Columbia to Embark on Campus Planning Study to Determine Best Use of Resources

President Lee C. Bollinger announced that Columbia is embarking on a campus planning study to determine how best to make use of its existing resources in Morningside Heights, Washington Heights, Lamont-Doherty and Manhattanville, as well as develop a strategic plan to identify options for new space for the University's long-term academic growth.

In making the announcement, Bollinger referred to Columbia's need for space.

"Columbia is the quintessential great urban university and also the most constrained for space. In order to fulfill our responsibilities and aspirations, we must grow. How to do that — what resources to consolidate and where to expand — needs to be considered very carefully and strategically. The first step is to develop a comprehensive vision of the entire University and its academic and research goals.

The study will be completed by a team consisting of two preeminent urban architectural and planning firms, Renzo Piano Building Workshop (RPBW) and Skidmore Owings & Merrill (SOM). RPBW has designed a number of venues and buildings around the world including the reconstruction of the Potsdamer Platz in Berlin. They are currently working on the design of the headquarters for The New York Times and the Morgan Library addition. SOM, known for its landmark projects in New York, including the new Pennsylvania Station located in the Farley Building, has also been engaged in a number of campus planning studies and projects for institutions such as Harvard, Yale and Memorial Sloan-Kettering.

I am deeply pleased to have Renzo Piano lead Columbia to a realization of the highest principles of our built environment, buildings that work for the University and the community," Bollinger added. "Marilyn Taylor, an internationally recognized urban planner who chairs SOM, will direct our focus on the ways in which buildings must be supported by infrastructure and public spaces so that our community's life is enhanced by what lies ahead.

The team will evaluate the best use of existing space, which programs within the University need more space, and how these needs should be addressed. The team will also be charged to develop strategies to enhance the relationship between the Morningside Heights campus, the University's Health Sciences campus in Washington Heights and the Lamont-Doherty campus in Rockland County.

Renzo Piano said: "I am delighted to have the opportunity to work with Columbia University on this exciting project. Columbia University in the City of New York is one of the most urban universities I know. Urbanity is the key word. One of the key questions I will be focused on is how, two centuries after its foundation, the University can hold a sense of unity and integrate and welcome all the rituals and vital activities of the City.

Marilyn Taylor sees the process as a chance to think critically about the long-term priorities of the University: "In collaboration with RPBW, we will seek a new form and expression of the great urban university, one that is highly interwoven with the community, as envisioned by President Bollinger. This opportunity deserves a broad and engaging vision, and a new architecture that can both house and symbolize Columbia and its role in the 21st century."

Columbia has less square footage per student than any of its counterparts in the Ivy League. Historically, the University addressed space needs by relocating, which it did twice before moving to its current Morningside Heights location in 1897.

Now, once again, Columbia is at a pivotal time in its history. After considering a number of options outside of New York, including locations in New Jersey and Westchester, Columbia has decided to commit to locations in Manhattan that will allow the University to take advantage of its existing presence.

Bollinger reiterated Columbia's commitment to New York City and said that the campus planning efforts will focus on the west side of Manhattan.

"We are Columbia University in the City of New York. Since our inception, Columbia has been integrated into the fabric of New York City. The campus of New York is a tremendous asset for Columbia's faculty, researchers, and students. And the Columbia campus is a tremendous contributor to the intellectual and economic vitality of New York. As we consider options for expanding our campus, we will work closely with government officials and our neighboring communities and their leaders on the west side."

The campus planning team will begin its work immediately. It is estimated that the process will take approximately one year to complete.