



February 1, 2021

COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY SHOULD HELP ALLEVIATE THE ACUTE SHORTAGE OF AFFORDABLE HOUSING IN MORNINGSIDE HEIGHTS BY KEEPING ITS RENT-REGULATED APARTMENTS AS A RESOURCE FOR THE COMMUNITY

Purpose of the Statement

Morningside Heights faces an acute shortage of affordable housing. Of the 630 apartments now being built, not a single one will be affordable. However, there is a reasonable and achievable way to alleviate some of this shortage. Columbia University, the largest landlord in the neighborhood, can reserve rent-regulated apartments now occupied by tenants not affiliated with the University, for low and moderate-income non-affiliates living in and around Morningside Heights.

This statement describes the background of this situation and the immediate steps the University can take to enhance its contributions to local community development.

Resolutions Supporting the Statement

Both Manhattan Community Board 9 (MCB9) and the Morningside Heights Community Coalition (MHCC), the neighborhood's leading civic organization, have passed resolutions supporting this proposal for relieving the shortage of local affordable housing.

On November 19, 2020, Manhattan Community Board 9 adopted a resolution, Institutional Rent Regulated Housing, calling upon institutions located within its jurisdiction (Morningside Heights and West Harlem), of which Columbia University is the largest, to rent apartments vacated by non-affiliates to other non-affiliates living in Community Board 9 who earn no more than the Area Median Income. The Resolution stated that "Morningside Heights requires a diverse community of individuals, including both institutional affiliates and non-affiliates, to maintain its historic vibrancy," and that "Many of the remaining rent-regulated units owned by institutions in Manhattan District 9 could serve as affordable housing to non-affiliates" [The Community Board 9 Resolution is included as an Appendix to this Statement.]

On January 22, 2020, the Morningside Heights Community Coalition (MHCC) adopted an [Affordable Housing Resolution](#), calling upon Columbia University to rent apartments vacated by non-affiliates of the University to other non-affiliates living in Community Board 9 earning no more than the Area Median Income (AMI) for the Board, which was \$61,010 in 2018. [The MHCC Resolution is included as an Appendix to this Statement.]

The Desperate Need for Affordable Housing

The recent history of real estate development in Morningside Heights is notable for its glaring absence of affordable housing. Of the four projects now being built or recently completed, with a total of 630 apartments, none will be affordable. In 2015, Jewish Theological Seminary [sold property and air rights](#) to private developers who then proceeded to build a 33-story condominium tower. Later in 2015, Union Theological Seminary [sold property and air rights](#) for a 42-story luxury condominium tower with 170 apartments.

In 2016, Mount Sinai Morningside Hospital [sold four buildings](#) to a private developer, who is converting them into apartments renting for as much as \$16,000 a month. Furthermore, Columbia's planned 34-story apartment building on 125th Street and Broadway, providing housing solely for students and faculty, will only worsen the crisis by not providing any affordable units for tenants who are not affiliated with the University.

The growing need for affordable units in Morningside Heights comes at a time when it is becoming increasingly hard to find low- to moderate-income housing. Morningside Heights and Hamilton Heights witnessed the third highest [increase](#) (34 percent) in rent of any neighborhood in New York City from 2018 to 2020. More than 30 percent of tenants in the Community Board 9 area are [severely rent-burdened](#), paying more than 50 percent of their income in rent.

The Role of Columbia University in Providing Affordable Housing

Columbia University's large holdings of apartment buildings offer a readily available supply of permanent affordable housing. As the largest landlord in Morningside Heights, and one of the largest in New York City, Columbia can protect a critical share of the remaining affordable housing in our community. In the 1960s and 70s Columbia [bought many private buildings](#) in Morningside Heights. Initially, tenants were subject to eviction when their leases expired, after which Columbia rented the units exclusively to tenants affiliated with the University. Following protests and tenant pressure, relevant regulations were changed to allow existing tenants to renew their leases and to retain the protections of New York's [rent regulation laws](#). In addition to limiting rent increases, these laws protect tenants against arbitrary evictions and offer them legal means to address problems with their landlords.

Due to legal loopholes, when a non-affiliated tenant dies or moves out of a Columbia apartment, the rent is deregulated and the apartment is removed from the city's rent regulation system. The apartment then vanishes as an affordable housing resource in the community. Over the past several decades, thousands of apartments owned by Columbia have been deregulated upon vacancy, a serious loss for the neighborhood and city. However, the hundreds of apartments still occupied by non-affiliates present an opportunity for Columbia to make a valuable contribution

to local diversity by permanently maintaining them at affordable rents with the protections of rent regulation. By [taking](#) this critical step, Columbia could fulfill the conditions of the MHCC and MCB9 resolutions.

An eclectic group of New Yorkers resides in Columbia-owned apartments. This benefits students by offering them proximity to older adults and variable-age families in mixed-occupancy buildings. Reserving apartments now occupied by tenants not connected with the University for future generations of non-affiliates is far less expensive than building new affordable housing. Continuing this rich local cultural experience is an effective and efficient way for Columbia to share in preserving the diversity of our Morningside Heights community.

Remedying Past injustices

Columbia University's President, in his [Call to Action to Address Racism](#) of July 21, 2020, committed the University to engaging in a "true community-wide effort to remedy deep injustices" and to "strengthen connections in both Harlem and Washington Heights by, among other steps, inviting new ideas for collaboration."

The University can take a significant step towards remedying these "deep injustices" and accepting "new ideas" by judiciously using the housing it already owns to benefit residents of the surrounding neighborhood at no additional cost to itself.

Implementing a Columbia University Policy for Preserving Housing for Non-Affiliates

MHCC strongly recommends that Columbia University take the following immediate steps to preserve rent-regulated apartments for non-affiliates. They should be promulgated in a Memorandum of Understanding between Columbia University and MCB9.

1. Issue a declaration adopting the policy advocated in the CB9 and MHCC resolutions and in this memorandum in order to preserve housing for income-qualified non-affiliates of the University living in MCB9. The policy should be enacted while the Memorandum is being prepared.
2. Prepare for review by MCB9 and MHCC template lease documents embodying these policies and providing the protections of state and city rent laws and regulations to new non-affiliated tenants.
3. Establish regular reporting procedures for informing MCB9 and concerned civic organizations of vacant apartments available for rental to non-affiliates in MCB9 and for reporting the occupancy of these apartments.
4. Report on how the policy for preserving affordable housing for non-affiliates helps to advance the University President's call to "remedy deep injustices" in the neighborhoods around the institution.

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THE CITY OF NEW YORK
COMMUNITY BOARD 9
MANHATTAN

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WHEREAS Prior to changes in the laws governing rent regulation in New York (hereafter “rent laws”), Columbia University and other Morningside Heights institutions routinely purchased rent-regulated buildings and evicted the existing tenants through the 1950s and 1960s; and

WHEREAS Subsequent changes to the rent laws required that non-profit institutions purchasing rent-regulated units maintain rent-regulation for the duration of the tenancy of the tenant at the time of purchase before permitting the institution to remove the unit from rent regulation to be used as housing for institutional affiliates; and

WHEREAS thousands of rent-regulated apartments were converted into housing for institutional affiliates through this process; and

WHEREAS Manhattan Community Board 9 believes that Morningside Heights requires a diverse community of individuals, including both institutional affiliates and non-affiliates, to maintain its historic vibrancy; and

WHEREAS Many of the new housing units developed in Morningside Heights in projects such as 100 Claremont Avenue, 543 W 122nd Street, 30 Morningside Drive, and others in the area are priced out of reach for neighborhood residents but may be suitable for purchase or long-term lease by Columbia University or other institutions in the neighborhood; and

WHEREAS Many of the remaining rent-regulated units owned by institutions in Manhattan District 9 could serve as affordable housing to non-affiliates, helping maintain the diversity of the neighborhood that helps make it attractive to institutional affiliates;

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED that Manhattan Community Board 9 strongly urges that vacancy decontrol should no longer apply to all apartments rented to non-affiliates in institutionally-own buildings owning for institutions owning 6 or more residential units. These apartments should instead be rented to people earning no more than the Area Median Income for Community Board 9 (\$60,021 as of 2018). Tenants of these units should continue to receive the rent and tenure protections of rent stabilization; and

THEREFORE BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that Manhattan Community Board 9 believes that a practice of setting aside 30% of units in buildings newly constructed by the institutions in Manhattan District 9 for people earning no more than the Area Median Income for Community Board 9 (\$60,021 as of 2018) would best further the aim of maintaining Morningside Heights as a diverse, mixed-income community.



January 22, 2020

MHCC AFFORDABLE HOUSING RESOLUTION

1. Vacancy decontrol should no longer apply to all apartments rented to non-affiliates in institutionally-owned buildings. These apartments should be rented to people earning no more than the Area Median Income for Community Board 9 (\$60,021 as of 2018). These tenants will continue to receive the rent and tenure protections of rent stabilization.
2. 30% of units in buildings newly constructed by the institutions in Morningside Heights should be set aside for people earning no more than the Area Median Income for Community Board 9 (\$60,021 as of 2018).