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The City of New York
Community Board 8 Manhattan
Transportation Committee
Wednesday January 8, 2025 6:30 PM
Conducted Remotely on Zoom

Please note: The resolutions contained in the committee minutes are recommendations submitted by the committee co-chairs to the Community Board. At the monthly full board meeting, the resolution is discussed and voted upon by all members of Community Board 8 Manhattan.

Resolutions for Approval:

Item 1: Central Park Drives

Present: Michele Birnbaum, Lori Bores, Alida Camp, Sebastian Hallum Clarke, Felice FarberPaul Krikler, Craig Lader, Valerie Mason, John -McClement, Jane Parshall, Rita Popper, Barbara Rudder, Judy Schneider, Charles Warren, Stephanie Reckler (public member), Barry Schneider(public member)

Absent (unexcused): John Philips

Number of Attendees from the Public: Approximately 70

The meeting was called to order at 6:32 PM.

Item 1: Public Hearing: Presentation by Central Park Conservancy-Central Park Drives Safety and Circulation Study (6:35PM)

David Saltonstall of the Central Park Conservancy made the presentation of the Study. He first mentioned that the Conservancy began with outreach to the public and Community Boards around the Park. They did a survey that received 10,000 responses from people who lived around the Park, and met with stakeholders. All of these efforts were in cooperation with the DOT and the Parks Department. Sam Schwartz Engineering was their consultant and did site counts and helped design the new plans. David then laid out the 'Vision and Goals' which were to (1) improve safety, (2) improve mobility and (3) maintain the character of the Park.

The Study developed a series of recommendations - Near-Term, Medium-Term and Long-Term. The Near-Term recommendations include repaving the entire 6 miles of the circular loop roadway in the Park, and reshaping it to make it easier for all users including pedestrians, bikers, rollerbladers and other types of vehicles, excluding cars. The Near-Term recommendations can be implemented starting this spring or summer. Mr. Saltonstall stressed that they are not changing the width of the drives but allocating the use to allow more space for pedestrians and joggers, then space for slower vehicles like bicycles and rollerbladers and then space for faster vehicles like emergency vehicles, faster bicycles and e-bikes and e-scooters. He also stressed that New York City decides what vehicles can use the Park and the Conservancy is not in a position to get into that process, which is why the report and the Conservancy don't take a position on the presence of e-bikes on the drive.

He discussed the fact that there are 80 crosswalks in the Park and each one needs to be looked at and handled individually to ensure that they will maximize safety for pedestrians crossing the Drive and those using the loop Drive. They will be looking to slow traffic down at crosswalks where there is heavy traffic by raising crosswalks, and will be undertaking separate analysis to determine what is specifically needed at each crosswalk. They will also look at the 19 historic arches in the Park and see if there are ways to make them more inviting for pedestrians with better signage and other improvements. Finally, they will be looking to improve Park bike connections so that bikers will have an easier time getting around in the Park. This could include creating a legal shared pathway at 97th Street, studying a bike cut through at 102nd Street and making use of the 86th Street bridle path as a shared path with pedestrians.

The Medium-Term recommendations include investigating parallel pathways for bikes at 59th Street, replacing vehicular traffic signals so they are at a lower level for bikers, and exploring protected bike lanes on the 86th Street Transverse. This will require more study. Another recommendation is to establish a Pedicab Reform Working Group since there have been many problems with pedicabs such as unlicensed vehicles, excessive noise and overcharging passengers.

The Long-Term recommendations will include exploring a raised pedestrian lane in the southern portion of the Park and developing tailored redesigns for hot spots such as the 72nd Street Transverse where there is confusion with vehicles going in a number of different directions.

There was a vigorous discussion from members of the public with a great number of people objecting to the presence of e-bikes and e-scooters in the Park. There was concern with some of the new design elements and a general feeling among some members of the public that the new recommendations compromise the character of the Park. Mr. Saltonstall emphasized that the Conservancy cannot dictate how the Park is used and that transportation has always been a part of the Park use since its inception.

There were also some speakers who supported the efforts of the Conservancy and the proposals they presented. Those speaking in favor appreciated the traffic calming measures that would slow bikes down and provide better separation between pedestrians and bikes, including raised crosswalks and better striping and markings. There was also positive feedback regarding the proposed conversion of the 86th Street Transverse sidewalks to dedicated bike lanes and its potential to divert some bike traffic from deliveristas that now use the Drive.

The following resolution was then put forward by Community Board 8:

WHEREAS; the Central Park Conservancy has made a number of recommendations to make improvements in the roadways in the Park; and

WHEREAS; the Central Park Drive is in need of a redesign to improve safety for people on foot, on bikes, and other modes of transportation; and

WHEREAS; pedestrians find crossing the Drives particularly challenging in the current configuration; and

WHEREAS; the proposed improvements and approach are intended to benefit safety and mobility for all users of the roadways; and

WHEREAS; converting underutilized sidewalks along the 86th Street Transverse to bike lanes will provide a more direct and safer means of biking across Central Park and reduce the amount of delivery activity on the Central Park Drive; and

WHEREAS; the presence of e-bikes and e-scooters in Central Park is viewed by many as a serious safety issue; and

WHEREAS; Community Board 8 has previously passed a resolution objecting to the use of the Park by e-bikes and e-scooters in connection with a DOT pilot program scheduled to end in May 2025; and **WHEREAS;** the proposals presented by the Central Park Conservancy in relation to improving safety and slowing down bikes are agnostic towards the legality of e-bikes in Central Park in the long-term;

THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED, that Community Board 8 approves as presented by the Central Park Conservancy the recommendations of the Central Park Drives Safety and Circulation Study; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, Community Board 8 reiterates its position in opposition to the presence of e-bikes and e-scooters in Central Park as presented in its prior resolution.

Yes (9+1): Bores, Hallum Clarke, Krikler, Lader, Mason, Popper, Rudder, J. Schneider, Warren, B. Schneider (Public Member)

No (4+1): Birnbaum, Camp, McClement, Parshall, Reckler(Public Member)

Abstain (0): None

Item 2: NYCDOT Updates

Colleen Chattergoon, Senior Borough Planner at NYCDOT and Liaison to Community Board 8, reported that the York Avenue Traffic Study, which had been requested by CB8M, has been initiated. She expected that NYCDOT would be setting up a stakeholder advisory group, and following its initial meeting would be ready to provide a presentation on the study at the February Transportation Committee meeting. Ms. Chattergoon also said they were working on several safety improvement projects and would come to the Committee when they are ready to make a report.

Item 3: Old and New Business

CB8 Board Chair Valerie Mason asked where things stood with the Birch Wathen Lenox Open Streets Application. Ms. Chattergoon stated that the application was on hold and the school was asked to meet with all the residents on the block and discuss the issues. They will come back to the Committee after these discussions.

A public member asked about the use of crossing guards to deal with many of the issues in the Park. Ms. Chattergoon said it was a matter for the Police Department, but she would look into it and get back to the Committee.

There being no further business, the meeting was adjourned at 9:45PM.

Respectfully submitted, Charles Warren & Craig Lader, Co-Chairs