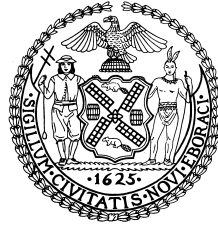


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The City of New York
Manhattan Community Board 8

Parks Committee Meeting

Brick Presbyterian Church
62 East 92nd St.
Session Room
Thursday, July 9, 2015
6:30 PM

CB8M Members Present: Elizabeth Ashby, Susan Evans, Daniel Dornbaum, Glen Pandolfino, Sharon Pope, Rita Popper, Peggy Price, Barbara Rudder, Barry Schneider

Public Members Present: Judy Schneider, Tricia Shimamura

Parks Committee Members Excused: Scott Falk, Sophia James

1. **Plans for the Renovation of the West 84th St. (Mariners') Playground in Central Park**—*a joint issue with the Landmarks Committee*

The Central Park Conservancy (CPC) official Lane Addonizio presented proposals for the renovation of Central Park's West 84th St. Playground, also known as Mariners' Playground. This project continues the CPC's program of upgrading and modernizing Central Park's playgrounds.

As described, the CPC's renovation goals for the Mariners' playground are: to blend it more fully into the overall landscape of Central Park; to maximize ADA accessibility and ensure the areas meet current safety standards; to preserve the open aspect of the playground; to ensure sustainability while incorporating innovative designs; and to enhance play experiences for children aged 2-to-5.

Specific proposals for the Mariners' Playground include: removing the existing 7-foot steel picket fence and replacing it with a smaller lightweight mesh fence, which will be screened by plantings to ensure that the play area is contained. Also, the perimeter of the paved playground will be defined by 18-inch wood-and-concrete benches and a shorter pipe rail. To accommodate wheelchair-bound children in the playground, the West 85th St. entrance will be regraded to include ramps and landings with railings; and an ADA-accessible gate will be installed.

Reconstruction in the central play area will include new active play components: spring toys, spinners, slide towers, climbers and tunnels. In the north end of the playground, interactive water features will replace the single sprinkler post. In the south end, there will be double the current number of toddler swings, as well as ADA-accessible swings. A new sandbox will include a built-in water feature that lets children mold the sand.

Once approvals of this \$1.5 million dollar project are obtained, work will begin in early spring and last approximately six months.

Questions raised by the public and CB8 members:

- Availability of additional ADA-accessible equipment. Besides the swings, these will include the new sandbox and climbers, CPC officials said.
- Recognition of Seneca Village. The Committee requested the installation at the playground of a plaque that describes Seneca Village, Manhattan's first community of African-American property owners. That area is located between 82nd St. and 89th St. and Seventh and Eighth avenues, in what is now a section of Central Park in the Mariners' Playground area.

RESOLUTION:

WHEREAS the West 84th St. (Mariners') Playground in Central Park is among the park's 16 playgrounds not comprehensively rebuilt in the last decade; and

WHEREAS the Central Park Conservancy (CPC) has a multi-year project underway to restore and renovate the park's playgrounds; and

WHEREAS the CPC is proposing renovations that would maximize access for disabled children, expand and enhance pre-school-age children's play experiences and better blend the area into Central Park's overall landscape design; and

WHEREAS the proposed design maintains its open footprint and some of its original features; therefore,

BE IT RESOLVED that Community Board 8, Manhattan (CB8M) approves of the Central Park Conservancy's plans for the reconstruction of the West 84th Street (Mariners') Playground, provided that the CPC places at the playground a plaque detailing the history of Seneca Village.

VOTE: 9-0-0

In favor: Elizabeth Ashby, Daniel Dornbaum, Susan Evans, Glen Pandolfino, Sharon Pope, Rita Popper, Peggy Price, Barbara Rudder, Barry Schneider.

Public Members in favor: Judy Schneider, Tricia Shimamura.

2. Further Issues with Queensboro Oval Park

The Committee addressed two significant developments concerning the Queensboro Oval. That E. 59th St. site is a public park, rented for most of the year to a private tennis club.

1. A Committee member reported that the Oval was again left in an unsightly condition—and even worse than ever—when the site's tennis bubble was temporarily removed for summer months. This has become a growing annual problem. And it makes the space unusable for the short time the public can access it.

It also represents a breach of the renter's—Sutton East Tennis'—agreement with the City. The City's contract requires the private tennis club to return the Queensboro Oval space to good and usable condition for the public when the club removes the bubble for the summer.

CB8M has repeatedly urged the Parks Dept. to fix this problem, but to no avail.

2. Meanwhile, a court ruling handed down July 2 could have important implications for future use of the Oval. As reported in the press, a four-judge panel of the Appellate Division of the State Supreme Court has just ruled that no further steps may be taken to convert the parking lot outside Citi Field into a shopping mall. That site (Willets West) is part of Flushing Meadows- Corona Park, which is public parkland, as is the Queensboro Oval. According to the court's ruling, mall construction at Willets West violates the public trust doctrine. This "doctrine," stated The New York Times, "effectively means that parkland in New York State cannot be alienated from public use by local governments without Albany's consent."

The Parks Committee believes this court ruling could help return the Queensboro Oval Park to the public full-time. If so, CB8M would get more of the public open space it so urgently needs. And the problem of clean-up after removal of the bubble would finally be eliminated.

RESOLUTION

WHEREAS the Sutton East Tennis Club, which leases the Queensboro Oval for most of the year, has repeatedly failed to return this E. 59th St. park to good and usable condition for the public when the club removes its tennis bubble in summer months; and

WHEREAS such negligence violates Sutton East Tennis' contract with the City, which requires such maintenance; and

WHEREAS the unsightly, and worsening, condition that Sutton East Tennis annually leaves this park prevents the public from accessing this space in the minimal time it can do so; and

WHEREAS CB8M has repeatedly sought to have this and other Queensboro Oval problems resolved; and

WHEREAS a July ruling by the Appellate Division of the State Supreme Court may make it illegal to privatize public parks in this state without Albany's approval. In the July ruling, which may apply to other New York City parks, an Appellate Court ruled that work on a planned shopping mall in a parking lot, which is part of Flushing Meadows-Corona Park, violates the state's public trust doctrine and therefore must stop, and;

WHEREAS according to press reports, this ruling means that "parkland in New York State cannot be alienated from public use by local governments without Albany's consent;" and

WHEREAS earlier this year CB8M passed a resolution urging the Parks Dept. not to allow any private entity to rent the Queensboro Oval park for more than six months a year after the contract with Sutton East Tennis expires in 2017; and

WHEREAS CB8M has subsequently concluded that this earlier CB8M request must be amended to take into account recent developments. These include: the worsening condition left by Sutton East Tennis when it temporarily leaves the space; and the July ruling by the Appellate Division of the State Supreme Court, which may bar privatization of New York's public parks without Albany's approval, therefore,

BE IT RESOLVED that Community Board 8, Manhattan, strongly urges the Parks Dept. to return the Queensboro Oval Park to the public full-time at the termination of the City's current lease with Sutton East Tennis. No further commercial use of the property should be allowed.

VOTE: 10-1-0

CB8M Members in favor: Elizabeth Ashby, Susan Evans, Daniel Dornbaum, Glen Pandolfino, Sharon Pope, Rita Popper, Peggy Price, Barbara Rudder, Barry Schneider.

Public Member in favor: Trisha Shimamura.

Public Member Opposed: Judy Schneider

3. Update on the Status of East River Esplanade Renovations

The Parks Dept.'s Alex Eng reported on five sites where Esplanade repairs and improvements will soon be made. He said he hopes this work will be completed by the end of 2016. The five projects, to be done on a rolling basis along the Esplanade: repairing timber structures between 63-64 streets; seawall repairs between 78-81 streets; seawall repairs at Carl Schurz Park, between 88-90 streets; filling sink holes between 90-91 streets; and fixing breaches in the seawall at 114th Street.

Various elected officials have requested signage on the East River Esplanade reporting on the various repairs and improvement projects. To assist this effort, the Committee unanimously passed the following resolution:

RESOLUTION

WHEREAS CB8M believes that signage on the East River Esplanade, describing the area's improvement projects, would be extremely helpful to walkers, cyclists and other users of this park; and

WHEREAS such signs would appear wherever work is being done, and explain the work at that specific location and its expected completion date; and

WHEREAS elected officials already have expressed their desire for such useful informational signs, therefore,

BE IT RESOLVED that Community Board 8, Manhattan urges the Parks Dept. to post informational signs along the Esplanade describing work being undertaken in this area and when it will be completed.

VOTE: 11-0-0

CB8 Members in favor: Elizabeth Ashby, Susan Evans, Daniel Dornbaum, Glen Pandolfino, Sharon Pope, Rita Popper, Peggy Price, Barbara Rudder, Barry Schneider

Public Members in favor: Judy Schneider, Tricia Shimamura

Among other Esplanade issues: A CB8M member also reported that a member of the public hopes very soon to begin doing plantings at the former Con Edison site in the Esplanade.

In addition, Rebecca Graham of Assembly Member Seawright's office, explained a state bill that would give community boards more power to address waterfront needs. Specifically, the bill would allow community boards to apply for grants for waterfront projects. Community boards wouldn't be receiving money directly. Instead, they would identify needs in their area and seek grants to address them. If approved, the grants would go to the organization able to accept and use the funds.

Currently, this bill is pending in the finance committees of the state's Assembly and Senate. But since the legislature won't be reconvening until early next year, the committee decided for now to stay abreast of this issue and revisit it later this year.

OLD BUSINESS

Biking Problems in Central Park

A CB8M member reported on the frequent violation of biking rules in Central Park. The member cited such problems as riding on park paths, running red lights, riding in pedestrian lanes and use of earplugs while on bikes, which prevents cyclists from hearing any movement around them. Although such problems have been reported to City officials, including the police, the persistent hazards continue to create dangers for park users.

The member agreed to draft a letter which CB8M can send to the Police Dept. and other City officials and agencies.

**Susan Evans and Margaret Price
Co-Chairs, Parks Committee**