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**The City of New York**  
**Manhattan Community Board 8**

Parks Committee Meeting  
Wednesday, April 11, 2012, 6:30 PM  
New York Blood Center, 301 East 67<sup>th</sup> St.  
Auditorium

CB8M members present: Michele Birnbaum, Molly Blayney, Matt Bondy, Lori Bores, Susan Evans, Scott Falk, Ellen Polivy, Rita Popper, Peggy Price, Barbara Rudder, Barry Schneider, Judy Schneider, Helene Simon, Teri Slater, Marco Tamayo.

**1. Plan to Alter Central Park's 72<sup>nd</sup> St. Cross Drive, Known at Terrace Drive, to Accommodate 2-Way Bicycle Traffic**—*a joint issue with the Transportation, Landmarks and Parks Committees.*

Neil Calvanese and Caroline Greenleaf of the Central Park Conservancy presented plans by the Conservancy, the Dept. of Transportation and the Parks Dept. to reconfigure Central Park's 72<sup>nd</sup> St. Cross Drive (known as Terrace Drive) to allow for 2-way bike traffic through the park. To obtain space for the new eastbound bike lane, one vehicle lane would be removed from the roadway.

The plan takes effect in June.

Currently, the 72nd Street Terrace Drive consists of one bike lane and two car lanes, all heading westbound. Cars are only permitted in those lanes only from 8 am to 10 am on weekdays, and never on weekends.

As its current configuration, the roadway includes an 8-foot wide bike lane on the left side of the road (i.e. against the south curb), followed by a 3-foot buffer and then two lanes of traffic, each 11 feet wide.

The new arrangement includes two 7-foot bike lanes (defined with paint) against the south curb, followed by a 4-foot buffer, an 11-foot lane of traffic, and a 4-foot shoulder. The plan would not involve the use of the adjacent pedestrian paths. The DOT will add traffic lights at the two locations where the bike lanes cross the transverse road.

Mr. Calvanese and Ms. Greenleaf said that the change was created at the request of "so many people" who have been seeking "legal" ways to bike across the park. They said cited biking congestion now on the single bike lane, especially by commuters traveling by bicycle. They also said they believe the plan would help alleviate bikers' use of the pedestrian pathways.

According to the Conservancy officials, the DOT, Parks Dept. and the Conservancy have been working on this plan for the last 6 months. They said that the DOT believes the new arrangement won't "impact traffic" flow "to any degree" on the 72<sup>nd</sup> Street Cross Drive, and that the change should add an average 3.2 seconds to the driving time across the 72<sup>nd</sup> St. transverse.

A number of attendees expressed enthusiasm for the plan, especially in light of the upcoming bike-share program.

Two attendees asked if a narrower-than-planned single car lane would better deter cars from speeding on the transverse road. Suggestions—which the DOT are "still looking into," according to Mr. Calvanese—include, possibly, placing a 10-foot car lane against the roadway's curve instead of its shoulder, and then widening the bike lanes or adding a jogging path.

Some issues and concerns raised about the new plan: One member of the public called what was presented at the meeting "complicated." A CB8M member said that, in light of "this permanent change to a roadway," she wished the plan had been presented to the board and the community before being settled on. She also expressed doubt that the plan would not cause congestion.

One CB8M member inquired about the volume of car and bike traffic on the Terrace Drive. Conservancy officials reported that, at the peak 8-9 am period, some 500 cars use that transverse. Since the Conservancy had no data on area bike traffic, the CB8M member said that "an amenity" was being created "without knowing the size of the constituency."

Questions came up about signage: Would painted signs on the roadway delineating bike from vehicular lanes be sufficiently visible and understandable? It was suggested that vertical signage would enhance clarity and safety for users of this area.

## **RESOLUTION:**

WHEREAS the addition of a bicycle lane on Central Park's Terrace Drive would permit 2-way east-west bike travel through the park at 72<sup>nd</sup> St.; and

WHEREAS the Central Park Conservancy, Dept. of Transportation and Parks Dept. maintain that the removal of a lane of car traffic to accommodate this change would not create traffic congestion; and

WHEREAS this plan for a second bike lane on the Terrace Drive would not involve use of the adjacent pedestrian paths; therefore,

BE IT RESOLVED that Community Board 8, Manhattan, approves of the plan by the Central Park Conservancy, Dept. of Transportation and Parks Dept. to remove a lane of traffic along Central Park's Terrace Drive in order to create space for a second bike lane on that roadway.

## **VOTE: 13-1-1**

In favor: Molly Blayney, Matt Bondy, Lori Bores, Susan Evans, Scott Falk, Ellen Polivy, Rita Popper, Peggy Price, Barbara Rudder, Barry Schneider, Judy Schneider, Helene Simon, Marco Tamayo.

Opposed: Michele Birnbaum.

Abstaining: Teri Slater

2. **Plan to Allow the Wi-Fi Equipment in Central Park To Become Permanent Fixtures**—*a joint issue with the Landmarks Committee.*

Last fall, Wi-Fi equipment was installed with temporary permits at two locations in Central Park: the Mineral Springs snack bar near the Sheep Meadow and the Central Park Zoo. The Parks Dept. is now seeking approval from the Landmarks Preservation Commission to have that Wi-Fi equipment remain permanently.

According to Chris Farnum, assistant architect at the Parks Dept., AT&T is providing free public wireless Internet access as part of a 5-year digital initiative with the City to bring Wi-Fi service to 20 NYC parks. AT&T will be responsible for maintaining the system during the 5-year program.

In Central Park, grey-painted, 20.5 inch high Wi-Fi antennas sit on a roof at the Zoo and at Mineral Springs. There are two antennas next to each other at Mineral Springs and 3 side-by-side at the Zoo. According to Mr. Farnum, the devices are barely visible to the public but are necessary to transmit the Wi-Fi's signal. The equipment has a frequency range of 2400-2483 MHz.

Mr. Farnum said it is hard to gauge how far the service extends in the park. But the signal from the Zoo antenna—the Wi-Fi location closer to the East Side—would not reach as far as the lake in Central Park, he said.

So far, the Wi-Fi service has been heavily used in Central Park, with thousands of users logging on each month, he reported.

Although AT&T is providing this service free to the public, it is not receiving any advertising in return, Mr. Farnum said.

**RESOLUTION**

WHEREAS AT&T and the City of New York have arranged a 5-year plan to provide free public wireless Internet access in 2 locations of Central Park (as well as such installations in other City parks); and

WHEREAS the size and color of the Wi-Fi equipment do not interfere with the scenic landscape of Central Park; and

WHEREAS there has already been substantial use of Central Park's Wi-Fi system, which has been provided through temporary permits for the necessary equipment; therefore,

BE IT RESOLVED that Community Board 8, Manhattan, approves of the City's request, of the Landmarks Preservation Commission, for permanent approval of Wi-Fi equipment at the Central Park Zoo and at Central Park's Mineral Springs snack bar.

**VOTE: 13-0-2**

In favor: Michele Birnbaum, Molly Blayney, Matt Bondy, Lori Bores, Susan Evans, Scott Falk, Ellen Polivy, Rita Popper, Peggy Price, Barbara Rudder, Barry Schneider, Judy Schneider, Helene Simon.

Abstaining: Teri Slater, Marco Tamayo.

### **3. Update on plans for the reconstruction of the East River Esplanade.**

Jane Swanson from Councilmember Jessica Lappin's office gave an update on the renovation of the East River esplanade. Last year, Ms. Lappin with Congresswoman Carolyn Maloney hosted a task force with interested community members, elected officials, and the Parks Department to discuss the best approach to reconstructing the esplanade. Parks Department has taken ownership of the project. By the end of this fiscal year, Ms. Lappin will have allocated two million dollars for the esplanade. There are 10 areas that have been fixed from East 66th St to East 104th St., and 12 more areas have been identified and will be addressed shortly. Parks will perform an engineering study to look at the underlying structure of the esplanade. Proposals from contractors are due this Friday (4/13/12).

Hunter Armstrong from CIVITAS announced that the organization conducted a competition for the design of the Esplanade. The winners will be announced on April 19, 2012. Winning submissions will be exhibited at the Museum of the City of New York, June-September 2012. Mr. Armstrong encourages discussion about the desirable aspects of each submission.

#### **New Business**

#### **Discussion of the Parks Department's plans to extend until mid-June a tennis facility's use of the Queensboro Oval at East 59th St.**

More than two years ago, the City announced that it had entered an agreement with a private tennis facility to extend the tennis facility's use of the Queensboro Oval from 8 months to 12 months. The Oval had been used by the public, and most often softball leagues, for four months each summer.

After many members of the public strongly objected to the Parks Dept.'s new plans for the Oval—and CB8M passed a resolution opposing the change—the Parks Dept. reversed its decision, thereby allowing public use of the space during summer months.

However, this year, the Parks Dept. entered into a new agreement with the tennis facility to allow it to use the space for an additional six weeks in the spring. In a letter to the Parks Committee, Elizabeth Smith, Assistant Commissioner, Revenue & Marketing, stated in 2009 that the tennis facility had made a substantial investment to convert the bubble to a year-round operation. She said that agreement has been signed and is in effect.

At the April Parks Committee meeting, all members of the public in attendance except for one voiced strong disapproval of this reduction in the public's access to the Oval. Among their objections, attendees stressed that the new arrangement would decimate their softball season since the City will not issue permits to the leagues until mid-August. Other complaints centered on the disrepair left on the Oval's property after the tennis bubble is dismantled.

CB8M members attending the meeting expressed dismay that CB8M had not been notified of this change prior to its enactment—especially since the deal involves having a private organization use public land paid for by the City's taxpayers.

Several members of the public asked for compensation for the six weeks of loss access to the Oval this spring. Their request: To have the ball field remain available to the ball players for an additional 6 weeks this fall.

It was announced that Betsy Smith has offered to attend the May CB8M Parks Committee meeting, and she has been formally invited to do so.

## **RESOLUTION**

WHEREAS Community Board 8M passed a resolution in February 2010, stating that it unequivocally opposes extending the use of the Queensboro Oval—which is public parkland—to a privately owned year-round franchise tennis facility, and maintains that the Oval must be made available for public use for four contiguous months a year; and

WHEREAS the Parks Dept. agreed in 2010 to honor THE PUBLIC’s desire to maintain the Queensboro Oval Park as a public space for sports leagues and for the use of the community at large for four straight months each year; and

WHEREAS the Parks Dept. has extended, without prior notice to the community, the terms of a private tennis facility’s use of the Queensboro Oval for an additional six weeks each year, thereby shortening the public’s ability to use the space by six weeks, and

WHEREAS the Queensboro Oval is typically left in disrepair when the tennis facility dismantles its “bubble” facility; therefore,

BE IT RESOLVED that Community Board 8, Manhattan, reaffirms its positions stated in its resolution of February, 2010 and urges the Parks Dept. to honor its agreement with the community to maintain the Queensboro Oval as public land for sports teams and the public at large for four contiguous months each year.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that CB8M asks the Parks Dept. to compensate the public for six-weeks of lost access to the Queensboro Oval this spring by extending public access to the park by six weeks this fall.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that CB8M urges the Parks Dept. to ensure that the Queensboro oval property be restored to its proper parkland condition as after the tennis bubble is dismantled.

VOTE: 14-0-1 In favor: Michele Birnbaum, Molly Blayney, Matthew Bondy, Susan Evans, Scott Falk, Ellen Polivy, Rita Popper, Peggy Price, Barbara Rudder, Judy Schneider, Barry Schneider, Helene Simon, Teri Slater, Marco Tamayo

Abstain: Lori Boris

Resolution passed by CB8M, February 2010

## **RESOLUTION:**

WHEREAS, the Queensboro Oval ball field under the Queensboro Bridge at York Avenue between 59<sup>th</sup> and 60<sup>th</sup> Street is currently operated as a public ball field in the summer months and a fee-based tennis facility in the winter months and,

WHEREAS, the Parks Department proposes to extend this commercial use as a tennis facility to the summer months, thus eliminating the public use of Queensboro Oval Park as a ball field, and

WHEREAS, the Queensboro Oval Park is home to the only ball field in a city park in CB8M, and

WHEREAS due to a modification of the NYC Zoning Resolution in 1989, the Queensboro Oval became the subject of a Restrictive Declaration between and among the Department of City Planning, NYC DP&R, Community Board 8 and the property owner of the site at 1<sup>st</sup> Avenue between 60 and 61<sup>st</sup> Street extending down towards York Avenue, and

WHEREAS the Restrictive Declaration clearly states that there should be a “program for the substantial enhancement of the Bridge Park at the Queensboro Oval”, and

WHEREAS the modified Restrictive Declaration for the Milstein/Brodsky site, developers of the Queensboro Oval, clearly states they are required to “upgrade this necessary open space in the neighborhood”, and

WHEREAS the Milstein/Brodsky developers spent a substantial amount in capital funds to upgrade the Oval and then provided \$685,000 to a NYC Department of Parks & Recreation Trust and Agency account for the maintenance of the Oval, and

WHEREAS Community Board 8M opposes in general the conversion of public parks spaces to commercial use,

**THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED** that Community Board 8M unequivocally opposes extending the use of the Queensboro Oval field to a year-round franchise tennis facility, and maintains that its use as a ball field must continue uninterrupted for four months a year.

**VOTE:** 11-0-0 In favor: Matthew Bondy, James, Clynes, Jacqueline Ludorf, Rita Popper, Peggy Price, David Rosenstein, Barbara Rudder, Will Sanchez, Judy Schneider, Barry Schneider, Teri Slater.

**Margaret Price and Barbara Rudder, Co-Chairs for the Parks Committee**