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Hunter College School of Social Work to Move

By [GLENN COLLINS](#)
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With the help of the largest gift ever to the [City University of New York](#), the [Hunter College](#) School of Social Work is moving uptown. The school will trade its tower on East 79th Street for a new \$135 million building 39 blocks to the north in East Harlem.

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Robert Stolarik for The New York Times

Third Avenue between 118th and 119th Streets, site of a \$135 million building for the Hunter College School of Social Work.

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Cooper, Robertson & Partners

A rendering of the planned Hunter College School of Social Work, looking from 119th Street.



The New York Times

In a multiparty real estate deal of byzantine complexity, the school's current building will be sold, and \$40 million of the proceeds, along with state construction funds, will be used for the larger, eight-story school building uptown. The graduate school, with 930 students, has occupied the building at 129 East 79th Street since 1969.

"We had to move out of the physical structure that didn't work for us anymore," said [Jennifer J. Raab](#), president of Hunter College. "Now we'll have a building to match our vision for the 21st century."

The new school, to be called the Lois V. and Samuel J. Silberman School of Social Work at Hunter College, after its benefactors, will be at Third Avenue from 118th Street to 119th Street, stretching west toward Lexington Avenue. The parcel now consists of a vacant lot and low-rise buildings; there are no residential tenants, Ms. Raab said. Small stores and restaurants on the site will be demolished.

Harlem is "exactly the right place in the city to build the school," said [Matthew Goldstein](#), the university chancellor. "Many of our students live in the Harlem area, and our faculty members are connected with Harlem and will be working with organizations that reside there. It made a tremendous amount of sense."

As the city's only public school for graduate training in social work, Hunter, with its \$7,500 tuition, "will be very attractive to students in the community," Dr. Goldstein said.

The school's current building, leased by Hunter, was built and expanded with \$5.675 million from the Lois and Samuel J. Silberman Fund. The Silbermans retained ownership of the land and tower in conjunction with the New York Community Trust, a nonprofit organization that oversees charitable gifts.

The trust and the Silbermans, after working out the plan in secrecy,

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the Brodsky Organization. They are to donate \$40 million of that to help pay for construction of the new school; the university's largest previous gift was \$30 million for its Honors College in 2006.

Under a separate agreement, Mr. Brodsky will build the social work school at the new property and deliver it at cost, though he will receive a lump-sum fee for administrative expenses.

The developer can then build on the 79th Street site, subject to approval by the New York [City Planning Commission](#). Ms. Raab said that the deal was structured so the developer would have to complete the school before building on the 79th Street property, an incentive to rapid construction.

The remaining \$95 million for the new building will come from state education funds appropriated last spring. The leftover \$25 million paid to the Silberman fund for the current building will be used to establish a program of social work grants "in perpetuity," said Lorie A. Slutsky, president of the community trust.

The developer and his brokers found the property for the new building in East Harlem, and the university bought it for \$23.5 million, closing on the land earlier this month. All stakeholders in the deal — the most complex the university has ever undertaken, according to Iris Weinshall, the school's vice chancellor for facilities planning, construction and management — said it was not likely to be affected by the Wall Street crisis. Dr. Goldstein said he was confident that the project would go ahead because the \$95 million from the state had already been appropriated.

And J. Dean Amro, a partner at the Brodsky Organization, said he did not foresee financing difficulties "because we are good for the \$65 million; we are not borrowing any money."

The Brodsky Organization has built, owns or manages 60 buildings in Manhattan, and has previously developed properties with the Roman Catholic Archdiocese of New York, the General Theological Seminary and [St. Luke's-Roosevelt Hospital Center](#).

The community trust chose Mr. Brodsky because he was the highest bidder and "he has a good reputation and is civic-minded," Ms. Slutsky said. Increasingly, Manhattan nonprofit groups have been involving developers in projects around the city.

On Tuesday, for example, St. Vincent's Hospital Manhattan is to seek approval from the Landmarks Preservation Commission for a plan to build a \$1.6-billion medical tower and condominium that would require the demolition of five buildings in the Greenwich Village Historic District.

Mr. Brodsky is paying a premium price for the building on 79th Street — nearly \$650 a square foot, according to Mr. Amro, who added, "We think that it is one of the great sites available on the Upper East Side."

The new school will be built to the specifications of the university by the architect Cooper, Robertson & Partners, designer of the 2004 [Columbia University](#) School of Social Work.

A dozen developers were informed about the project but only several made bids because of the stipulation that they could not build on the 79th Street property for about three years after buying it, when the new school was occupied. They would also have to accept state-mandated construction and bidding rules required by the university.

The future building will devote about 10 percent of its space to the university's new School of Public Health, which will share a library and other resources with the School of Social Work.

The university, which will not seek any zoning variances to build the new school, expects construction to begin this summer and hopes for completion by June 2011. The 142,000-square-foot building will have five large floors topped by three smaller floors set back, and will exceed the size of the current school by more than 32,000 square feet.

Unlike the current building, with its massive gray stone front, the new school is to have a large glass

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catalyst for the deal.

The new school "will be a bright spot for the city's future in what could be a difficult economic time," said Jayne M. Silberman, vice chairwoman of the Silberman fund.

As for the 79th Street site, Mr. Amro said that the Brodsky firm would most likely not have to seek zoning changes for a new residential building there — probably a luxury condominium. The current 10-story school rises to a height equivalent to that of an 18-story apartment building.

"We want to build an old-world-style residential building that would fit into its surroundings," Mr. Amro said.

Mr. Silberman, a former president of the Federation of Jewish Philanthropies of New York in the 1960s, died in 2000 at the age of 84. His wife, Lois, 87, termed the deal "something he would have loved."

Mr. Silberman was a fixture at the school in his later years, spending time with students and faculty members. "He had a passion," Ms. Slutsky said, "to ensure that there would be a first-rate public social work school for the City of New York."

By law, the state attorney general and the State Supreme Court must approve the trust's sale of the current school, since the principal assets of the Silberman fund — the building and land — will be sold. "We are confident it will be approved," said Jane L. Wilton, the general counsel of the community trust.

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