

10 Reasons to Say ‘No’ to Hunter’s Land Grab

Getting specific on what’s wrong with plan to demolish complex

By Sherry Jacobs and Tina Pack

On Sept. 20 for the first time, our community officially heard of Hunter’s plans to demolish the Julia Richman Education Complex (JREC) to build a multi-story science facility. This proposal is wrong-headed for 10 reasons that are vitally important to this community:

- 1) Demolition and construction of a high-rise, multi-story building will turn our residential neighborhood into an institutional building-site. Hunter’s plan will further erode any hope for this community to remain residential.
- 2) We have a state-of-the-art educational complex, housing six quality public schools in our community that have won numerous national awards. Throughout this city, other communities are fighting to retain and improve their public schools. Why should we allow Hunter to destroy ours?
- 3) Many parents in our community send their children to schools in the Julia Richman Education Complex. We need *more*, not fewer good public schools!
- 4) JREC is a “shining example of small schools at their best.” This is why JREC has become a national icon in education. The Gates Foundation describes the building as the “best example of a multiplex in the country.” Visiting educators from across the country gain inspiration from the use of a large old building that was successfully redesigned to house multiple schools.
- 5) Julia Richman is an asset to our community. Many community groups use the building after school hours – from theater groups in the neighborhood to the lawyers who play basketball, to the coop boards who use space for meetings, to the all-city orchestra and chorus who rehearse in the auditorium, to graduation for PS 183 students and families – the building is in constant use.
- 6) \$30 million of taxpayers’ dollars has been spent to modernize and maintain the building. New windows, tuckpointing, and new sidewalks have just been completed. Before that, taxpayers’ money paid for a new roof, new wiring, a new heating system, and new lighting. Why would the city allow our public funds be squandered? WHY SHOULD WE PAY 100 MILLION MORE TO RE-BUILD THIS COMPLEX ELSEWHERE?
- 7) Contributions from such donors as Weil Gotshal and Manges, LLP, MTV, the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation and many private funders have provided JREC with, among other improvements, a new library, a professional sound system for the auditorium, and an art gallery. Razing the building sends a negative message and undermines the confidence of future donors to the public schools and public works.

- 8) Public institutions that serve children and families should support, not destroy, each other. Our community supports Hunter's need for science facilities, but why doesn't Hunter use its own Hunter Elementary/High School Campus on Park Avenue or build its science building in Mayor's Bloomberg's designated "bioscience science park" on 25th Street, where Hunter already owns property?
- 9) The Hunter proposal to remove and relocate the schools in the Complex completely disregards the network of relationships that has been created in this community. The Ella Baker Elementary School was approved by District 2's superintendent to serve children whose parents work in our community at the medical facilities on York Avenue and at Hunter College. PS 226, a JREC school that serves children with autism, has established relationships with local organizations such as the 67th St. Public Library and the Neighborhood Coalition for the Homeless. Why should Hunter's science space be permitted to violate the trust built up through these long-term relationships?
- 10) If communities really matter, why did Hunter work in secrecy for two years—making deals and securing contacts—before we were informed of the Hunter plan? We were excluded from any decisions that will have long-term effects on our families, our homes, and our children.

Hunter has other options. Our community does not. Destroying the Julia Richman Education Complex is a sell out to everyone who helped make these schools a national success story.

Sherry Jacobs, Esq. is a community resident. Tina Pack is a resident and JREC parent.