

# NEW YORK POST

## COLUMBIA'S LAND GRAB

By NICK SPRAYREGEN

*December 26, 2007* -- LAST week's vote by the City Council to rezone a large area in West Harlem (sometimes referred to as Manhattanville) was a good decision. For too long, this area has been subject to an antiquated designation as a manufacturing zone. Thanks to this rezoning, much of West Harlem can now smartly be revitalized into a vibrant mixed-use community. I believe most of West Harlem and Columbia University are in agreement on this zoning change.

However, the basic disagreement between those parties remains open - that of Columbia's threatened use of eminent domain and forced relocation in order to achieve its stated goal of a total takeover of the entire area.

For more than three years, Columbia has been effectively muscling small property owners, businesses, residents and even churches out of Manhattanville. Its means of coercion: the threat that hangs over every independent's head that he or she will be forced to move in the near future, by the state power of eminent domain - a power that Columbia has always insisted is necessary to its expansion plan.

I've seen first hand how many owners, believing that they had only two choices - sell their property to Columbia now, or risk condemnation and a forced sale at a court-determined rate - have "voluntarily" sold. It's no wonder that the school already owns about 70 percent of the property.

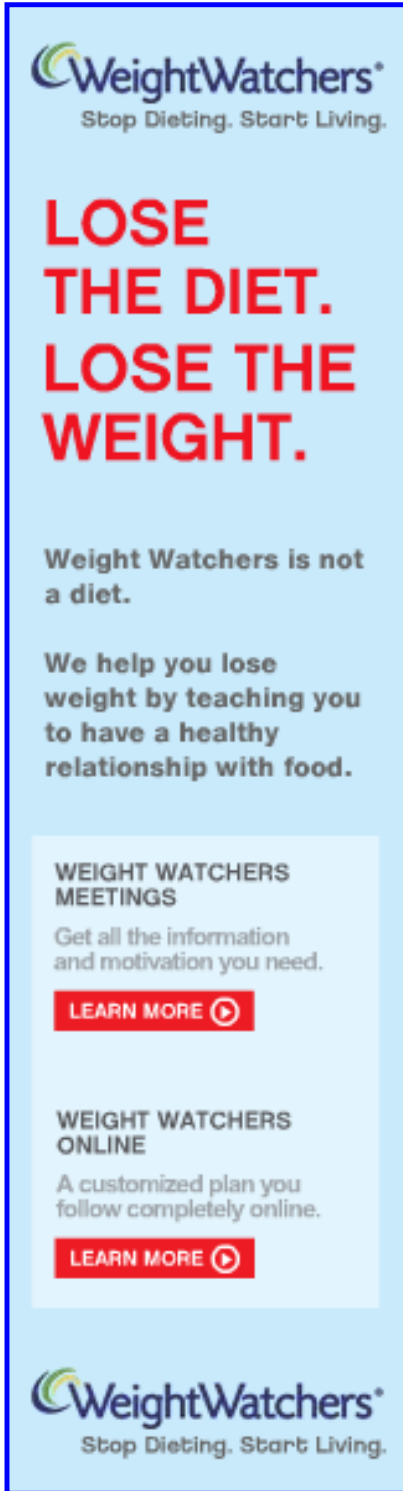
If Columbia is successful with its "we must have it all" expansion plan, the entire West Harlem community from 125th to 134th Streets and from Broadway to 12th Avenue will be wiped out - forever.

A community with a long history - which is actually already experiencing an economic rejuvenation without the "help" of Columbia - will be eliminated. This is wrong.

I expect that the Empire State Development Corp. (the state agency empowered to use eminent domain) will soon declare this part of West Harlem "blighted" - the first necessary step to condemnation. It will do so in order to take private property from one owner and give it to another private owner - Columbia.

For the last three years, in fact, Columbia has given a blank check to the ESDC - agreeing to reimburse the agency for all costs expended in this endeavor. In effect, the state agency has allowed itself to become a "hired gun" for Columbia. This, too, is wrong.

I remain steadfast that Columbia has met its match in me. I will not back down; I'll do everything I can to show the ESDC and the courts why eminent domain should not be used here. If need be, I will litigate this matter all the way to the U.S. Supreme Court.



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Columbia needs to learn what every well-adjusted child learns at a very early age: The fact that *want* something doesn't give you the right to just take it. If Columbia's administrators continue to refuse to voluntarily learn this, then they must be "taught" it.

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