

Columbia's Expansion Plan for West Harlem

Columbia argues it needs to expand because it has less space per student than other top-ranking universities. The University says it needs this space to maintain its position as an elite research institution, but the University's caliber should be measured by its programming and its policies, not square footage alone.

The University's proposed expansion into Manhattanville is a long-term plan for this expansion of the University's programs and its research facilities that would take until the year 2030 to complete.

Buildings for the first phase of the proposed development include:

- The Jerome L. Greene Science Center
- A new site for Columbia Business School
- Columbia's School of the Arts
- A privately-owned publicly accessible park space
- A permanent site for the new, University-assisted public secondary school (opening in temporary space in September 2007)

The first phase would also include renovations to University-owned buildings on the south side of 125th Street — Prentis Hall as part of the new School of the Arts and the 560 Riverside Dr. faculty apartments. The University also may include more housing for faculty and grad students.

Why Manhattanville specifically?

- A primarily non-residential area that is “underutilized and lacked community amenities”
- A contiguous space for 5 million square feet of new development
- Access to public transportation
- Location between Columbia's Morningside Heights and Washington Heights campuses

Although the proposed rezoning area consists of approximately 35 acres, only 17 of these—from the north side of West 125th Street to West 133rd Street between Broadway and Twelfth Avenue, plus three properties immediately east of Broadway from West 131st Street to West 134th Street— are for Columbia's proposed development. The University is requesting that the area, which is currently zoned as light manufacturing, be rezoned for mixed-use development that would replace current businesses.

Biotech: Columbia proposes to build a biomedical research level-3 lab (out of 4 levels). The University has a poor safety record. It was fined \$792,029 in 2002 by the U.S. Environmental Protection agency for violations involving improper storage and disposal of toxic waste and faulty emergency plans. This plan raises

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concerns not only because of CU's lackluster safety record, but also because the research lab would be built on a fault line surrounded by a densely populated neighborhood, and would extend 7 stories underground in a flood plain area, making the lab especially vulnerable to natural disasters and accidents.

Retail: Columbia says that they will encourage ground-level retail to make the neighborhood more vibrant, but change in retail is one type of gentrification. If the retail stores included in the plan are only high-end, they will not benefit, for example, residents of Manhattanville or Grant Houses, who may be forced to travel farther to buy things they need at prices they can afford.

Community Access: Columbia always emphasizes that the open space they create will be accessible to local residents as well as students and faculty. While open space in Manhattan is certainly desirable, creating a campus that is open and inviting to people not affiliated with the University means more than constructing buildings with glass walls and not blocking off streets. The commitment to integrating local residents into the campus space must go deeper than this. Columbia must commit to making its resources available to local communities, such as its libraries, its athletic facilities and space for community meetings.

Columbia's expansion is not only about the future of the institution but its effects on West Harlem. West Harlem residents will be negatively impacted and possibly displaced through such a large development if community resources, affordable housing, jobs and environmental concerns are not met within the expansion. The expansion must be accessible and accountable to the residents of West Harlem, many of whom are low-income people and people of color thus far not heard in this campus plan, despite CU's self-proclaimed support of diversity and devotion to the communities of Upper Manhattan.