
**Statement to New York City Planning, Dispositions and Concessions;
Zoning and Franchises
City Council Subcommittees Joint Public Hearing
Columbia University “Manhattanville Expansion Project”
Wednesday, December 12, 2007
Robbie Cohen**

Esteemed members of the City Council,

My name is Robbie Cohen, and I am president of the second year medical class and an MD/PhD candidate at Columbia College of Physicians and Surgeons in Washington Heights. I thank you all for hearing my testimony and allowing me to go to class today; this is quite a pleasure and my first time in City Hall. I am here to speak in favor of Columbia’s 197c plan.

We in the medical center community, which educates over three thousand students in 6 medically related professions, are deeply excited by the proposed expansion in Manhattanville. Students from all these professions, especially the nearly 700 graduate students working in our basic science labs, engage in scientific research in every field imaginable. Our enthusiasm for research and its potential to change the lives of millions of people living with diseases that we might eventually control, cure, or prevent, is the reason so many of us devote the better part of our twenties and thirties to the world of DNA, proteins, pharmacology, and patient care.

The future of CUMC is even brighter than its present. Just over a year ago President Bollinger announced the appointment of Dr. Lee Goldman, a cardiologist and expert in Health Promotion, as Executive Vice President for the Health Sciences Campus. Dr. Goldman was most recently chair of medicine at UCSF and under his supervision UCSF became an elite medical school and research institution in America, receiving, and I am quoting a report here, “more financing in grants and contracts from the NIH than any other academic department of any kind in the United States.” We students believe that under his leadership Columbia Medical Center is being transformed into an institution to be mentioned in the same breath as Harvard, Johns Hopkins, Stanford, and UCSF, located right here in our wonderful city of New York, as the revered schools at the very forefront of the essential search for cures for diseases and for an end to the suffering they inflict worldwide.

One unique aspect about attending medical school or doing laboratory research in New York is the challenge of providing the necessary infrastructure for it, which must always be collaborative and labor and resource intensive. Right now Columbia lags significantly—over a hundred million dollars—behind our peer schools in research grants from the NIH, a direct function of the number of labs we are able to house in Washington Heights, yet we are still consistently ranked as one of the best medical research institutions in the country. Imagine what more we could achieve for New York, America, and the world if given the necessary resources to support our

brilliant new Dean and our distinguished faculty, which includes two winners of the Nobel Prize in Medicine in the past eight years.

We in the medical center community are extremely concerned for those we serve, specifically the residents of West Harlem, many of whom attend Columbia Presbyterian Hospital or our affiliated Harlem Hospital for their medical care. We have tremendous respect for those students and community leaders who are advocating the fair treatment of the residents of West Harlem, we echo their sympathy, and find them to be displaying the highest level of responsible citizenship in voicing their concerns. We equally respect and agree with those who wish to ensure that Columbia not ask the city to invoke eminent domain in the transference of land ownership, something that could certainly be construed as a disregard for the needs of the current residents. We applaud Columbia both for agreeing to this as well as their offers to help find affordable housing for all those who will inevitably be affected by this expansion. We would not support this plan if we did not feel these reasonable concerns were being adequately accommodated in ULURP's proposal; in fact we find Columbia's 197c proposal to be well more than adequate. We believe, frankly, that the good that will almost undoubtedly come from this 21st century research campus is essentially limitless in potential and should not be abandoned unless one of the great American rights, such as that to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness, or the protection of the minority against tyranny of the majority, were being infringed. Hearing not only the ULURP team's plan to provide affordable and nearby housing and possibly even a public high school, but also their sincere concern for the quality of life of their future neighbors has satisfied us that this compromise is one that is principled and necessary. On the behalf of many students at Columbia University Medical Center, I enthusiastically and wholeheartedly endorse the proposed plan to build this new research campus in Manhattanville.