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**Open Letter: New York Law School wants to help the  
neighborhood move forward**

Anthony W. Crowell

# Open Letter: New York Law School wants to help the neighborhood move forward

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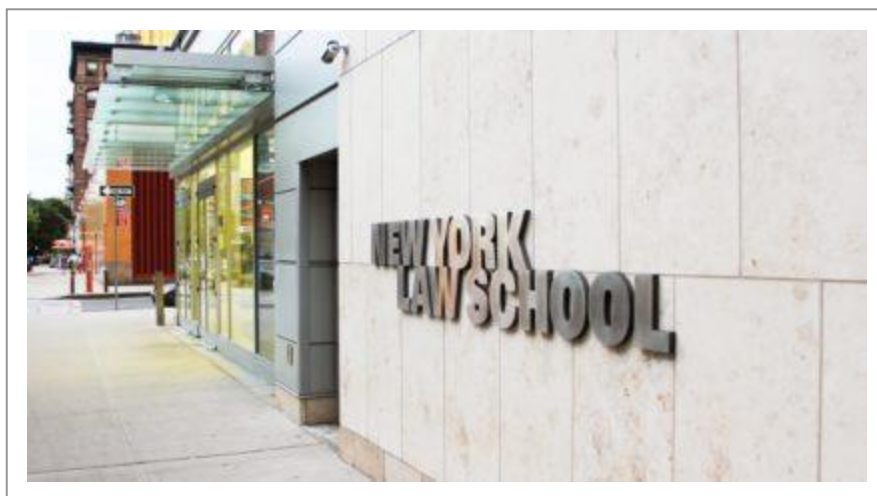
*The dean and president of New York Law School, Anthony Crowell, asked me to send this message to the neighborhood: that the school, which has been a presence in the neighborhood for 60 years, wants to act as a force to organize and coordinate Tribeca's residents and businesses so it can thrive in the next 60. To that end, and as a starting point, he is planning an online community forum for later this month (details to come soon). Read on.*



I've spent my 24-year legal career — what feels like my entire professional life — working in Tribeca and the Civic Center.

I've been dean of New York Law School since 2012. Before that, I was counselor to Mayor Michael Bloomberg for more than a decade at City Hall. In 2001, I worked at the city Law Department and was among hundreds displaced by the attacks on the Trade Center. I was then deployed as counsel to the city's Family Assistance Center, where I directed the expedited death certificate program.

I've seen Tribeca go from triumph to defeat, and back again. But now, our neighborhood faces an existential reckoning unlike any I've seen. NYLS has had a front-row seat to these changes.



**One year ago**, a student called me to report that they had been in contact with New York COVID Patient Number 2. We'd anticipated this possibility and swiftly cancelled classes on March 4, 5 and 6 — just before spring break — so that we could perform deep cleaning on campus.

Soon, news vans were parked outside our West Broadway doors. We were a novelty — one of the first New York City schools to grapple with the pandemic, at a moment when the science was still very unclear. Fortunately, our student later tested negative, but with positivity rates and hospitalizations mounting, the writing was on the wall. After spring break, we moved exclusively online to protect our community's health. Meanwhile, our neighborhood businesses were shuttering, and residents were heading out of town.

In August, after careful planning with health experts, we partially reopened for the fall semester. Since then, only a tiny fraction of our 1,300 students, staff and faculty — including me—have returned to the school. Those of us on campus wear masks, undergo health screenings, and stay safely distanced. We are fortunate to have had no known case of on-campus transmission.

Currently, with the promise of vaccines and a better understanding of the virus, we are assessing health data and modeling a number of scenarios to bring back more of our staff, faculty and students in the months to come. While we expect to stay masked and distanced, we want to ensure that our community members can begin to get back to some sense of normalcy, however that will be defined. Nonetheless, as I walk the streets of Tribeca each day, I realize that bringing the Law School back together is likely a far easier endeavor than bringing Tribeca back together.



A 130-year-old Lower Manhattan institution, NYLS has been an anchor of Tribeca for 60 years. We've always tried to give as much to the neighborhood as we take from it. We recognize that the absence of our community members contributes, along with many other closures and relocations, to the economic impact felt by local businesses. The result is an array of dark and vacant storefronts, made worse by street closures from long-interrupted infrastructure projects.

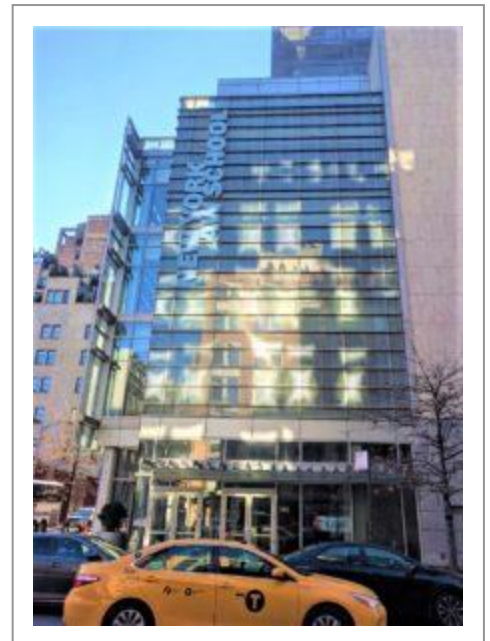
While Tribeca may have all the cache of an international destination, at its core, it is a village, supported by a web of loyal and long-time personal relationships, many of which have been lost during the pandemic. Each business closure — every restaurant,

boutique and personal care provider that shuttered — represents the death of someone's dream. And the displacement of each business' workers — who hail from across the city — means losing the very people who help to create and sustain our neighborhood. These are COVID's other victims. The question before us now is, how do we harness our neighborhood's collective strength and rebuild?

At this moment, Tribeca needs clear and collaborative leadership, vision, direction, advocacy and investment. While the neighborhood has a small stable of committed owners and tenants, no formal organizing entity exists to hear and prioritize the concerns of businesses and residents; identify and open the lines of communication with government; identify public resources and private investment to support business retention and development; coordinate the commercial and residential real estate community; and market area businesses, cultural institutions, and tourism sites.

Indeed, some of the problems that need to be addressed were mounting pre-pandemic due to skyrocketing rents that undermined business development and retention. When coupled with the impacts of COVID, the effects have been staggering. While we don't know when the pandemic's grip will ease, what's clear is that we need to act now or risk imperiling our neighborhood's ability to rebound in the future.

**To move the conversation ahead, New York Law School will host an online neighborhood forum on Wednesday, March 24, at 6:00 p.m.** Community business owners will be able to hear key statistics on the



state of Tribeca, raise concerns to be prioritized in future meetings with government officials, and discuss the development of a formal organizing group to lead the community forward. My City Hall experience includes working on 9-11 recovery, economic development and small business programs, and I will bring that lens to our event. More details will be shared soon, and I hope you can join us.

*Anthony W. Crowell is Dean and President of New York Law School. He can be reached at [anthony.crowell@nyls.edu](mailto:anthony.crowell@nyls.edu).*