inappropriate. I would ask that they similarly recognize the overwhelming community sentiment that public land should remain in public hands, and remove this request from their proposal, then support us in advocating for the land’s transfer to the Parks Department.”

Community Board 2 has always supported this position, and passed resolutions again in 1979, 1995 and 2004, asking that the land be mapped as permanent parkland. In 2004, then Parks Commissioner Henry Stern supported the transfer, but said, “NYU won’t grant consent and is blocking the move.”

Sadly, over the years, NYU made many agreements with the city to maintain these spaces for the benefit of the community, in exchange for development rights elsewhere on the superblocks. But their stewardship has been woefully inadequate, and at times completely neglectful.

“You just have to look at the padlocked playground and reflecting garden on Mercer Street, the fact that Gould Plaza is a front door for two NYU buildings instead of a community public space, and the broken promise of a playground on top of Coles gym,” said **Terri Cude, Co-Chair of CAAN**. “The only successful spaces are the ones created by dedicated community volunteers, who band together to make

useful parks from unused land. Our community members have planted, built, cleaned and advocated for all of these spaces for years, and do not want the results of their hard work destroyed by NYU.”

**Tobi Bergman, Chair of the CB2 Parks Committee**, states: “Neither NYU nor the Department of Transportation is equipped to manage these important public areas for the best benefit of the neighborhood, NYU, and the city. It requires cooperative stewardship under the leadership of the agency that knows how to manage parkland, our Parks Department.”

“We understand that NYU is part of Greenwich Village, and a neighbor, but it is inappropriate for them to take what little public space we have and privatize it for reasons which seem unclear and unnecessary. This community stands firmly behind a position that we have held for over 40 years, and calls on NYU to not include this parkland in their land use application,” says **David Gruber, Chair of the CB2 Institutions Committee**.

Members of the community who are actively involved with the current uses on the strips have also expressed support for the Board’s position:

- **Ellen Horan, LaGuardia Corner Garden**: "We hope the city will preserve this public land as much-needed community parkland. A zoning change from residential use would forever place Greenwich Village in the shadow of NYU’s buildings. Like the plants in these ribbons of green, residential neighborhoods thrive on sunshine and air and once deprived, they are gone forever."
- **Beth Gottlieb, Mercer-Houston Dog Run Association**: "Almost 30 years ago, neighborhood residents and their dogs began meeting on our corner, then an empty lot. The Mercer-Houston Dog Run continues to answer the needs of community dog owners. We are a vibrant facet of the neighborhood, and hope to secure our future longevity. CB2's resolution is very encouraging. We sincerely hope to sit and stay!"
- **Larry Goldberg, Friends of LaGuardia Place**: "The public parkland and open space represented by the statue of Fiorello LaGuardia and the soon-to-be-built Adrienne's Garden for toddlers, is a green oasis for all New York City residents and visitors. It must not be turned over for an unnecessary private use."
- **Enid Braun, LMNO(P)**: "Given the proximity of Mercer Playground to NYU property, we have always worried about the university's future plans, and strongly support the permanent transfer of the park to the NYC Parks Department. Public open space is irreplaceable; we thank CB2 for its forceful statement."

**Alyson Beha, New Yorkers for Parks, Director of Research, Planning & Programs**, said: “The community garden, dog run, plaza and playground located on these strips are critical open space to the park-deprived community. These vibrant public spaces have served this neighborhood for decades, and any attempt to privatize them or sell them to NYU is a violation of the Public Trust Doctrine.”

*For more information and background, visit [cb2manhattan.org](http://cb2manhattan.org) (see link to NYU’s 2031 Plans on left) or email [info@cb2manhattan.org](mailto:info@cb2manhattan.org). For additional information on the Community Action Alliance on NYU 2031, visit [caan2031.org](http://caan2031.org) or email [info@caan2031.org](mailto:info@caan2031.org)*

