

For Immediate Release, January 24, 2013

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Federal, State, Local Officials Stand with Village Community, Implore NYU to Not Appeal Recent Court Ruling, Go Back to Square One on Plans to Build in the Village; Actor and Village Resident John Leguizamo Adds Voice

Two weeks after Manhattan State Supreme Court Justice Donna Mills put a halt to NYU's massive 1.9 million square foot expansion plan by ruling that the City illegally gave parkland to NYU for its development, elected officials, NYU faculty, Village area community organizations and other supporters – including actor John Leguizamo – held a press conference encouraging NYU to step back from its planned appeal and to “do the right thing” by going back to the drawing board and exploring alternatives.

The venue for the press conference – the offices of the Greenwich Village Society for Historic Preservation and the Historic Districts Council – was filled with supporters of the effort to prevent the current NYU expansion plan from going forward. Jim Walden, pro bono counsel from Gibson, Dunn & Crutcher, who represents the petitioners in the successful lawsuit, started off the press conference and introduced the other speakers.

“We are fully prepared to continue this fight in the courts, including by appealing aspects of the court's opinion with which we respectfully disagree. We would much prefer working with our elected officials and NYU on a path to re-start the land-use-review process, where we hope the voices of the community, the faculty, and these storied preservation and parks groups will be heard and respected,” he said.

U.S. Representative Jerrold Nadler issued a statement in support of this position: “The recent court decision blocking NYU's construction on the superblocks' park space is a real victory for the community and for everyone who has fought to protect access to the public open space for this neighborhood. This decision changes the scope of the planned NYU 2031 development, and I stand with the community to ask that NYU review the entire plan in light of this decision. As I urged throughout the ULURP process for NYU 2031, the growth of the university must be contextual and respectful of this community's needs.”

After Congressman Nadler's statement was read, a stunning array of elected officials stepped forward to seek a new land-use-review process, urging NYU to cooperate, redesign its plan, and restart the ULURP process in a manner respectful of the community and NYU faculty.

State Assembly member Deborah Glick, who was one of the petitioners in the legal proceedings, told the crowd, “This decision is a huge victory after years of work by the community as we united together to protect the Village from the overdevelopment proposed by NYU. I am honored to have been a petitioner on this case and stand with many community members, groups and faculty members on behalf of our entire

community. We stand here today to offer an olive branch to NYU; don't appeal the ruling, sit down with all of us, and begin the process again, a process that will result in the appropriate amount of academic space for NYU and will preserve the integrity of the Village community." Also in attendance, Manhattan Borough President Gale Brewer echoed Glick's sentiments while stating her full support of the cause.

State Senator Daniel Squadron focused on the parkland and its accessibility to the public, saying, "Let's be clear: this process failed to include more than half of the open space available to the community and protected as parkland. Accurate and fair assessments of the impacts of any new development are crucial. That is why it's unacceptable to alienate parkland for this plan. Now, there must be a complete reassessment of the impact of NYU's expansion plan that accounts for all open space, as well as other priorities."

This sentiment was mirrored by his colleague, fellow State Senator Brad Hoylman. "I'm gratified that the court affirmed what we in the community said all along: public parkland can't simply be forked over to NYU without approval from the State Legislature," said Hoylman. "With this decision, NYU must go back to square one and work with community and faculty stakeholders to develop a plan that protects our public open space and respects the character of the neighborhood."

City Council member Corey Johnson, a strong supporter of the cause, agreed. "The decision by Justice Donna Mills is an affirmation of the community's fight to preserve public open space. In light of this ruling and the change of scope of the NYU 2031 project, I believe it is appropriate for the City to analyze whether or not this ruling changes the environmental review process which took place during the rezoning. Rather than engage in protracted litigation, NYU should seize this opportunity to work together with stakeholders to craft a growth plan that is contextual and respectful of the community character," said Johnson.

The Greenwich Village Society for Historic Preservation, which co-hosted the press conference in its headquarters, was another petitioner in the case. The GVSHP Executive Director, Andrew Berman, has long been an outspoken advocate for the struggle against the expansion plan. He weighed in on the issue, saying, "Judge Mills did the right thing in protecting our open space and putting the brakes on NYU's plan. The process for approving this plan, by the prior administration and prior City Council, was flawed and based upon what have now been shown to be faulty assumptions. We need to go back to square one and start a real process that will examine the university's needs, what the Village can really accommodate, and alternatives to NYU's current plans in terms of scale and location that may be better for the future of New York City."

The well-known actor John Leguizamo put in an appearance as well. "We don't want NYU to have to leave or shut down. What we want is for NYU to take a look around, see and appreciate where they are located, and embrace and respect the community and its needs when thinking about any expansion. They need to re-start the planning process," he said.

Following Justice Mills' recent verdict, Community Board No. 2's Chair, David Gruber, sent a letter to elected officials, which he read at the press conference.

"We are asking our elected officials, both in the district and those who have been on the Land Use Committee, to support the original CB2 ULURP resolution of 2012, which denied the NYU Plan 2031. We particularly ask you to stand behind the sections of the resolution deeming the public open areas surrounding the superblocks to be public parks, as affirmed in the recent court ruling, and, therefore, not eligible for inclusion in the development plans of the university.

'We are additionally asking that [elected officials] reach out to NYU to restart a review process with a smaller, more focused plan, as we the Community Board, have advocated all along in our resolution, and thus create a win/win for both the community and the university.'

Petitioners involved in the case include several neighborhood associations, a sizeable portion of NYU's own faculty, and a selection of organizations that advocate for the local parks and gardens – all of whom are concerned about the future of Greenwich Village.

"NYU called the lab building 'pivotal' to their plan. Yet as soon as the ink was dry, they quietly relocated it out of the core plan area. The taking of public parkland, the most crucial element, is now ruled illegal. What was approved by the City is no longer valid; these changes are too massive to call this the same plan," said Jeanne Wilcke, Chair of the NoHo Neighborhood Association.

Ellen Horan, Vice Chair of LaGuardia Corner Gardens, emphasized how pleased her group is with the decision, which affects it directly. "We are pleased with Judge Mills' ruling affirming LaGuardia Corner Gardens' status as parkland. Our forty-year-old green space, along with the other park strips on LaGuardia Place and Mercer Street, will now be preserved. We look forward to joining our neighbors along these beautiful ribbons of green to help steward the future of these community parkland assets," she said.

LaGuardia Corner Gardens wasn't the only parks organization to show relief over the legal decision. The Lower Manhattan Neighbors Organization (LMNO(P)) was chartered more than twenty years ago, with a mission dedicated to parks, and was responsible for the creation of Mercer Playground. "We join with all members of the coalition in our appreciation of Judge Mills' sound ruling, and remain deeply committed to retaining the integrity of our neighborhood, and its parkland green spaces in perpetuity; hopefully, for endless generations to come."

Professor Mark Crispin Miller has become a familiar face to those following the NYU expansion struggle. President of the NYU Faculty Against the Sexton Plan (NYUFASP), he has become an avid crusader for the cause. "As NYU faculty, we are delighted by Judge Mills' decision to uphold the public trust. This ruling benefits our whole community—not just NYU's neighborhood, but NYU itself, because the Sexton Plan would do grave damage to the Village and the university alike," he said, "We call on NYU's administration to

respect the judge's ruling, and to take this opportunity to reconsider their expansion plan. Specifically, we urge them to begin the planning process over, this time with all due transparency and fairness, treating the community and faculty as partners, not as adversaries.”

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You can learn more about some of the petitioners in the Article 78 case and opponents of the current NYU 2031 expansion plan online:

[Greenwich Village Society for Historic Preservation](http://www.gvshp.org/) (GVSHP): <http://www.gvshp.org/>

[Historic Districts Council](http://www.hdc.org/): <http://www.hdc.org/>

[NYU Faculty Against the Sexton Plan](http://nyufasp.com) (NYUFASP): <http://nyufasp.com>,

[Washington Square Village Tenants' Association](http://www.wsvtenantsassociation.org/): <http://www.wsvtenantsassociation.org/>

[East Village Community Coalition](http://www.evccnyc.org/): <http://www.evccnyc.org/>

[LaGuardia Corner Gardens, Inc.](http://www.laguadiacornergardens.org/): <http://www.laguadiacornergardens.org/>

[SoHo Alliance](http://www.sohoalliance.org/): <http://www.sohoalliance.org/>

[Bowery Alliance of Neighbors](http://www.boweryalliance.org/): <http://www.boweryalliance.org/>

[NoHo Neighborhood Association](http://www.nohonabe.org): www.nohonabe.org