

Sidebar: Columbia maintains working relationships with local politicians

As an institution of enormous economic and social importance, Columbia is a key player in the political relationships of elected officials all over the city.

By Jillian Kumagai

Spectator Senior Staff Writer

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Olachi Oleru for Spectator

The jurisdictions of New York's elected officials intersect all over the city. Columbia's campuses are represented by a dozen different city, state, and federal officials. As an institution of enormous economic and social importance, Columbia is a key player in all of these political relationships.

Some elected officials come to Columbia when they retire from their careers, like former New York City Mayor David Dinkins, now a School of International and Public Affairs professor in the professional practice of public affairs. Others came from Columbia to begin making their careers—President Barack Obama, CC '83, and Attorney General Eric Holder, CC '73, to name two.

But one of the most important relationships that Columbia has with politicians today is with the local elected officials that represent the Manhattanville campus, the first phase of which will be completed in 2016.

Rep. [Charles Rangel](#) said in April that the Manhattanville expansion will become an important partner for elected officials who have promised jobs recovery to their constituencies.

“One of the biggest economic development projects that we’ve had in decades has been the Columbia partnership,” Rangel said. “It’s long-term, and it involves the state and the city, but it also involves the best interests of the community to see that there is follow-through.”

Manhattanville has also served as a source of contention—when a building collapse on the site killed a construction worker in March, State Senator Bill Perkins, whose

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district includes Manhattanville, said that Columbia should halt construction immediately.

“It’s a tragic occurrence, and they’re yet to even begin the real construction,” he said. “It’s a really bad start.”

The [West Harlem Local Development Corporation](#)—charged with distributing \$76 million from Columbia to programs in Manhattanville—has also frustrated elected officials as an instance of a city-University partnership not living up to expectations. The development corporation was set up in 2009 as a concession to the construction of Columbia’s Manhattanville campus, but it remained without a director, office, or website until this year.

In November 2011, Manhattan Borough President Scott Stringer led politicians in demanding that the organization speed up its progress. Since then, the WHLDC has gotten organized, hiring a staff and outlining plans to distribute Columbia’s money.

At a public meeting of the WHLDC last week, State Assembly member Keith Wright said, “We’re in the middle of the starting of a new adventure. It’s very exciting for this community. There are a number of stakeholders.”

City Council member [Robert Jackson](#), whose district includes Baker Field and Manhattanville, said that his office has valued a partnership with Columbia over the years. He praised the University’s efforts to work with nonprofit groups to expand the public’s access to the waterfront at Baker Field, as well as the WHLDC’s work to open the Teachers College Community School and begin a grant application process for West Harlem organizations.

“These examples of long lasting impacts in our neighborhoods only begin to highlight the importance of engaging CU students and the broader Northern Manhattan around common interests and benefits, as well as in ventures involving both the university and elected officials,” he said in a statement.

jillian.kumagai@columbiaspectator.com

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