



Community Board 12 - Manhattan Washington Heights & Inwood

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Katherine Diaz, Chairperson
Ebenezer Smith, District Manager

January 26, 2023

Hon. Susan M. Donoghue, Commissioner
NYC Department of Parks & Recreation
830 Fifth Avenue
New York, NY 10065

Re: Resolution Supporting NYC Parks Proposed Reconstruction/Renovation of the W. 186th Street Basketball Court.

Dear Commissioner Donoghue:

At the General Meeting on Tuesday, January 24th, 2023, Community Board 12, Manhattan, passed the following resolution with a vote of 40 in favor, 0 opposed, 0 abstentions, and 1, not voting, due to conflict, supporting the proposed design with some additional changes listed below, which the Parks Department design team agreed to incorporate into a further-revised design, and which also must be approved by the agency, and recommending that the Public Design Commission approved the project if (and only if) these changes indeed are incorporated; and calling on the NYC Parks Department to work with Councilmember De La Rosa to work with the original artists of the murals mentioned below at the site, as well as community mural artists willing and able to assist, to facilitate the restoration of said murals; and calling to work with Councilmember De La Rosa to provide additional funding for sports lighting at the site.

Whereas: The basketball court is built on the former site of a residential building on W. 186th St. between Audubon & St. Nicholas Avenues, which burned down in the 1970s. The Community Association of Progressive Dominicans (ACDP) urged the City to establish courts on the vacant lot, and in 1997 the City installed fencing, lighting, and hoops. Eventually, the property was transferred from HPD to Parks. It is the only park within a 5-minute radius, so it's an especially important facility for the community. Currently, the asphalt paving is cracked and pitted with settling due to unstable foundation materials and no drainage, the lights and water fountain do not work, and the retaining walls on the perimeter are severely compromised and in need of repair. The site has strong and distinct shadows cast by the buildings on three sides which make the site act like a giant sundial. There also are four murals on the adjacent buildings that are fading and damaged, but which are outside the scope of this project as they are on the exterior walls of privately-owned buildings, not Parks/City property; and

Whereas: In FY 2020 & FY 2022 then-Councilmember Ydanis Rodriguez (10th District) allocated \$1.1 million to renovate this site, and the current Councilmember, Carmen De La Rosa, has continued this allocation; and

Whereas: The Parks Department & Councilmember De La Rosa held a very well-attended, multi-site public input meeting on March 7, 2022, with participation from a broad range of community members at multiple venues connected through Zoom. The community prioritized basketball at the site but also wanted the new design to incorporate activities for younger children, seating for all ages, greenery/plantings, trees for shade, and multipurpose uses (e.g., farmers' and/or crafts markets, kid's activities, movies, performances) as well as preservation of the beloved memorial murals; and

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Whereas: Representatives of the NYC Parks Department made a presentation on November 10, 2022, to the CB12M Parks & Cultural Affairs (PCA) Committee for which this agenda item was well publicized and which meeting was attended by more than 50 members of the public and representatives of more than 15 community organizations and institutions as well as a quorum of the Committee and additional CB12M Members; and

Whereas: Based on the community's desire for an additional opportunity to vet the proposed design and provide feedback, the Parks Department's Capital Design team made an additional presentation on December 13, 2022, to the PCA Committee for which this agenda item was well publicized and which meeting was attended by more than 50 members of the public, including those attending in-person at a satellite location proximate to the project site, and representatives of many community organizations and institutions as well as a quorum of the Committee and additional CB12M Members and at which the public provided substantial feedback on elements of the plan which it approved and which it wanted to see changed, including most particularly less seating, larger basketball play area, and higher fencing; and

Whereas: Representatives of the NYC Parks Department made a third presentation on January 10, 2023, to the CB12M Parks & Cultural Affairs (PCA) Committee for which this agenda item was well publicized and which meeting was similarly well-attended, including by those at the satellite location; and

Whereas: The proposed plan will:

- Reconstruct the retaining walls, which are about 5' below grade, and have 12' chain link fencing. The cost will be funded through the City's retaining wall fund and is being added to the financial scope of this project. There will also be 12' chain link fencing at the northern end of the basketball court to prevent errant basketballs. The sidewalk and curb outside of the site will also be reconstructed, expanding plant beds for better aesthetics and runoff recapture.
- Add a 46'x80'-8" court, which is a slightly narrowed regulation junior court, modified to fit the width of the site. The length is 15' greater than initially proposed and is the maximum available length without bisecting one of the memorial murals with the backstop fencing. The unstable foundation materials will be removed, and the site repaved with asphalt so it's flat. The court will include detention/retention tanks. The court design is unique to the site, with thermoplastic graphics based on the movement of the light through it, marking the equinox and solstice shadows.
- Add a 12' chain link fence at the northern end of the basketball court to protect the seating area (and the adjacent sidewalk) from errant basketballs. The fence will have a 10' high gate at the eastern end.
- Repair and repave (with asphalt) the front portion (as you enter the courts, at the northern end) adding a thermoplastic coating with a ladybug/bumblebee hopscotch feature to make the area more inviting to younger children as well as to adults. The plan for this section also includes a bucket hoop, a seating area with three (down from ten) benches, expanded tree pits for existing trees and three (rather than the initially proposed five) new trees, a plant bed, a hi-lo drinking fountain with bottle filler, and new lighting with electrical service in the seating area. The seating will be standard "World's Fair" style benches, with dividers to discourage sleeping.
- Remove the current 8' entry fencing which is unwelcoming and carceral in appearance and replace it with a 5'6" high iron fence, consistent with Parks' new design guidelines on Parks Without Borders, and a 10' wide entry gate. This will provide a more accommodating and welcoming appearance. Based on community feedback the proposed fence height is 18" higher than the originally proposed 4' fence, and includes pickets as a further deterrent to accessing the area after hours; and

Whereas: The project will NOT repair or alter the murals in any way, Parks is open to working with the landlords to secure access to the murals for restoration. The cost of any such work is outside of the scope of this project. Because Parks will need access to the buildings for the retaining wall work, they will be in touch with the landlords and have committed to enquiring about having the murals restored, as well as ensuring that the contractor will protect the murals during construction. The original artists are known to the community, and the Councilmember is in contact with them regarding the restoration of the murals, and additional community mural artists have committed to working on them if needed; and

Whereas: There was considerable discussion about the fencing height, with the majority agreeing that the current fence gives an unwelcoming and decidedly carceral appearance, but that a 5-1/2' fence is too low to limit access to the site when it is closed (which would be disturbing to adjacent neighbors), and that a 7' fence with pickets would be preferable; and

Whereas: There was considerable discussion about lighting, and while it is understood that the current project includes only two security lights at the perimeter and there is no funding to cover the cost of replacing the now-broken sports lighting within the basketball court, the current project could be designed to include a footprint for the future installation of such lighting. The Councilmember's staff committed to funding such a project, but it was agreed that implementation of the proposed basketball court renovation should not be delayed pending the addition of lighting. It was further agreed that should sports lighting be funded and approved as an additional project, there should be community engagement around the evening hours enabled by such an amenity, with said hours not being any later than 9 pm or 10 pm; and

Whereas: With the addition of plantings and larger tree pits, the newly renovated site will have a more permeable surface area (11%) than before (negligible), which will help to reduce stormwater runoff; and

Whereas: Public engagement with the mural should not be disturbed by a tree or plantings which may block visibility as they grow or a bench that forces viewers to sit with their backs to the mural; and

Whereas: There is a children's playground nearby so the addition of bucket hoops and hopscotch/ladybug for very small children is not necessary at this site, but the addition of skully would have broader appeal to children of all ages as well as adults; and

Whereas: The timeline for this project is another six months for design, 9-12 months for procurement, and not more than 12 months for construction, with an anticipated opening in the 2Q/3Q of 2025; now, therefore, be it

Resolved: Community Board 12, Manhattan supports the proposed design with these additional changes which the Parks Department design team agreed to incorporate into a further-revised design, and which also must be approved by the agency, recommends that the Public Design Commission approved the project if (and only if) these changes indeed are incorporated:

- Include a footprint for sports lighting, to be added later as a separately funded project.
- remove the tree to be planted near one of the murals and ensure that the landscaping is low enough so as not to interfere with the bottom of the mural.
- change the style of the bench to be placed nearest to the mural in the northwest area to a backless bench.
- remove the bucket hoops.
- remove the ladybug graphic in the front area of the pavement and add skully;
- add a 7' (not 5-1/2') fence at the sidewalk perimeter to discourage after-hours access; and be it further

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Resolved: Community Board 12, Manhattan calls on the NYC Parks Department to work with Councilmember De La Rosa to work with the original artists of the murals at the site, as well as community mural artists willing and able to assist, to facilitate the restoration of said murals, and to provide and/or help identify the needed funds to do so; and be it further

Resolved: Community Board 12, Manhattan calls on the NYC Parks Department to work with Councilmember De La Rosa to provide additional funding for sports lighting at the site, to be installed and operated at such evening hours not to exceed 9 pm or 10 pm.

Sincerely,



Katherine Diaz
Chairperson

cc: Hon. Anthony Perez, Borough Commissioner NYC Parks Hon. Robert Jackson, State Senator
Hon. Eric Adams, Mayor Hon. Cordell Cleare, State Senator
Hon. Mark Levine, Manhattan Borough President Hon. Al Taylor, Assembly Member
Hon. Jumaane Williams, Public Advocate Hon. Manny De Los Santos, Assembly Member
Hon. Brad Lander, Comptroller Hon. Carmen De La Rosa, Council Member
Hon. Adriano Espaillat, Congressman Hon. Shaun Abreu, Council Member
Ms. Jennifer Hoppa, Parks Administrator