

# Community Task Force on NYU Development

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Minutes - September 17, 2008

The focus of this meeting was on the goals, responsibilities and conduct of the Task Force itself.

There was general consensus that the Task Force was moving to a third phase where actual plans and projects would be subject to Task Force comment, query and additional review prior to as-of-right development and/ or required public hearing by Community Boards, The Department of City Planning (DCP), The New York City Landmarks Commission (LPC), The Board of Standards and Appeals (BSA). The Task Force further considered the need for creating guidelines for a more defined reviewing process, adaptable to the scale and timelines inherent in each project, and that addressing such guidelines, should be included in meetings over the fall and winter.

*This Task Force meeting then assessed some of the issues that were raised in the discussions and meetings about the Provincetown Playhouse site in May 2008, as a way to help inform the process discussions, including aspects of the Provincetown process that individuals felt worked or didn't work..*

133-139 MacDougal St. (Provincetown Playhouse) was an as-of-right project that NYU brought to the Task Force for opinion. In three Task Force meetings ramifications, modifications and site objections were addressed, resulting in the Task Force' recommendation that additional specifications, reduced height and bulk, contextual design modifications and the preservation of the Provincetown Playhouse itself (133 MacDougal) should be subjects of additional meetings. The work of the Task Force focused on refining this project in light of the Planning Principles and in urging a more thorough presentation for Community Board #2 consideration.

There were Task Force Members who objected to this as-of-right proposal altogether; there were also Task Force members who saw this project as an opportunity to improve dialogue and contextuality in an open advisory process. Press coverage and member lobbying outside of the Task Force became a matter of concern, as did meeting attendance by members of a

## **Background:**

The Community Task Force on NYU Development was conceived to make NYU's growth more transparent, public and community-collaborative than it has been in the past, largely because it was generally recognized that as a Lower Manhattan (Greenwich Village/East Village) entity, the University had reached a critical mass requiring broader scrutiny in New York City's urban planning process. In early 2006 the founding Task Force members agreed upon a [framework for participation](#).

In 2006 and early 2007 the major efforts were to form a Task Force in which New York University would participate. In defining what participation would entail, the Task Force and John Sexton, agreed on a framework for NYU's participation. Following this agreement, the Task Force asked for and was presented a report on past, present and future expansion and the goals of the University. In this first phase

- NYU issued an RFP for a Campus Planning team that would evaluate current facilities and make recommendations regarding expansion based on University needs as well as potential options in core and offsite campus locations. This first phase. [Request for Qualifications - New York University](#)
- The Task Force reviewed and discussed a presentation of University goals and data presented in March 2007. [NYU Overview - March 2007](#)

This was the first time a comprehensive and public consideration of campus planning – well in advance of any official applications - had ever been presented.

Task Force represented organization, which some members felt disrupted the balance of discussion.

Recognizing that as we enter Phase III where more as-of-right projects as well as public review projects would be matters of Task Force meetings and advisements, the September 17<sup>th</sup> meeting addressed – specifically, again, the role and conduct of Task Force members.

In that light the following issues were raised:

1. *Who are the Task Force members and how should their organizations be represented?*

If, for instance, Organization A is a member and has designated a representative, is it appropriate for that representative to bring 20 members to a meeting to express individual opinions? Or, if a show of hands is called for to assess agreement or disagreement on a question, should those 20 members be counted?

Though a majority opinion on this question was not called, it was agreed that a list of currently recognized Task Force members would be circulated for review at the next meeting for clarification and possible additions and that a spokesperson for each group, organization or office would be defined.

2. *What is considered a subject in progress and if it is in progress, should the information be considered “confidential, incomplete or not-for publication” until a majority of Task Force members agree that the topic has been suitably vetted? And what substantiates “suitably vetted”?*

In the case of the Provincetown Playhouse, for instance, the Task Force was presented with an initial plan, upon which it had many questions that could not be answered, or, as a result of which, NYU agreed to re-think or re-draft their plan. Another meeting was scheduled in which NYU would prepare answers or solutions to questions raised. In this case, the consensus at the Sept 17<sup>th</sup> meeting was that the meetings discussion was incomplete and that members would not represent the meeting as a final outcome.

#### Background (cont'd)

By the Fall of 2007 the Task Force addressed essential criteria for acceptable University expansions, debating, at length mandates for offsite campuses, better integration of University functions and built environment within the context of neighborhoods demanding more successful co-existence, architectural contextuality and environmental standards. Included in the 2007 meetings were also discussions of the as-of-right Co-Generation project where a variety of modifications and additional research were suggested for presentation to the community at large.

These discussions yielded the [Planning Principles](#) signed onto by NYU, The Task Force, Community Boards #2 and #3 and announced by Borough President Scott Stringer as lead sponsor of the Community Task Force on NYU Development in January 2008.

[CommUNITYnyc.org](#) was also launched in January 2008, to share materials, presentations, urban planning tools used or reviewed by The Task Force.

Through Spring 2008 NYU's planning team made presentations to the Task Force and in public meetings on planning concepts, culminating with an [Open House presentation](#) on April 24<sup>th</sup> with concentration on the core campus as well as the expanding list of offsite options for campus growth.

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It was generally agreed at the Sept 17<sup>th</sup> meeting that in such circumstances the Task Force would poll its members for a determination of “complete” or “incomplete” and that if polled as “incomplete” members would not lobby or speak to the Press outside the Task Force on incomplete discussions.

- 3. If there are Task Force Members, who feel they have a responsibility to lobby or advocate on behalf of their constituency, when is this appropriate?*

Because the Task Force is NOT a ruling body and its queries and opinions are advisory to NYU as a matter of better or more compatible campus planning members agreed that information released by Task Force members prior to agreement by the group could contribute to mis-information as the University adheres to City legislation/requirements and/or public hearings.

This point was not completely resolved at the September 17<sup>th</sup> meeting. Generally, the Task Force agreed, in principle, that each meeting would end with a discussion of whether members, including NYU, felt the topic needed more review, clarification or revision before releasing the topic or project for public scrutiny. This procedure would at least make known to the leader of any particular constituency the consensus – or lack thereof – of the other Task Force members.

Respectfully Submitted,

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