What is the NYU 2031 expansion plan? Where would it happen/what area and communities would it affect? What’s the timeframe?

The NYU 2031 expansion plan, also known as the Sexton Plan, was put together by NYU President John Sexton, the NYU administration, and the Board of Trustees.

The expansion would take place on the 2 Greenwich Village “superblocks” bordered by LaGuardia Place and Mercer, West Houston and West 3rd Streets. The plan calls for the construction of 2.2 million square feet worth of new buildings (the same size as the Empire State Building), and would draw an additional estimated 10,000 more people in daily foot traffic alone.

Additionally, it would take 20 years to complete and the community would become a virtual construction zone for that whole time. That, of course does not factor in possible delays, etc. A similar, ongoing plan at Harvard has recently been paused for an indefinite time period due to lack of sufficient funds – and that was after groundbreaking, leaving an unsightly mess for the surrounding community.

Why does NYU feel like they have to keep growing? Is there really not enough room available for students and staff?

Non-profit universities like NYU take on the characteristics of a for-profit institution when they are run by an executive class, often recruited from corporate America, that believes it has unilateral power over decision-making. One of the consequences is that the growth imperative, so enshrined in the world of business, begins to pervade the university. President Sexton has said, “NYU must grow to maintain excellence.” That’s nonsense. The size of a school has nothing to do with its academic excellence. While it may be true that some additional space is needed, specifically for classrooms and studios, the scale of this expansion is unfounded. As a matter of fact, right now, there are more than 100 vacant NYU apartments in existing buildings in Washington Square Village. Right now, NYU underutilizes its classroom space – for example, few classes are offered on Fridays.

How are they planning on using this space?

Incredibly, NYU has said that only 17%-18% of the planned 2.2 million square foot expansion would be dedicated to academic use within the first 10 years of the plan. The original NYU 2031 plan included a 30-floor hotel, and while the administrators have since dropped it, they still want to incorporate commercial space. What does that have to do with education?

How much would this cost and who would pay? Is there a financial plan?

NYU administration adamantly refuses to release a business plan or budget for the
Sexton Plan, despite many requests from various parties. Even the project’s total costs are a closely held secret and estimates vary by billions of dollars. Best guess estimates are that the plan will cost between $4 billion and $5 billion dollars, but as with all projects, there are bound to be delays and cost overruns. Even conservative estimates place this financial burden at more than twice NYU’s entire endowment of $2.83 billion dollars. It’s even more risky than it sounds, since NYU is now stretched across the globe. NYU almost went bankrupt in the 1970s trying to run two campuses, but now they have 4 globally, and want to have even more.

The financial aspects of the plan are so obviously bad that NYU’s Business and Economics departments voted against the plan, departments that have produced three Nobel Prize winners in Economics.

Isn’t this a bad time for an expansion, given the current economy and worries about the mounting student debt crisis? Hasn’t this become a huge national problem?

NYU is a national leader in at least one respect – student debt. Tuition at NYU is already more than $41,000 a year, putting its students in the #6 spot (and climbing, if this plan goes through) in the entire nation for student debt burden. President Obama has recently put colleges and universities “on notice,” saying that they need to do their part in keeping tuition costs down so that attending college will not just be for the privileged few. This expansion plan flies in the face of the current student debt crisis, since we know that the students are the ones who, ultimately, will pay for it. And, despite President Obama’s exhortation, NYU just recently hiked tuition by 3.8%.

There is no justification for this plan. It will clearly be financed on the backs of students and will not make an education at NYU “better” in any sense of the word.

What’s the reaction been like so far from the Village community and NYU faculty/ staff/ students? How would it impact their lives if the plan is approved?

The overwhelming majority of NYU’s faculty opposes the plan; 34 NYU departments have voted against it. This overwhelming opposition includes a unanimous vote in the Economics department, as well as a shocking 52 to 3 vote at the Stern Business School. 40% of the faculty and their families live at the proposed construction site, and they have been vocal about the detrimental effects that this two-decade long project will have on the health and safety of residents, not to mention the damaged potential for drawing good professors from other institutions, who will never want to move to NYU only to live in a non-stop construction zone. Despite widespread faculty opposition, President Sexton says that he has “amazing’ support for the project within NYU. “The people who make decisions for the university, the Board of Trustees, all are unanimous and enthusiastic about the plan,” he said in a recent interview on WNYC.

Doesn’t the community get any say in this? Wasn’t the faculty consulted

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before the plan was announced? Didn't NYU get the land from NYC years ago in return for an agreement to use the land for the public good?

Believe it or not, no one – not the faculty, the students or the community – was consulted before the administration made the decision to go forward with a plan that would shape the destiny of NYU and Greenwich Village for 20 years and beyond. And, yes, the City did give the land to NYU in perpetuity with the agreement that it would always be used for public good. NYU calls itself "a private university in the public service," but now it's clear that NYU is reneging on its promise to the faculty, the students and the whole Village community.

What will happen to the Greenwich Village community? What will happen to the parks and the gardens? Will there be any green space left?

The historic Sasaki Garden would be razed and sown with rat poison and many of the trees would be chopped down. Instead of building tall, thin buildings, they have now planned short, squat ones of the same area, drastically diminishing the space between the new and old buildings, with very little greenery remaining.

The project is so massive that it will literally tower over the rest of the community, shutting out light and changing the actual character of the neighborhood, a neighborhood famed for its writers, artists and intellectuals. It's that certain Greenwich Village character, of course, that draws some of the best students and faculty to NYU, and that is in danger of being lost forever.

What about our elected officials? What do they say? Aren't they supposed to hold the University responsible to the community? Is there anything I can do about this?

Currently, the plan has gone to the City Council, where it is being discussed by the Land Use Committee.

You can contact CD1 Councilmember Margaret Chin directly at (212) 587-3159 or chin@council.nyc.gov to let her know how you feel.

Let's show them that we are united and will fight until we win.

Find NYU Faculty Against the Sexton Plan online: http://www.nyufasp.com
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