

CAPITAL

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Near \$10B in higher-ed construction planned

By Ryan Hutchins



Higher education institutions in New York City will undertake nearly \$10 billion in construction projects over the five years ending in 2017, nearly double the amount spent over the previous five years, according to a report to be released Wednesday morning by the New York Building Congress.

The report, entitled “NYC EDU; Building a 21st Century College Town,” will be unveiled at a morning forum keynoted by New York University President John Sexton. Underwritten by several of the schools it surveyed, the report delivers an auspicious view of the development efforts.

The building boom, which in some corners of the city is already well underway, is a “continuation” of some \$2 billion in investments made over the preceding three years, the report finds. The new construction starts represents a recovery from the recession years, when many projects were shelved for better times. Some \$2 billion in construction activity is expected this fiscal year alone.

Much of the work that's ongoing or nearing fruition will be the result of major expansion and renovation projects commissioned by the likes of N.Y.U., Columbia University, Cornell Tech and the city and state university systems. Some, the report notes, “are massive in scope.”

Columbia is building a 6.8-million-square-foot expansion of its Manhattanville campus, in addition to other projects that include the creation of a 450,000 square foot center neuroscience research.

N.Y.U. plans a 1.9-million-square-foot expansion—one still hotly contested by some faculty and Greenwich Village neighbors. The school plans 14 major projects over the five-year period, including a \$345 million Center for Urban Science and Progress in Downtown Brooklyn.

On Roosevelt Island, Cornell Tech—a new joint program that has just 100 students this fall but plans to grow to 2,000 over coming decades—is just starting work on a campus on Roosevelt Island in the East River. Over three phases, the campus is planned to grow to 2 million square feet and cost \$2 billion to construct.

The City University of New York anticipates work on 11 different projects in coming years, including a \$406 million, 360,000-square-foot academic building at New York City College of Technology.

More broadly, though, there are other projects planned by additional schools and teaching hospitals, according to the report, which is based on a survey of higher education officials in New York. The report notes the big-ticket efforts account for “a fraction of the work” being undertaken.

“Dozens of other institutions throughout the five boroughs are in the planning or construction phases with a wide range of projects designed to improve libraries, student housing, performance venues, athletic facilities, nursing programs, and other facilities that house a variety of academic disciplines,” the report says. “In addition to strengthening each individual institution, these projects are providing multiple benefits to the New York City economy in general and the construction industry in particular.”

Colleges that disclosed plans for annual maintenance and repairs anticipated, on average, that they would spend 17 percent more on outlays “as a result of development that is underway or anticipated.”

The report was commissioned by the Building Congress’ higher education committee, which is co-chaired by officials at N.Y.U., Columbia and CUNY. A letter from the three opens the report.

“The fact that New York City is in the early stages of a higher education building boom is certainly great news in the near term for the construction industry and the local economy,” they wrote. “Far more important, however, is what it means for our future. By investing billions of dollars to maintain, upgrade, and expand their facilities and campuses, these schools are confirming that they are thriving today while also preparing for an even brighter tomorrow.”

Among the recommendations is for the city to establish a Mayor’s Office of Higher Education, build on the city’s Allied Science NYC competition and for governments and industry to collaborate with higher education on “big data” projects meant to design for efficient and “smart cities.”