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

Parks Committee meeting
New York Blood Center, 310 E. 67th St.
Conference Room 1 & 2
Thursday, October 4, 6:30 PM

CB8M Members present: Elizabeth Ashby, Michele Birnbaum, Molly Blayney, Susan Evans, Scott Falk, Mary Pike, Peggy Price, Barbara Rudder, Teri Slater.

Excused: Rita Popper, Barry Schneider, Judy Schneider, Helene Simon

1. Results of the Central Park Conservancy's Study of the Usage of the Shared Pedestrian-Bike Path at 96th St. in Central Park—*a joint issue with the Landmarks and Transportation committees.*

Caroline Greenleaf, the Central Park Conservancy's (CPC) director of Community Relations, reported that, between April 17 and May 10, 2012, the CPC conducted a usage study of the shared pedestrian-bike path in Central Park at 96th St. Since last January, this path had been designated for shared biking and walking as a CPC pilot project. According to Ms. Greenleaf, the CPC was conducting its spring study of path usage to determine the volume of biking and walking, peak times of usage, and from which direction people were taking this path. The study was conducted on 3 Tuesdays, 3 Thursdays and 2 Saturdays, for 2 hours in the morning and from 4-6 PM in the evening.

The CPC had expected that commuters would be major users of the path. But study results did not seem to bear that out: Of all the 2-hour periods studied, the highest volume of bike usage was 30 bikes going one way on the path during one 2-hour period on an unspecified Saturday. However, the peak number of walkers going one-way during an (unspecified) 2-hour period was 148. Overall, Ms. Greenleaf said that results of the study showed no clear usage pattern, and at times "the usage of the path was zero," she said.

In June, the CPC officially designed the 96th St. route as a shared pedestrian-bike path. It is now one of 2 such shared paths in Central Park. However, the CPC currently has no plans for adding shared pedestrian-bike paths in the park, Ms. Greenleaf said.

According to Ms. Greenleaf, public response to the shared path has been favorable, and the CPC had received only 2 complaints—but only when an opinion was solicited--about improper behavior by cyclists.

However, most—although not all--meeting attendees expressed different views. Various attendees asked why bikers needed an extra 96th St. path when they could already use 102nd St. to cross the park. According to several members of the public and CB8M members, making the 96th St. pedestrian path available for biking was excessive, especially given the evidently limited bike usage of that path.

Moreover, a number of meeting attendees felt that sharing this path had not discouraged bike riders from taking pedestrian-only paths. Indeed, the shared-bike program seemed likely to serve as a “call to other bikers” to use Central Park’s paths. Moreover, it had the potential to create dangerous conditions for walkers and joggers. And overall, to many meeting attendees, the creation of this shared path further illustrated the City’s growing trend toward accommodating cyclists at the expense of pedestrians, who far outnumber NYC bikers.

Several attendees asked for more and better signage to discourage bad biking behavior. Indeed, one CB8M member said that, although the park now has more park enforcement officers following of a serious biking accident in Central Park this summer, these PEP officers “are focused on giving tickets to dog owners instead of talking to (errant) bikers.” Since tourists may not understand the CPC’s rules on biking, one CB8M member suggested giving bikers pamphlets—available in different languages—that define biking rules.

Ms. Greenleaf offered various responses to attendees’ questions about why the 96th St. path was converted to shared use. She said that the 102nd St. route is not an official shared pedestrian-biking path. Moreover, bikers did not want to travel several extra blocks to 102nd St. if they were transporting a child on the bike. In addition, she said the CPC wanted to provide an alternative route for bikers to discourage them from using the north meadow route.) To Ms. Greenleaf, creation of the shared bike path “is a demonstration of communities” of users getting along” and of how “we can all make the most of the park.”

One CB8M member applauded the shared path program. The fact that bike usage on the path has so far been limited means that “it hasn’t been as dangerous as perhaps some feared it would be.” However, among other factors, he held that creation of this shared path showed that the Conservancy was preparing for City’s coming launch of its bike-sharing program, and showing how it can work, since this bike-sharing “could increase the number of bikes” in the park.

2. Presentation of Plans for the Renovation and Operation of Tavern on the Green restaurant in Central Park and for Bike Renting in TOG’s Parking Lot—a joint issue with the Landmarks

Committee

Charles Kloth, the NYC Parks Department’s Director of Concessions, provided an update on the status of the reopening of Tavern of the Green (TOG) restaurant and plans for using TOG’s parking lot for bike rentals.

Mr. Kloth reported that Central Park’s Tavern on the Green is expected to reopen in November 2013, and be run by the Emerald Green Group, whose principals, Jim Caiola and David Salama, operate the Philadelphia bistro, Beau Monde. Katy Sparks, who was previously with the New York restaurants Mesa Grill and Giraffe, will serve as executive chef. Responding to a question, Mr. Kloth affirmed that Mr. Caiola is related to an aide to Mayor Bloomberg.

According to Mr. Kloth, the restaurateur had been the top contender to run TOG. Its proposal had included an attractive design for the interior of the restaurant, a good menu, and \$5.5 million in capital. Emerald Green will operate TOG under a 20 year contract with the City and has a signed letter of agreement with the restaurant workers’ union. According to Mr. Kloth, the City expects TOG will annually produce \$1 million a year for the City’s general fund.

As planned, TOG will serve breakfast, lunch and dinner, and will be open year-round from 11 AM to 11 PM on weekdays and 11AM to 1AM on weekends. It will include a formal dining area and a bar with an open kitchen. Mr. Kloth shared a sample menu, which includes a variety of options such as small plates ranging in price from 9 to 18 dollars, and large plates ranging from 19 to 29 dollars. The restaurant will accommodate up to 250 diners inside and an additional 200 on the outside patio. There will be a takeout window on the south side of the restaurant, with a seating area for patrons and the public.

Currently, the City is restoring the building to its 1930s footprint and historic design. During construction, an original archway was exposed facing Central Park West. The City will complete its construction by July 2013, and then the concessionaire will begin its restoration of the interior.

Mr. Kloth also discussed the Parks Dept.'s plans to extend for 3 years its contact with Bike and Roll for bike renting at Tavern on the Green's parking lot.

That vendor, which also runs a concession at Columbus Circle, will store the bicycles in a shed at the parking lot behind the TOG restaurant and rent the bikes at the building's front by the turnaround. Mr. Kloth will encourage the vendor to post signs about the rules for safe and legal biking. The parking lot, which is not included in the restaurant's lease, will continue to be used for some events, such as the New York City Marathon. The Parks Dept. plans to add benches and shrubbery to enhance the area's park-like appearance.

3. Discussion about the need/desire for a CB8M position urging institutions on the Upper East Side to provide for public open space when they plan new buildings.

When local institutions appear before CB8M seeking variances, Community Board members frequently raise questions about the institutions' plans to provide public open space as part of their project. Most recently, this issue arose during a presentation of the planned CUNY-MSK project.

As a follow-up, the Parks Committee discussed whether CB8M should formalize a position on this issue. The questions: Should CB8M urge institutions creating new buildings include public open space as part of their new project? Should that open-space provision be one of the necessary considerations when CB8M members vote on a variance request?

Given the extreme shortage of public open space on the Upper East Side, most CB8M members present agreed that CB8M should adopt such positions. Several members cited specific areas where such public open space would be possible.

To some CB8M members, taking such a position could boost institutions' attention to the community and sense of partnership with it, especially when institutions are planning a new structure. It could also enhance such organizations' compatibility with the residential zoning districts in which they are permitted to exist.

One CB8M member—who had suggested writing a letter to institutions rather than having a resolution on the issue—wondered what “would be the punishment for institutions that don't incorporate open space in their projects? Are we going to turn down anyone who doesn't provide it?”

However, many attendees favored having a resolution, since it could clarify CB8M's position for institutions and address a pressing need in CB8M. As one CB8M member noted, “our community has the City's lowest per capita amount of green and public open space.”

“Many institutions come to the Board seeking variances,” an attendee stated. “This form of leverage”—which would benefit the community—“is long overdue,” she held.

RESOLUTION

Whereas Manhattan's Upper East Side suffers from a severe shortage of public open space, particularly green space, compared with other districts of New York City; and

WHEREAS CB8M can help expand available public open space by encouraging institutions to include such open space in their development plans; and

WHEREAS providing public open space could enhance institutions' compatibility with the residential zoning districts in which they are permitted to exist; and

WHEREAS providing public open space would help local institutions demonstrate their concern for the community they operate in and sense of partnership with it; therefore,

BE IT RESOLVED that Community Board 8, Manhattan urges all institutions planning to create new facilities in the CB8M district to incorporate public open space into their plans for the project.

Henceforth, CB8M members will take this open-space provision into account when voting on an institution's request for a zoning variance.

VOTE: 8-0-1

In favor: Elizabeth Ashby, Molly Blayney, Susan Evans, Scott Falk, Mary Pike, Peggy Price, Barbara Rudder, Teri Slater.

Abstaining: Michele Birnbaum

Preliminary discussion of new car traffic, biking and pedestrian lanes in Central Park.

At its November meeting, CB8M's Transportation Committee will be discussing the City's new roadway arrangements in Central Park. According to the DOT, which recently held an informational meeting on the changes, the new arrangement is similar to that in Prospect Park. The Central Park roadway changes for the East and West drives include: eliminating one car lane, doubling the size of the pedestrian lane and widening the cyclist lane, creating a lane for slower moving bikes and a lane for faster moving bicycles. The length of pedestrian crossings is also being reduced.

In advance of the Transportation Committee's Nov. meeting, CB8M members aired several opinions of the changes that could be discussed at the Transportation Committee meeting.

One general concern centered on the City's failure to consult with the public before enacting these major changes. To one CB8M member, the DOT's recent presentation on the new program was a mere "pro forma session done merely to justify its decision."

Another issue: that the creation of 2 bike lanes, including one for "faster-moving bikes," could pose a danger to pedestrians. (However, it was noted that this "faster" bike lane is adjacent to the car lane, while the slower biking lane, where children would ride, abuts a pedestrian lane.)

One CB8M member cited the need to review pedestrian crossings. Although she said the DOT's meeting included discussions of more enforcement, such a move may not resolve problems. For instance, adding enforcement patrols may not prevent bikers from running red lights. Instead, she suggested that the DOT should relocate enforcement patrols from time to time so that "bikers won't know where they can get away with" breaking the rules."

Another member proposed adjusting the traffic lights in Central Park so they would turn red when a pedestrian pushed a button. That way, bikers would realize that there was actually someone waiting "who wanted to cross" the roadway.

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