United Missionary Baptist Ministers Association Supports Columbia Proposal to Revitalize Old Manhattanville Manufacturing Zone in West Harlem

February 1, 2007 – The board of the United Missionary Baptist Association has unanimously resolved to endorse and work with Columbia University on the university’s proposal to expand upper Manhattan’s urban academic community in the old Manhattanville manufacturing zone of West Harlem.

“Our members believe in effective partnerships built on mutual trust and commitment to our community,” said Rev. Reginald Williams, Pastor of the Charity Baptist Church and chair of the association’s Commission on Human and Economic Development. “We are convinced that the current leadership at Columbia has approached this process in a spirit of consultation, a desire to be an integral, supportive part of this community, and a recognition that the university’s future is, and should be, linked to Harlem in ways that make new growth into a win-win situation for the people who live and work here.”

More than 200 Pastors, members and delegates present at the Macedonia Baptist Church on Tuesday evening, January 30 officially voted the following:

Be it resolved that the officers and members of UMBA supports the proposed expansion and development of Columbia University in Harlem and Upper Manhattan and that we will continue our collaborative working relationship and on-going discussions to ensure that both the community’s and Columbia’s issues and concerns are appropriately addressed and mutually resolved.
“We know this area is going to be developed,” said Rev. Isaac B. Graham, Moderator of UMBA and Pastor of the Macedonia Baptist Church. “We want to work with a partner whom we know brings a commitment to education, health care and public service to shaping Harlem’s future. Unlike commercial development, we know Columbia is in this for the long-haul and is willing to work with us as a partner to make sure this is a win-win process for both the university and the Harlem community.”

“Of course, there may be a past history of differences between campus and community, but there is a positive wind blowing now,” said Rev. Lee A. Arrington, 1st Vice Moderator of UMBA and Pastor of the Paradise Baptist Church. “This comes down to a matter of trust. And President Bollinger and his team have satisfied us that they are committed to helping protect and provide for the residents and businesses that will be affected by the university’s proposal. We also believe that the elements of the expansion that will provide street level activity, retail opportunities, arts and other community facilities make this a very good project for the local community overall.”

“There may be issues we are concerned about going forward,” said Rev. Carl Washington, 2nd Vice Moderator of UMBA and Pastor of the New Mt. Zion Baptist Church. “But Columbia is already a major employer in our neighborhood and this project will result in many more such good jobs with good benefits for our neighbors. Because we think this growth can be such a good thing for Harlem, we want to be part of guiding this project. We are impressed with the way Columbia is willing to work with us and we look forward to working together with Columbia in the months and years ahead to help the university and community thrive together.”

“After much deliberation and prayer, we have faith that this can be a great development for our community,” said Rev. Williams. “But faith without works is dead. That’s why we believe it’s important to be part of this work in progress and why we plan on sharing our views with our colleagues in other congregations and associations. Because the more we engage community, consulting with different groups with different perspectives, the better the result will be for everyone. We know that together we can all win.”

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