

**OFF  
THE CUF**

By David Hochman

# MAKING THE MOST OF MANHATTANVILLE

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The battle over eminent domain has dominated discussion of Columbia's planned expansion into West Harlem, but the ultimate success of this project will hinge on whether it simply results in a larger campus or if, like with other recent expansion projects by U.S. universities, it triggers additional economic development for New York and the community

UNTIL EARLY DECEMBER, COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY HAD SEEMED poised to move ahead with its \$6.3 billion plan to develop its third major campus (complementing the university's main complex at Morningside Heights and its medical center at 168th Street) in Manhattanville, the lightly populated and mainly deindustrialized blocks of West Harlem sprawling between Broadway and 12th Avenue in the low 130s.

The city had approved the requested zoning changes. The state had agreed to exercise eminent domain over holdout commercial properties. And despite ferocious neighborhood opposition to the development stretching back nearly a decade, area politicians had signaled acquiescence after Columbia signed a "community benefits agreement" (CBA) that provides many protections for low-income residents and a rich pool of benefits for the entire area.

However, the Appellate Division of New York State Supreme Court has now at least temporarily put a halt to the university's expansion plans, ruling that the state cannot use eminent domain to take property on Columbia's behalf. The matter will ultimately be settled in a higher court. But even if the state prevails, the battle over eminent domain should not be the final word on this project.

There are still important pieces missing from the plan that, depending on how they are addressed, will determine the size and scope of the economic benefits of this promising project for New York City and West Harlem. If done right, the end result will not just be a larger campus for Columbia, but a range of positive economic outcomes for the surrounding community: the university's own investments could prompt private companies based on advanced science and engineering technologies to set up shop nearby, boosting the city's long-faltering innovation economy while creating a range of high-value, fair-wage jobs for local residents.

### What's missing from the Manhattanville discussion

There's no question about the project's potential benefits. Already one of the city's largest employers, Columbia will rebuild 17 acres of Manhattanville to create an "educational [or academic] mixed-use development" that will include in its first phase a new neuroscience initiative and relocated headquarters for the university's schools of business, arts, and international and public affairs—as well as university housing. Unquestionably a project of transformative scope, the final plan projects 6,000 permanent jobs and promises a bevy of business opportunities and civic or cultural amenities.

It should also bolster the city's largest and arguably most important higher education institution in the endless competition for the federal research funding that drives American universities—and helps amplify their local economic-development impact. Federal grantors now favor large-scale, interdisciplinary collaborations that integrate departmental silos and invite collaboration with industrial research and development (R&D) organizations. That's a tall order for campuses configured in the last century or earlier, and so universities

their global research partners to locate within a close walk of students and faculty.

The issue is salient because the Audubon Biomedical Science and Technology Park at Columbia's medical campus in Washington Heights—which was "sold" politically to city and state funders in the 1980s as the path to growing a biotech industry in the City—has failed to deliver on that promise. The "park" includes just one smallish commercial building with less than 60,000 usable square feet of business incubator space. (Two other academic research buildings have been built on this campus.) To this day, not one major corporate research partner of Columbia has space at the Audubon site. The lack of true capacity for industry partnership close to Columbia makes the lacunae of the Manhattanville plan especially troubling.

It's also an important point because the city's premier academic research institutions have not helped spark the growth of a larger local innovation economy, as have similar institutions in other regions. Despite a healthy complement of standout universities and other centers of research, New York City has no nexus of

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across the United States are expanding or—if landlocked, as Columbia is at Morningside Heights—are creating entirely new districts for overflow or relocation.

What's different about Manhattanville, however, is that to this point the plan has included no discernable emphasis on jobs other than in the university itself and in retail or service businesses that mostly offer low wages and limited advancement potential. By contrast, many new campus plans nationally (see table, page 6) make it possible for businesses that are research partners of the university to operate cheek-by-jowl with new academic space, sparking the growth of a sustainable regional technology cluster and the creation of jobs that pay relatively well. Even other campuses landlocked by residential neighborhoods with virtually no developable space (e.g., Carnegie Mellon in Pittsburgh) have developed standalone buildings that allow

academic institutions and innovative businesses comparable to the clusters around Stanford and MIT, for example.

Over the long term, New York has a lot at stake in reversing this trend, given the need to diversify the city's economy and identify new engines of growth. The final Manhattanville project plan approved by the state makes oddly confused assertions on industrial partnership. On the one hand, it acknowledges that the mixed-use district "should serve as an engine of private economic growth where more companies will want to be the first to translate research breakthroughs." But on the other, it promises plainly that "Columbia would not permit occupancy of the Project Site for conduct of scientific research as a commercial enterprise," with the exception of "ancillary" uses, possibly another technology oriented business incubator. While that's better than nothing, it's much less than what it should be.

### How we took our eye off the ball

Columbia determined very early that its new interdisciplinary space had to be all in one place (unlike NYU, which reached the opposite conclusion when it subsequently set its own expansion plans). Spurning the alternative Community Board 9 plan for modest infill development, Columbia opted instead for an aggressive clearance and buildout to its entire projected space need literally decades hence, well beyond the horizon of what's known with certainty now.

Moreover, to assure efficient use of lot size within the anticipated height restrictions and facilitate what the project plan repeatedly calls an “integrated, modern, open campus,” the university planned for two million square feet of underground utility space, requiring control over the entire site. Since they did not wish to compromise on full site control, administrators knew they would also ask for eminent domain powers. Under state urban development law, any project sponsor asking the state to exercise these powers on its behalf must demonstrate a plan to remediate substandard or insanitary conditions and to address educational, cultural, recreational, and community needs.

When you're a large institution operating in a community that is deeply suspicious and fearful of your motives to start with, whose buildout plan is necessarily a bit foggy because you're asking for more space than you need right now or have specific ideas for, and the law you want the state to use on your behalf requires you to argue that the community was decrepit to start with, and these same state laws says you must justify your plan by meeting community and civic needs, then conditions are ripe for a pretty toxic negotiation.

Indeed, as Columbia must have anticipated, there unfolded a race- and class-tinged brawl in which all imaginable risks and grievances—some entirely reasonable and others not—were thrown against the project in the hope of either protecting legitimate interests or extracting concessions of some kind. The rancor abated only when the CBA was signed in May 2009.

State law actually also includes a requirement for maximum participation in the development project by private enterprise. However, to keep the focus on the public purpose of the eminent domain procedure—the very point on which project opponents have challenged the state's powers of eminent domain—Columbia ironically ignored the greater private-sector potential of its plans, choosing instead to emphasize instead jobs in the institution itself and in retail/service operations.

Perhaps this was a political calculation. Mention of the potential to attract private-sector research partners

likely would have inflamed concerns that Columbia's success would come at the cost of displacing low-income residents from the surrounding areas. Every additional argument in support of eminent domain—even if fully consistent with state law—produced an opposite reaction of rage, and raised the “price” that the university would ultimately pay in the CBA. Therefore, development for private-sector partners was simply not discussed after the earliest stages in project planning.

### What to do now

Columbia has a superb design and engineering team working on a powerful and (to me) elegant physical plan, and it has signed a CBA that, whatever one may think of the process that produced it, does include many significant and useful commitments to genuine university/community partnership. But we're still behind on understanding how to leverage Manhattanville for significant economic development.

Beyond the 17 acres being developed by Columbia, there were about another 18 acres considered by the City Planning Commission as part of the overall planning area. This comprised two parcels of land: the underdeveloped lots surrounding Fairway market between 12th Avenue and the City-developed West Harlem Piers waterfront park; and the low-lying quasi-industrial district southwest of City College, sometimes known as “New Amsterdam.”

In its smart and thoughtful memorandum of decision reconciling Columbia's plan with the CB9 plan, the City Planning Commission recommends continued commercial zoning for these spots, albeit with enhanced height and density controls. These are the areas we should now be focusing on for high-value private-sector uses. There is no reason not to do so, since the CBA provides ample resources to combat displacement, and Manhattan borough president Scott Stringer has emphasized his intent to seek strong preservation controls for the historic parts of Hamilton Heights and “contextual” zoning and “inclusionary housing” rules for existing residential areas.

The New Amsterdam area in particular could “connect” the City College campus, which includes CUNY's new Advanced Science Research Center and the consortial Structural Biology Center, with Columbia's assets at Manhattanville, without any need to displace or otherwise negatively affect the adjacent Manhattanville Houses, a public housing complex. A few modest-sized private-sector R&D buildings would instantly create one of the country's truly great knowledge districts, creating partnership opportunities for faculty and jobs

for students at two great institutions, one undeniably elite but the other just as plainly focused on serving the working class. There is no downside to this for local officials.

New York City and State, and Columbia itself, have sometimes acted as if the final approval of the Manhattanville plan (including the eminent domain request) were the end game. But these additional private-sector job opportunities will not develop by themselves: leadership is required. The main task for political leaders is to invert the toxic dynamics that inexorably followed Columbia's all-or-nothing approach to land acquisition. Carefully planned private-sector job development should now be revisited as an opportunity for West Harlem, not a threat to it.

Will such jobs be relevant to the residents of West Harlem? If we take the right steps, the answer is yes. As a provision of the CBA, the residents of West Harlem will already have access to advanced job training, but right now the jobs contemplated are mainly university and retail or service-sector opportunities. Expanding the range of potential employers can only help. And as in the St. Louis Cortex project (see table), the West Harlem LDC should convene a public/private-sector diversity task force, including members from city government, local clergy and the philanthropic community, to ensure that these connections are made consistently and reliably.

Whatever plans Columbia may once have discussed internally for partnership buildings on its own site—

and they're not saying much as long as the litigation is pending—should be dusted off and considered in the context of the additional, non-university acreage that the City Council will rezone in the next half-year. All this should have nothing to do with how the eminent domain litigation is settled. The city's job is now to articulate and promote a vision under which development of private-sector job opportunity goes forward in a way that's compatible and even synergistic with affordable housing and other features desired by the community.

Properly done, a modest amount of commercial development could provide for upper Manhattan and its higher-ed institutions what East River Science Park will do for the East Side biomedical institutions. The CBA assures that low-income residents will be properly protected and will have access to a new Math, Science and Engineering High School, as well as up to 40 scholarship slots at Columbia, and sophisticated job training and placement services. West Harlem residents have fought hard to ensure themselves an appropriate share of the prosperity that will result from Columbia's Manhattanville expansion. At this late point, however, their focus should turn to how best to partner with the university and city government in pursuit of the quality jobs that ultimately will do the most good for the community.

*Off the CUF* commentaries are published periodically by the Center for an Urban Future. Alternatively written by outside experts and CUF staff, the commentaries aim to highlight critical opportunities and challenges facing New York and other cities, and generate fresh ideas for policymakers, business leaders and nonprofit practitioners.

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## Selected New Campus Plans Nationwide

City	University/Campus	Description of the campus	Connection to industry space
Aurora (CO)	Anschutz Medical Campus of CU	227-acre site at the former Fitzsimons Army Hospital in Aurora, redeveloped so that the entire University of Colorado Health Sciences Center could relocate from downtown Denver, where it was landlocked. All part of a broader 578-acre institutional and commercial health-science district planned for the Army hospital.	Built immediately adjacent to 160-acre Colorado Bioscience Park entirely dedicated to commercial biotech uses. Adjacent to sites of the former Stapleton Airport and the former Lowry AFB, both of which are being redeveloped for both residential and commercial uses.
Boston	Harvard University Allston Campus	200-acre former truck yards being redeveloped as a new Harvard Campus, targeted for development of 10 million square feet of institutional space over 50 years, focusing on Harvard's science departments, and the schools of education and public health. Plans in suspension due to fiscal retrenchment as of late 2009.	No direct industry presence, but Allston is quite close to millions of square feet of commercial R&D space at University Park at MIT in Cambridge and at the Longwood Medical and Academic Area of Boston.
Clemson (SC)	Clemson University International Center for Automotive Research	250 acre greenfield campus built around Clemson's new graduate engineering research center.	Similar to NCSU Centennial Campus (below) but without the housing – graduate engineering research center situated on the same campus as major new industry research centers (e.g., BMW, Timken).
NYC	Columbia University Manhattanville Campus	17-acre renewal of light industrial district within broader 35-acre rezoning	None stated. Manhattanville is 30 blocks from limited commercial space at Audubon Center and several miles from ample commercial space at East River Science Park.
Philadelphia	Penn Connects	42-acre redevelopment of former U.S. Postal Service yards along the Schuylkill River as a campus extension (targeting natural sciences, nanotech, and law) including a 24-acre park.	Only one office building is in the plan, but Penn is already walking distance to the 17-acre University City Science Center research park, with nearly 2 million square feet of commercial R&D space.
Portland (OR)	Oregon Health and Sciences University Schnitzer Campus on South Waterfront	19-acre site donated to OHSU within the broader, formerly industrial 130-acre North Macadam being redeveloped for mixed commercial and housing use.	Unclear at current stage of development, but some industrial R&D seems likely.
Raleigh	North Carolina State University Centennial Campus	1,120-acre greenfield campus built around NCSU's graduate engineering research center and other facilities.	Conceived as a dual-use campus/research park, integrating millions of square feet of academic and commercial uses side-by-side in discipline-focused "neighborhoods" plus housing, retail, and schools.
St. Louis	Cortex – a project under sponsorship of several adjacent universities	200+ acres of the light-industrial Midtown area lying between Washington University, Saint Louis University, Barnes Jewish Hospital, and the Missouri Botanical Garden.	Intended not as a campus expansion for any single institution, but as a site for industrial partners and business-incubator spin-outs emerging from the research programs of all of them. One mid-rise, 200,000 square-foot multi-tenant private R&D building already open.
San Francisco	University of California, San Francisco, Mission Bay Campus	43 acres of expansion space for UCSF biomedical research and clinical care at the core of a 300-acre former rail yard being redeveloped for mixed commercial and housing use.	No industry presence on the campus itself, but it is literally surrounded by commercial space, including at least one large privately developed commercial bioscience lab