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MAS URGES CITY COUNCIL TO EXAMINE COLUMBIA EXPANSION MORE THOROUGHLY BEFORE VOTING

The Municipal Art Society, a private, non-profit membership organization whose mission is to promote a more livable city, today urged the City Council through testimony and individual letters to take the full extent of the time for review of the Columbia University expansion under ULURP in order to fully examine the complexities of the plan.

MAS' effort comes as the City Council scheduled a vote that appeared to cut short a full public approval process. The announcement of the vote was made without ample notice to the public and with time still available for review of the project under ULURP.

"If the City Council votes on Columbia's Manhattanville expansion today it will dramatically shorten the Council's review of such a complex and significant project," said Kent Barwick, president of MAS. "We believe the plan can be altered to better knit the project into the community and we believe the council should carefully consider these and other suggestions brought forth by Community Board 9 and members of the public."

Barwick said that while Certainly Columbia University contributes to the life and economy of New York City, its expansion will permanently alter the character of Manhattanville and adjacent West Harlem.

MAS urged the City Council to give the details of this project the scrutiny that they deserve and encouraged the full Land Use Committee of the Council to hold a public hearing on the project.

The Municipal Art Society recently testified to the Land Use sub-committees, recommending a design that would better knit the campus into the surrounding urban fabric and enhance the public "feel" of the campus' streets and public places.

MAS's suggestions include:

Relocate major open spaces to 12th Avenue and 131st Street in order to maximize public access, the public "feel" of the park so every member of the public will feel welcome whether or not they are affiliated with the university.

Maximize the potential of the viaduct, including developing a lighting scheme for that piece of urban sculpture and maintaining the 12th Avenue street wall, creating a dynamic "urban room."

Preserve more historic buildings, including the Sheffield Stable building.
Modify the street design to create visual cues that the streets feel public and not private.

MAS's procedural recommendations for the expansion plan echo the community's vision for West Harlem. MAS has urged the Council to:

Demap the volumes for Columbia's "bathtub," pursuant to ULURP, rather than allowing the ESDC to override the City Map.

Compel Columbia to negotiate directly with these property owners, as opposed to the ESDC exercising its power of eminent domain.

Take the full extent of the time for review available under ULURP and hold a public hearing of the full Land Use Committee, so that the considerations for change are fully explored.

The Municipal Art Society of New York is a private, non-profit membership organization whose mission is to promote a more livable city. Since 1893, the organization has worked to enrich the culture, neighborhoods and physical design of New York City. It advocates for excellence in urban design and planning, contemporary architecture, historic preservation and public art.

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