



CITY OF NEW YORK MANHATTAN COMMUNITY BOARD 10

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Hon. Marquis A. Harrison
Chairperson

RESOLUTION: WEST 85TH STREET PLAYGROUND RECONSTRUCTION

WHEREAS The Abraham and Joseph Spector Playground (a.k.a. West 85th Street Playground) is located at 86th Street St, west of the West Drive in Central Park; and

WHEREAS The playground is located within the Seneca Village Landscape exhibit site which spans from 82nd-89th Streets on the West Side; and

WHEREAS The West 85th Street Playground, one of Central Park's largest, was originally constructed in the 1930s as Marginal Playground #16; and

WHEREAS Central Park Conservancy (CPC) renovated the playground in 1994, keeping the same footprint. Most of the remaining features and the layout of the current playground date from this 1994 renovation; and
WHEREAS Play features have been removed due to deterioration, the playground has become more open and empty, with significant space for free play; and

WHEREAS The large sand play area is a dominant feature of the playground as it currently exists. The playground is shaded by large canopy trees and includes seating with wood-and-concrete benches inside and at the entrance and a surrounding landscape that is predominantly lawn with scattered, large canopy trees and areas of rock outcrop; and

WHEREAS Ongoing investigations into the history of Seneca Village; a thriving predominantly African-American community that existed from 1825 to 1857, decades prior to the park's construction, have provided detailed information on the location of pre-park features within and adjacent to the present-day playground; and

WHEREAS The area that is currently occupied by the playground would have been near an important center of activity within Seneca Village, with churches, homes and important streets; and
WHEREAS Today, CPC's Seneca Village-focused tours often use an area near the playground entrance as the first stop to orient visitors to the site; and

WHEREAS In the past year, the Conservancy has held several community meetings to discuss the landscape, restoration, interpretation and commemoration of Seneca Village with historians, descendants, community members and park users to determine how to emphasize the enduring physical features of the site, highlight its history, and honor the memory and significance of Seneca Village; and 122023

WHEREAS CPC will continue these conversations in the coming year and come back to the community with proposals for commemoration once they have been established; and

WHEREAS Project Goals reflect the goals of the Plan for Play initiative to:

- Improve the relationship between the playground and the park
- Enhance the quality and variety of play experiences
- Maximize user accessibility
- Ensure compliance with current safety standards
- Preserve unique and successful aspects of existing designs
- Practice sustainable design and construction
- Design innovative solutions
- Enhance the distinctive topography and site features of the surrounding landscape
- Create an accessible route from the west side and to West 84th Street playground; and

WHEREAS The Scope of Work includes:

- New protected water service, drainage infrastructure and manual irrigation infrastructure
- New benches, pavement, drinking fountain, and plantings
- Reconfiguration of the playground entrance area to better accommodate Seneca Village-related gatherings, tours, programming, etc.
- New perimeter fence to be replaced with lower, 4 'high fence. Improve overall playground layout to better integrate the playground within the landscape and give more space to mature trees
- New play equipment including swings and play structures/climbers. Water and sand play areas will be included; and

WHEREAS CPC acknowledges the prominence of this playground within the Seneca Village site and re-envisions the playground as a play and family gathering space connected to the surrounding landscape; and

WHEREAS Construction is expected to start in summer 2024 and take a year. Once it reopens, it will be renamed the West 85th Street Playground. The upcoming project will move the location of the playground slightly north and cut down on the overall play space from 26,196 to 24,937 sq. ft.; and

WHEREAS There will be the movement of 2 large oak trees further out into the landscape; better aligning the playground entryway; and

WHEREAS CPC conducted extensive community outreach including surveys based upon direct interviews with park users over a six week period; varying days and times of their visits, posting of a survey link inside of the playground as well as in 2 different CPC newsletters. Community feedback was used to shape the design plans; and

WHEREAS Central Park Conservancy presented design plans to upgrade the 85th Street Playground in Central Park through renovations to the Parks and Recreation Committee on November 8th, 2023; and

WHEREAS In absence of quorum the sentiment of the Committee was to move the proposed Resolution to the November 29th Executive Committee meeting, where it was voted on to unanimously support the project; and

NOW THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED THAT during the December 5, 2023 General Board Meeting, the board voted unanimously 36 Yes, 0 No, 0 Abstention, and 0 Recusal to support the upgrade of the Abraham and Joseph Spector Playground (a.k.a. West 85th Street Playground), a vital community resource, through reconstruction.