

**TESTIMONY BEFORE THE CITY PLANNING COMMISSION REGARDING
THE EXPANSION OF FORDHAM UNIVERSITY AT LINCOLN CENTER**

Council Member Gale A. Brewer (D- Manhattan)

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My name is Gale A. Brewer and I represent the residents of the West Side of Manhattan from West 54 Street to West 96th Street in the City Council. I am here today to discuss the expansion plan of Fordham University at Lincoln Center.

I want to thank the staff of the Department of City Planning Department for their on-going efforts to make themselves and their expertise available. Fordham's expansion is particularly complicated, and Adam Meagher of the DCP staff presented the plan brilliantly at the March 2 Commission review session.

The land use staff of the Office of the Manhattan Borough President, along with Borough President Scott Stringer, have also made great strides in improving the proposed expansion. Among other changes, Fordham agreed to eliminate the construction of slab-like towers on Columbus Avenue and to lower the street-facing walls of some buildings to 75 feet to better fit the scale of the neighborhood. Community Board 7 and its leadership, Helen Rosenthal, Richard Asche and Ethel Sheffer, have held many public hearings and have worked tirelessly on this project, paving the way for innovative ideas such as decreased garage space and second tier reviews. I know because I have attended the discussions. Also participating have been hundreds of neighborhood residents who are concerned about the effect that the expansion plan will have on the community; their leader, Michael Groll, is a pleasure to work with.

Fordham University is a wonderful institution making important contributions to our city and neighborhood, including local support for schools and community centers, and the provision of meeting space. It seeks to enlarge its vision and mission, and the community wants to support its efforts. The question before us is not the legitimacy of Fordham's needs, but how those needs should be met.

When we step back from the project several perspectives emerge. Most importantly, the proposal by Fordham is in fact a master plan for a series of linked developments within a large, single, bounded site in a dense urban setting. In this respect it recalls the Lincoln Center development plan of the 1960's, and, like that one, it is meant to serve a single institution of multiple components at a single site, and to evolve over a long time frame- perhaps as much as twenty years.

The proposal thus makes an implicit statement about the integrity required by such a plan and its design components. Also implicit is the need to integrate all the components within a single concept, and establish their impact on the surrounding neighborhood. But unlike the Lincoln Center master plan, Fordham's proposal lacks several key elements of sound design and good long term planning.

- First, the actual design of the structures in the plan is largely unspecified. Some features are known in general terms, and a building envelope has been established for the Columbus Avenue side of the project. But beyond this, Fordham's intentions are little more than a series of design components. And the one structure that had been sketched for Amsterdam Avenue, the erstwhile Pelli design, is no longer under consideration.
- Second, the Amsterdam Avenue side of the proposed development is still sketchy. No plans have been presented that describe actual buildings. What sort of a plan leaves unspecified height, bulk, volume, density, scale, siting, architectural materials, curtain wall appearance, residential and commercial overlays, and general look, access, and use- all to be pre-approved, and then decided by Fordham at a later time, also unknown, without control or consultation by the city or community? If these basic elements are unknown to Fordham, than this is not a adequate plan, and it cannot be appropriately review by the City Planning Commission as if it were one.
- To summarize, most elements of the overall proposal are concepts, or moving parts, whose actual physical nature can only vaguely be foreseen. In addition, these are concepts to which Fordham has made only a non-binding commitment. No one at this time can say definitively what will be built on these various sites, how they will be designed or used, what architectural features they will have, or how the result will impact the community. Every key element of what comprises good planning, let alone master planning, is vague. Fordham also has an open-ended time frame, and makes no actual commitment to build upon the site as its proposed plan suggest.

The Fordham proposal is long term and wide ranging in its potential impact, and it requires the rigorous and detailed analysis due any plan of this scale. I strongly recommend that the Commission require from Fordham much more detailed planning documents before issuing any approval for all or part of the proposal.

The next step will be consideration by the City Council. Much will depend on the outcome of the deliberations at CPC, but I remain focused on the following issues: the size, bulk, and siting of the proposed private buildings on Amsterdam Avenue which as-of-right would be 28 stories but are proposed to be 60 stories; the scope of the second tier review; and the continuing debate about the podium's design and access. Finally, from a broader community perspective, I look forward to working with Fordham regarding their continuing commitment to neighborhood school programs.

Much has been achieved to date by working in an atmosphere of good will and serious reflection. I believe that we can do still more before April 25 to improve both the scope and quality of Fordham's plans for an enlarged campus at Lincoln Center, and I look forward to that task.