

The Dialogue on Manhattanville

Spring 2004

As part of its collaborative development process, the University has been encouraging dialogue regarding its plans for the Manhattanville area of West Harlem through a series of events including community open houses, advisory committees, and meetings with local, civic, and elected leaders over the past few months.

In January, Columbia hosted an eight-hour open house on campus, drawing hundreds of University and community visitors. The University also held a similar forum for local residents at the Manhattanville Houses Community Center.

Members of the campus planning team were on hand at both events to hear concerns and answer questions. The team also discussed some of the proposed economic benefits to the Manhattanville community in the form of jobs and the introduction of retail shops along Broadway and 125th Street. “It’s important that we hear from the community early and often in the process so that in the end, everyone feels comfortable with the plan that emerges,” says Emily Lloyd, executive vice president for government and community affairs.

In addition, a Student Advisory Committee was created by Provost Alan Brinkley to provide senior administrators with ideas and discuss issues important to students as plans for expansion develop.

Many of Columbia’s planning objectives build upon recommendations made for the area by a New York City Economic Development Corporation study completed in 2001, says Jeremiah Stoldt, director of campus planning for facilities management. These recommendations stress the importance of 125th Street as a connector to the Hudson River and of keeping the cross streets open to pedestrians. Both objectives reinforce the importance of the waterfront park, which the City will begin building shortly.

Senior Executive Vice President Robert Kasdin says the University expects to unveil its urban design proposal—developed in conjunction with a distinguished team of

architects from Renzo Piano Building Workshop and Skidmore, Owings & Merrill—later this spring. This proposal will address such issues as the scale of buildings and will outline the plan for the area’s full development over the next 30 to 40 years.

The urban design proposal is a first step in what will be a lengthy process. Shortly after the plan is unveiled, Stoldt explains, Columbia will submit its application to rezone the area to the New York City Department of City Planning, an action that would subject the proposal to the City’s Uniform Land Use Review Procedure. Stoldt says the University hopes the plan will be approved by this fall, which would start a 12- to 14-month review process by various City constituencies.



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