

# The Community's 197-a Plan

While Columbia has consistently declared that its expansion into West Harlem will be an 'all-or-nothing' project, there is an alternative scenario for development that addresses the needs of both the University and its neighbors, and has broad public support. The 197-a plan is a set of guidelines created by the West Harlem community to inform and promote redevelopment in the neighborhood. Community Board 9, as the most local form of government, began developing the 197a plan in 1991. The plan is now in its final stages of revision, having undergone almost 15 years of public hearings to seek community input and create a comprehensive vision for the future of West Harlem. The framework set forth in the 197-a plan would allow for Columbia to expand in a way that recognizes and supports the needs of existing and future generations of the community that already lives in West Harlem, including neighborhood businesses and residents.

**In the broadest terms, the 197-a plan calls for the protection and creation of affordable housing and living wage jobs, environmentally sustainable development, and in-fill development (building around non-Columbia-owned properties).**

## **Five key concerns drive the plan:**

- A need to improve the quality of life of its residents.
- A need to preserve historical building patterns and neighborhood scale.
- A need to encourage the creation and development of job-intensive businesses to benefit local residents.
- A need to allow for population growth in a manner that promotes diversity of incomes and ethnicity without displacement of existing residents.
- A need to significantly improve the social, cultural and economic opportunities for residents by encouraging the redevelopment of the area while preserving and enhancing the built and natural environment for present and future generations

## **As a result, the plan makes recommendations including:**

- A number of zoning changes to preserve jobs held in light industry in the area and in spaces that can absorb higher density developments for production/light manufacturing, commercial, cultural, education and residential and other mixed uses.
- Allowing for a mixture of production/light manufacturing, commercial, retail, cultural, and residential uses within the community, and in some cases within the same building to support new job creation, along with supporting current business development.
- The expansion of existing programs that provide housing for low-income tenants. Some buildings within these programs such as the TIL buildings on 133<sup>rd</sup> street are slated to be destroyed by Columbia's expansion.
- The prohibition of the use of eminent domain to convey property to any private party seeking development in Manhattan's Community District 9 (this includes Columbia's proposed expansion area).

(continued on reverse)

- Using opportunities presented by zoning changes that increase residential density or allowable uses to create affordable housing.
- Creating more green and open spaces throughout West Harlem.
- The expansion of landmark designations and historically preserved sites, including sites that would be destroyed by Columbia's expansion in its current form.
- Improving transportation and transit in the neighborhood through widening select streets, creating bike paths, and improving bus services
- Studying and planning much needed improvements to community facilities such as schools, senior citizen centers and youth centers.

**Many of these recommendations do not conflict with Columbia's plans for the area, such as creating more green spaces, and creating new jobs. Yet the University has ignored key concerns of the community such as preserving existing affordable housing and businesses, developing contextually with current building heights, and not using eminent domain for private development. Even where conflicts exist, in many cases, their resolution would not require a wholesale abandonment of Columbia's expansion plans but rather select compromises.**

*For the full 197-a plan see - <http://www.prattcenter.net/cp-cb9.php>*