



Universities as Urban Planners

E. John Rosenwald, Jr., Robert Campbell, James Stewart Polshek, Omar Blaik, and Lee C. Bollinger

This presentation was given at the 1888th Stated Meeting, held in New York on February 28, 2005.

E. John Rosenwald, Jr. is Vice Chairman and Senior Managing Director at Bear Stearns Companies, Inc. He has been a Fellow of the American Academy since 2001 and is a member of the Academy Trust.

Robert Campbell is an architect and a writer. He has been a Fellow of the American Academy since 1993.

James Stewart Polshek is Founder and Senior Design Principal of Polshek Partnership Architects LLP. He has been a Fellow of the American Academy since 2002.

Omar Blaik is Senior Vice President of Facilities and Real Estate Services at the University of Pennsylvania.

Lee C. Bollinger is President of Columbia University. He has been a Fellow of the American Academy since 1992.

E. John Rosenwald, Jr.

The role of universities as city planners is a critical issue for all of us concerned with the relation between academic institutions and their neighboring communities. In addition to my day job at Bear Stearns, where I've been

for the last fifty-one years, I've had the privilege of serving on the boards of a number of educational and cultural institutions, including New York University, Carnegie Hall, the Metropolitan Museum of Art, and, my alma mater, Dartmouth College. All of these institutions have physical facilities and, in some cases, large, sprawling campuses. All face the complex set of challenges that are posed by the need to grow and expand while maintaining harmony with their neighbors and their neighborhoods. Many of us have been involved on one side or the other of the inevitable growth pangs of an institution and its host community. Of course, every case is unique. But are there some overarching principles that govern how universities and other large, nonprofit landholders manage their growth?

The Academy's interest in the question of universities as urban planners demonstrates its concern with topics that call upon the expertise, experiences, and insights of individuals from many fields. As a businessman with a deep interest in the arts, higher education, and public policy, I believe that programs like this one exemplify the thoughtful, cross-disciplinary exploration of subjects at which the Academy excels.

Robert Campbell

As a preface for our discussion, I want to take a brief look at the city planning profession. The profession flourished in the 1960s and early 1970s in many cities, but it existed largely for the purpose of administering an influx of federal urban renewal funds. Today city planning agencies are in decline, not only because of decreased federal and municipal spending but also, in my view, because of a loss of faith in the ability of people to plan better cities.

To some degree, New York is an exception. Several major planning initiatives are in progress: the far West Side, the Brooklyn piers and waterfronts, and the Second Avenue subway, to name a few.

But in most cities, planners are no longer proactive. Rather than take the lead, they often can do no more than look for ways to spin off public benefits from private initiative. Thus they may say to a developer, "You can have ten more stories than the zoning allows, as long as you build a school or a park in the neighborhood." Fan Pier, a beautiful piece of land on Boston harbor, is a case in point. Some years ago the city said to potential developers, "You may build a generous amount, but you will also have to build all the streets and maintain them forever; put in all the utilities and maintain them forever; construct underground parking and maintain it forever; and build and maintain the parks." In the past, the municipality would have done most or all of these things. Given such constraints and conditions, a private developer finds it difficult to make a profit – and so far no one has volunteered.

Thus there is a planning vacuum. My hypothesis is that universities have moved into this vacuum by becoming *de facto* planners. They are the dukes, the "Bedford Estates" of our time, planning whole chunks of the city much as Bloomsbury was planned in the eighteenth century.

Universities are acting as planners in two entirely different ways. Some are expanding into new territory and redeveloping large pieces of land; for example, Columbia is growing north into Manhattanville, and Harvard is growing across the Charles River into the neighborhood of Allston in Boston. Manhattanville, a one-time fishing village, occupies a low site on the Hudson River, a valley between the bluffs of Morningside Heights to

In most cities, planners are no longer proactive. Rather than take the lead, they often can do no more than look for ways to spin off public benefits from private initiative.

the south and Hamilton Heights to the north. Now inhabited by only seventy people, at least legally, it has been used by the City as a dumping ground for infrastructure. Now it offers new opportunities for Columbia.

The impact of universities can be summarized by the fact that Columbia has the least land area per student of any of the Ivy League colleges, yet it is already the third largest landowner in New York City, after NYU and the Catholic Church. We'll learn more about Columbia's plans from President Bollinger.

At the same time, other universities are acting as planners not by expanding but rather by reconfiguring their surroundings. The University of Pennsylvania and Yale, for example, some years ago found themselves situated in the midst of depressed and disinvested neighborhoods, neighborhoods that were beginning to affect each university's ability to attract faculty and undergraduates. In the case of Penn, the neighborhood had deteriorated so badly that it was literally felt that the university might not survive. Both universities responded by undertaking joint initiatives with local groups, in order to upgrade the quality of city life for both university and nonaffiliated residents.

We can take Penn as an example of the importance of universities in today's urban economy. Penn is the largest employer in Philadelphia. It imports raw material in the form of eighteen-year-old minds and bodies, and four years later ejects a finished product that is ready for the market. It has, thus, replaced traditional industry with a new kind of industry. We'll hear more about Penn's planning from Vice President Blaik.

Of course, there is an overlap in these cases: Columbia is very much concerned about its immediate neighborhood, and Penn has acquired a large piece of land for future development. Nonetheless, there are two prototypes – the university aiming to expand, and

the university aiming to regenerate its surrounding area – and they provide a framework for our discussion.

James Stewart Polshek

As practicing architects, my colleagues and I have, in the past thirty years, worked with some forty institutions of higher education, both as planners and as designers. Speaking on this topic makes me feel a bit like a war correspondent who's been asked to comment publicly about various world powers, some of which hold his children as hostages. This crude metaphor refers to my thirty years of complex professional relationships with research universities, three of which I shall speak of in some detail.

Given this experience, and in particular having served as a dean for fifteen years at Columbia, I've seen both sides of the challenges faced by institutions attempting to expand or to replace obsolete buildings. Whether on the perimeter of a campus or in a new precinct, a number of often conflicting elements have to be reconciled: alumni memory, and its implications for the development office; institutional history; public identity (which is related to the question of memory); student and faculty aspirations; and, of course, trustee fiduciary responsibility. Finally, there are the local communities and the special interest groups that represent them. This last challenge hardly existed before the late 1960s, but it is now a major political factor.

I demonstrate some of these issues by reference to several academic institutions. First, Columbia with its turn-of-the-century classically ordered campus by the distinguished firm of McKim, Mead, and White. But over the course of a hundred years, the campus grew and expanded and not always benignly. As with many other universities, particularly in the 1960s, Columbia made some avoidable planning and architectural errors. East of Amsterdam Avenue, it's not difficult to see what those mistakes were. I refer here, specifically, to the School of International and Public Affairs and the Law School. Having made a significant addition to the latter building, I hope we have demonstrated that it is possible to heal a retrograde structure's deficits.

Columbia, New York University (with its "accidental" campus), and other similar urban campuses such as the University of Chicago, the University of Pennsylvania, and Harvard University historically failed to recognize the

interdependence of community and university. Their acts of indiscriminate expansion created a negative memory bank that affects decisions even in the relatively enlightened planning environment of today.

A very different example of a university's relationship to both its internal and external community is the University of Virginia in Charlottesville. Our firm was selected to design a major expansion of the campus to serve the College of Arts and Sciences. Here there exist internal organizational complexities that are both statutory and emotional. Thomas Jefferson, in creating the university, established a formal Board of Visitors that is appointed by the Governor. One of their obligations is to approve the design of new buildings and expansion plans. This board, once purely honorific, has in recent years become more active in assuring that the Jeffersonian tradition is being respected and "replicated." A former member of the Board of Visitors stated in a meeting at which I was present something close to the following: "I don't care what you fellas do on the insides of the buildings but they better be pure Jefferson on the outside!" I assumed that such a threat would soon be forgotten and that we would be spared from confronting the Hobson's choice between vacuous imitation or resignation from the commission. But the Board of Visitors is only one of the power centers that is concerned with image. Another is the Office of the President. Here, there is a sophisticated understanding of design, but there is also great pressure to raise money for the university – often from alumni who see themselves as protectors of UVA's "Jeffersonian" traditions. There is also a College Foundation – charged with financially supporting the Arts & Sciences, the Dean's office, the University Architect whose mandate is the protection of the physical integrity of the campus, the Facilities Office concerned with budgetary and schedule issues, the State Office of Historic Preservation, and the naturally self-interested adjacent residential neighborhoods.

The presence of a burgeoning health-science complex at UVA represents a further complication. These various stakeholders and self-appointed guardians do not always share a common point of view, nor should they be expected to. Nevertheless they must develop sound working relationships if the University is to expand progressively into the twenty-first century without depending

Clearly, the great research universities of this country have an opportunity and, I believe, an obligation to themselves and to their surrounding communities to harmonize planning processes and consequent architectural realizations.

upon retrograde architectural pastiche. Indeed, even Jefferson was concerned about this. In 1810, in a letter to Samuel Kercheval, Jefferson stated, "I am not an advocate for frequent changes in law and constitutions, but laws and institutions must go hand in hand with the progress of the human mind. As that becomes more developed, more enlightened, as new discoveries are made, new truths discovered, and manners and opinions change, with the change of circumstances, institutions must advance also to keep pace with the times. We might as well require a man to wear still the coat which fitted him when a boy as civilized society to remain ever under the regimen of their barbarous ancestors."

Fortunately, at many universities, there are promising signs of greater cooperation among their different schools and an increased recognition that excellence in architecture is achievable in a university context. Health care is one aspect of UVA's expansion challenge that it holds in common with Columbia, NYU, the University of Michigan, the University of Chicago, Stanford, and many others. For a long time, there were two worlds on these college campuses: the undergraduate and graduate schools on the one hand, and the medical school on the other. Often the one did not inform the other of its plans. When I was Dean at Columbia, this was certainly the case. The Morningside campus and Presbyterian Hospital uptown were separate in every way. Now at a time when the expansion of health-care facilities is increasing exponentially there is an urgent need for planning processes that will recognize the environmental and intellectual interdependence of all disciplines. In each of the schools noted there have been positive steps that recognize this.

Another encouraging development is the role of the arts in both undergraduate and graduate education as catalysts for ideas about and responsibility for rational planning and the sponsorship of progressive design. Here I can point to the University of North Carolina, Stanford University, and Yale University, where we are currently expanding arts facilities in areas on the edge of the campus precincts. In these cases, the Chancellor at UNC, the President at Stanford, the President of Yale, and the former President of Stanford see the performing and visual arts as magnets that can attract students in medicine, business, and law. The arts initiatives of these three less urban universities also are intended to attract members of local communities as well as tourists. Here lies the opportunity to open what once were closed intellectual sanctuaries to a broad culture-consuming public.

Clearly, the great research universities of this country have an opportunity and, I believe, an obligation to themselves and to their surrounding communities to harmonize planning processes and consequent architectural realizations. Hopefully, these efforts can become models for government initiatives as well.

Omar Blaik

Today, as we talk about universities as planners, community builders, and economic drivers, we must address several questions that pertain to the topic:

- What is the difference between campus planning and urban planning?
- How can you integrate community development with institutional processes?
- If you accept the proposition that universities should engage with their surroundings, how do outside constituents, such as a neighboring community, contribute to a process of strategic planning on campuses that is inherently internal and bureaucratic?
- Lastly and most importantly, can urban universities succeed without engaging in comprehensive urban planning for both the campus and the community?

Let me first give you some context. The University of Pennsylvania was founded on the principle of teaching what is useful and what is ornamental, on integrating undergraduate education with professional graduate studies, with an emphasis on both theory and prac-

tice. Penn is unique in that it is one of a handful of large urban universities in one of the largest cities in America. It experienced its largest expansion in the 1960s and 1970s, during which six million square feet were added. Federal urban renewal programs facilitated and financed most of this growth. Through eminent domain, the Redevelopment Authority acquired and then demolished many residential and commercial city blocks to accommodate Penn's expansion. Having destroyed the fine urban fabric around it, Penn proceeded to physically expand with massive, institutional, super-block-like development.

The institution that promoted the values of service, engagement, and integration found itself physically insular and detached. The physical disconnection from its surroundings eventually caught up with Penn, as the neighborhood deteriorated and started a downward cycle that threatened its academic status and risked its core mission. The cycle is all too familiar to many cities: homes were abandoned, services were cut, residents migrated to suburbs, crime became rampant, and streets were left unattended. In short it was a cycle of divestment. It reached a new low when a Penn graduate student and a professor became victims back in the mid 1990s.

A crisis instigated a rethinking. A new leadership took the helm and decided that Penn must adjust its attitude toward the city and neighboring communities and embarked on a unique integrated approach toward community revitalization known as the West Philadelphia Initiatives. It encompassed five distinct strategies:

Clean and safe: Penn would increase the size of its police force and would create a special services district devoted to public space maintenance and safety.

Homeownership: Penn would provide incentives to its employees to purchase homes, or improve homes, in the adjacent neighborhood, and today more than four hundred faculty and staff have moved into the community.

Commercial development: Penn would convert its land at the edge of campus into lively retail and mixed-use space, mitigating the invisible walls of the campus border by adding three hundred thousand square feet of retail and over forty new businesses serving both the campus and the community.

Economic inclusion: Penn would create a “Buy West Philadelphia” program that supported local businesses in the trade and professional services, adding approximately \$50 million to the local economy, resulting in higher employment and increased economic stability.

Investing in public education: Penn would partner with the Philadelphia School District to construct a new public elementary neighborhood school and then support it through curriculum and resources.

Most of these strategies can be traced back to community demands discussed and debated over the prior decade. Rather than starting from scratch, Penn listened to the community to understand its needs, aspirations, and concerns.

These initiatives were formulated at a time when Penn was beginning 3.5 million square feet of newly planned construction representing more than \$1.5 billion in capital investment. The convergence of the initiatives with an intensive capital program elevated the effort from community development to a full-fledged urban plan. The campus-built environment and its surroundings represented the fabric on which Penn knit these initiatives together.

By engaging in community and urban planning, universities are preserving the values of our democracy.

We took on the challenge of creating a campus plan that would guide growth and development for twenty-five years. After a two-year process that included participation from our faculty, students, staff, and community, we established a vision for creating a coherent identity for the entire campus by reintegrating the campus with the city of Philadelphia – its streets, sidewalks, and residents. The vision and values from our West Philadelphia Initiative and Campus Development Plan began to converge and something remarkable happened. We realized that updating the campus did not require alienating the community. In fact, integrating the West Philadelphia Initiative and our campus plan improved the community, and an improved community would no doubt enhance the quality of life on campus.

If the sins of our past were building walls, now we had the chance at redemption, to build again, but this time through integration and transparency reflected in architecture, prudent land use planning, and smart development. The goal of integration has been met and is spreading energy into the community through art galleries, theater, community centers, locally owned retail, and economic development. The new cafes and restaurants are bustling; the newly designed pocket parks are filled with people, live music, and pick-up soccer games. Our built environment today is one of the key factors in our ability to recruit and retain a world-class faculty and student body. Penn finally reclaimed, in a physical way, the values to which we as an institution had always aspired.

In conclusion, I would like to answer one question I raised earlier: Can universities, especially urban ones, remove themselves from the exercise of community and urban planning? The answer is no: this is a core mission. Cities large and small are dependent on higher education and the health-care industries as economic engines. Our metropolitan areas depend on the economic, job creation, and intellectual capital of such institutions. In a post – 9/11 society, cities, with their mixed population and rich ethnic and cultural heritage, are our window to the world. By engaging in community and urban planning, universities are preserving the values of our democracy.

Lee C. Bollinger

Today there are two primary forces at work with respect to the role of universities in city planning. The first is that universities, which by any measure are extraordinarily successful institutions, have a kind of imperative for growth. As knowledge expands, so does the need for space. And the second is that communities are actually interested in being near universities and in growing with them. Over the past fifty years, these two converging forces have brought about striking changes in our universities and our cities.

Let’s begin with universities and with Columbia University in particular. Columbia just celebrated its 250th anniversary. There are few institutions that have been in existence that long. But, equally remarkable, is the steady expansion of the university over that period of time, especially in the last century. One hundred years ago Columbia had four thou-

sand students; today the number is twenty-two thousand students and it’s not unthinkable that a century from now it could be double or triple that number. The expansion of any single major American university is also matched by the increase in the number of universities. The University of California at San Diego did not even exist as a university until the 1960s and is now one of the very fine universities of the country. The fact is that the growth in knowledge, together with the growing interest in knowledge, has produced a need for physical space as a kind of imperative. As a working rule, the experience of the last century shows an increase of one to two million new square feet every decade.

Universities have a kind of imperative for growth. As knowledge expands, so does the need for space.

These forces obviously can have an impact on communities that also want to grow. For needy communities, people naturally look to universities for help and assistance, since over the past twenty years we have had less government action focused on our inner cities. In actual fact, universities have offered extraordinary, if often unheralded, services to their surrounding neighbors. In the case of health care, Columbia runs Harlem Hospital as well as the major medical facilities in Washington Heights. We help provide legal services, business counseling, and urban planning. Many universities probably have their own police force, either deputized or not, which helps keep communities safe. All this is in addition to the contribution universities make to create a stimulating environment in which to live and work.

This has not always been the state of affairs. Many will recall the demonstrations that occurred in the wake of Columbia’s plan to build a gymnasium on public parkland in the late 1960s. To my mind this controversy was one of many that represented a collision between a Robert Moses view of city planning and a Jane Jacobs effort to uphold citizen rights and control over the environment. Since then, much has been done on all sides to ameliorate the sources of tensions and enhance the chances for mutual benefits from growth.

What does this mean, practically, for our current plans for a new campus just north of the famous McKim, Mead, and White campus on Morningside Heights? There are many answers to that question but here are a few: Unlike the brick and stone of a McKim, Mead, and White design, today's world calls for glass, transparency, and color. It is not acceptable to build, literally or figuratively, a gate through which community people must enter; you need open streets, setbacks with vistas, retail shops to

draw in the community, and a quadrangle that is welcoming to all. Everything must be worked out in detail to reflect a campus working with a community.

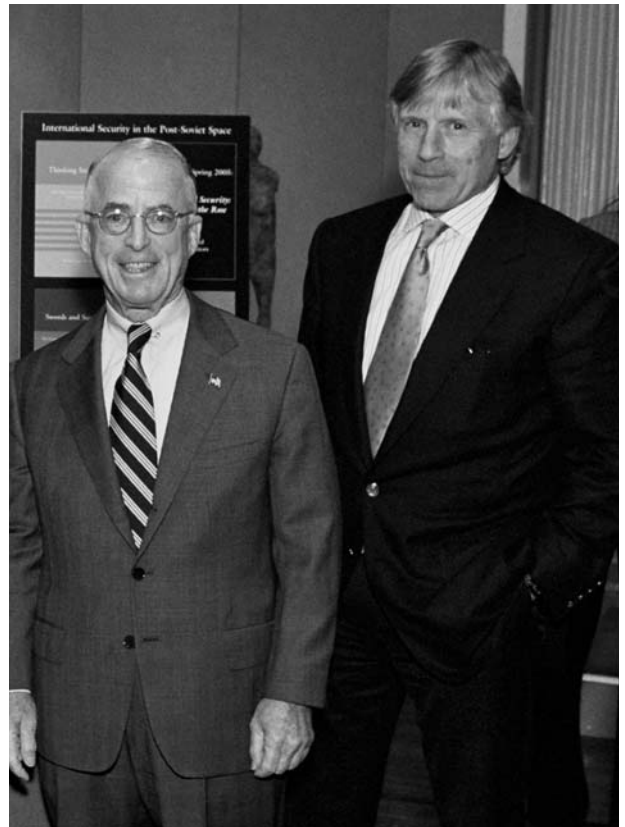
It remains to be seen whether we can create this kind of "university city." At least two major questions will need to be answered over time: First, can we incorporate community and city planning and still retain the sense of a campus, a place dedicated to students and faculty? Second, will we inevitably disappoint

communities by not being able to fulfill their hopes and expectations? Our answers to these questions will determine how effectively universities can serve their own needs *and* those of surrounding communities. Whatever the outcome, it is a new historical moment. ■

© 2005 by E. John Rosenwald, Jr., Robert Campbell, James Stewart Polshek, Omar Blaik, and Lee C. Bollinger, respectively.



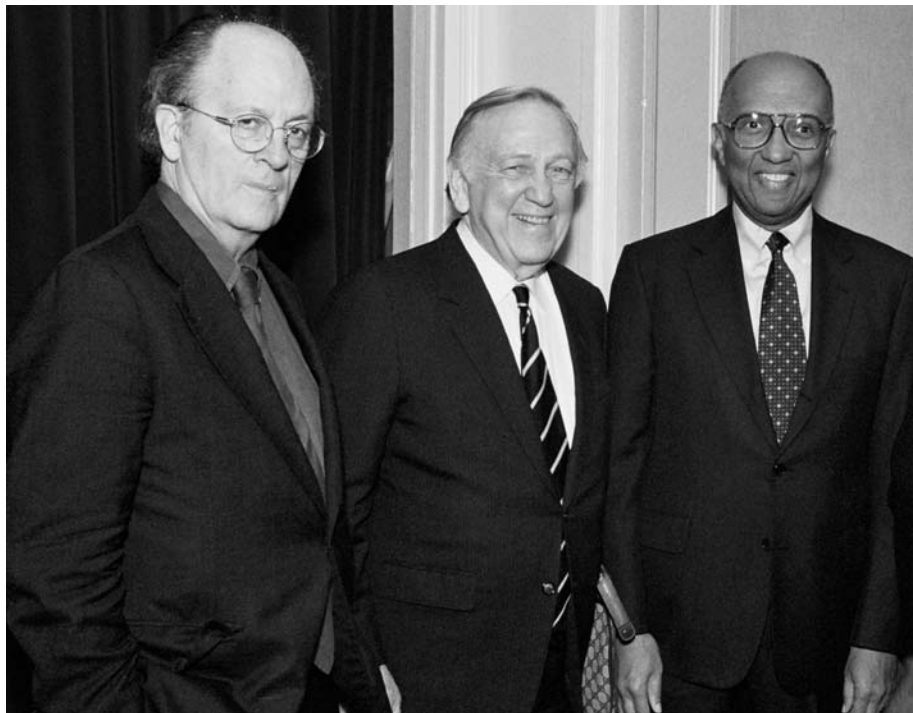
Omar Blaik (University of Pennsylvania) and James Stewart Polshek (Polshek Partnership Architects LLP)



E. John Rosenwald, Jr. (Bear Stearns Companies, Inc.) and Lee C. Bollinger (Columbia University)



William T. Golden (New York, New York) and Joel E. Cohen (Rockefeller and Columbia Universities)



Robert Campbell (Cambridge, Massachusetts), John Brademas (New York University), and Conrad Kenneth Harper (Simpson Thacher & Bartlett)