

Community Board 12, Manhattan Parks & Cultural Affairs Committee
September 6, 2016

Committee Members Present: Elizabeth Ritter, Chair; Osi Kaminer, Assistant Chair; Daryl Cochrane; Natalie Espino; Mitchell Glenn; Richard Lewis. **Committee Members Absent:** Barbara Frazier; Karen Taylor. **Other Board Members Present:** Shahbuddeen Ally, Chair; Gerard Dangel. **Others in Attendance:** Jack & Karen Greene, Francisco Menendez, Joan Relich, Diana Van Buren, Peter Zangert, Morrie Silvert, Alison Loeb, Rosa Naparstek, Rochelle Lauer, 720/730 Ft. Washington Ave.; Paul Kittas, Sara Pyle, Peter Levy, Pam Henry, Danish M., Eduard Checo, John Moran, Chantone & Jonah Gerber, Joshuel Marte, Kevin McMillen, Ricardo Irizarry, Ira Gershenhorn, community residents; Jennifer Hoppa, Katherine Bridges, Leslie Peoples, NYC Department of Parks & Recreation; Shawn Folz, Ft. Tryon Park Trust; Trish Anderson, Inwood Canoe Club; Sara Fisher, Friends of Inwood Hill Park; Charles Edwards, J. Hood Wright Park; Jenn Bristol, Ft. Tryon DOG; Michael Scher, NY Road Runners; Lindsay Sierra & <name?>, Partnerships for Parks; Sandra Harris, CUMC; and at least a dozen people who didn't sign in.

1. Chair Liz Ritter brought the meeting to order at 7:05pm, with welcome and announcements:
 - Sherman Plaza development *vis a vis* Ft Tryon Park: the view is preserved, at least for now, due to City Council rejection of the rezoning plan. It is not clear what building the developer might construct as of right.
 - DCLA's "Building Community Capacity" grant has hired a project manager, Veronica Liu, and will be having a day-long uptown cultural summit of local stakeholders and artists on Sept. 24th.
 - Statement of District Needs (SoDN) submitted in August using new OMB online form. Budget priorities for FY'18 are due to OMB on October 31st, so we will have our Committee's rankings at the October meeting; CB12 public meeting and ranking date TBD. [Note: scheduled for 10/19.]
 - Highbridge Park awarded \$30 million in capital funds as part of a broader City initiative to upgrade one park in each borough. Outreach for public input on needed projects to begin this fall. We'll also look to SoDN & Budget Priorities for recommendations. All projects will be vetted through this Committee.
 - There were also a number of announcements of upcoming events, including the various clean-ups in Inwood parks on 9/10; 9/17 Danza Dance Festival at Highbridge; 9/18 Medieval Festival; 9/18 outdoor movie; 10/1 Listen Closely Concert at OSA Church (189th & Bennett); CB12's own Arlene Schulman's photo exhibit at the BP's office through 9/30, with a reception on 9/20; 9/19 art opening and concert at the Allen Pavilion; and the 9/15 & 10/1 deadlines for two art shows at NoMAA & OSA respectively.
 - Oct. meeting will need to be rescheduled due to Jewish holy days. [Note: rescheduled to 10/13.]

2. Lindsay Sierra, Partnership for Parks Grants & Resource Coordinator: P4P will administer Columbia University's gift of \$300k to be used over a period of three years for projects in three parks – Isham, Inwood Hill, and Muscota Marsh – per a Community Benefits Agreement. Grants may range from \$500 - \$15,000, for small physical improvements or for events and/or programming. Grantees will be community groups and nonprofit organizations, but do not have to be 501(c)(3). Application details are available on the Partnership for Parks website: www.partnershipforparks.org.

3. Sandra Harris, Columbia University Medical Center
 - Neighborhood Appreciation Day football game 9/17. Free tickets to community residents w/ proof of residency. Free tickets available thru community orgs for home games (10/1 @ noon v. Princeton; 10/22 @1:30pm v. Dartmouth; 10/28 @7pm v. Yale; 11/12 @1pm v. Cornell).

- Columbia University Medical Center wants to create a pedestrian plaza on Haven Avenue between W. 168th & W. 169th Streets, and filed an application on August 31st with DOT through their Pedestrian Plazas program. The proposal would maintain patient vehicular access to Neuro and Mehlman access. The plan would include making W. 169th St. into a one-way eastbound street for the benefit of southbound traffic on Haven Ave. If DoT accepts the project – notification is not expected until December -- CUMC will make a formal presentation to the PCA and Traffic/Transportation Committees.
4. Ira Gershenhorn, spoke about the possibility of creating a beach in Fort Washington Park.
 - Existing situation: 2 coves with sandy beaches between W. 169th & W. 172nd Streets.
 - Hudson River water is very clean (he swims in it often); less clean in the Harlem River.
 - Wants to get people thinking about creating one or more beaches in the area.
 - Recommends a trial 200 foot long beach with a lifeguard at this location.
 - Ms. Hoppa pointed out that it is illegal to swim from there as there is no lifeguard.
 - Richard Lewis notes that there was a beach at this location long ago.
 5. Paul Kittas, Heights Historic Tours. Announced his walking tours of historic locations in Northern Manhattan. For more information, visit www.HeightsHistoricTours.com.
 6. Jennifer Hoppa announced sculpture pieces now on display in Highbridge Park. This exhibition will last for four months. There was a question about making this a permanent installation. Ms. Hoppa explained the different processes for permanent vs. temporary (up to one year) installations.
 7. The Javits Playground renovation update. Katherine Bridges, Parks Designer for NYC DPR, presented a preliminary design for Javits.
 - Public scoping meeting occurred in February 2015. Active recreation was prioritized.
 - There is no other playground within a ten-minute walk of the Javits Playground.
 - Total project is \$2.45mm: C/M Rodriguez contributed \$1.5mm; BP Brewer contributed \$600k; Fort Tryon Park Trust contributed \$350k.
 - Committee formed of local stakeholders, including parents of children of various ages, elderly, basketball players, Bar Starz workout participants, and residents of adjacent buildings, has been meeting regularly since January 2016.
 - Currently in 10-16 month design phase. Construction startup possibly fall '17, for 12-18 months.
 - Preliminary concepts presented to CB12 in March. Parks asked for community input re: keeping the same footprint or to flip basketball/playground to put basketball on Ft. Washington Ave. and playground on Cabrini Blvd. side. CB12 passed reso 3/22 approving the flip. On the basis of this approval, Parks went ahead with schematic plan following this design concept.
 - Due to budgetary constraints, the overall footprint of the playground will not be changed, though retaining walls along the western perimeter will be shored up. The existing footprint and the presence of the wooded area in the SW corner as a significant grade on the western portion of the lot all present design challenges and limitations.
 - Ms. Bridges' presentation noted the basic design plan, significant changes to features of the existing park, examples of equipment and furniture to be installed, and examples of new plantings. The basketball courts will not change size; the children's playground will be one-third larger; the adult workout area will be more than three times its current size.

- Highlights of additional public comments:
 - i. Shawn Folz, resident/parent and consultant hired by Fort Tryon Park Trust for this project read a letter from the playground renovation committee in support of the plan. There remain some concerns in various areas, particularly including lack of space around the basketball court, which Katherine Bridges addressed.
 - ii. Rosa Naparstek (area resident living directly across from Javits) asked about the existence of trees and shrubbery facing Fort Washington Avenue. Katherine confirmed that the eastern border of the park (along Ft. Washington Ave.) will have plantings, as it does now, and that no trees will be removed. Ms. Naparstek also had concerns regarding aesthetics, and overall changes to the design as compared to what is there now. Concerned that as people exit the A-train at 190th St., the sight of grown men playing basketball is less welcoming than to see a children's playground.
 - iii. Jack Greene (area resident living directly across from Javits) spoke for many others when he shared his concerns with flipping the basketball and playground elements, for esthetic, safety and noise reasons. A sound study was discussed at the March Committee meeting; he asked that any results be made public. Ms. Bridge's response was that the primary source of noise is a set of old and rickety backboards. The new backboards will be much quieter and create no more noise than the background noise of the children's playground.
 - iv. Members of the public stated concerns regarding noise that comes from the current park at night, and worries that this will be exacerbated by moving the basketball courts to the east side of the playground. Parks stated that this is an enforcement problem, and directed this issue to NYPD, noting that this is a problem irrespective of the park's design.
 - v. There were concerns raised regarding lighting and security cameras.
 - vi. Mitch Glenn asked whether the park can be locked at night, to mitigate noise issues, noting that taller fences and locking gates would help. Ms. Bridges noted Commissioner Silver's "Parks without Borders" initiative, which is at odds with this suggestion.
 - vii. Concerns about the four-foot fence around much of the basketball courts and the danger of balls escaping the courts imperiling others.
 - viii. Two residents wrote testimony in support of the design, which was read to the group.
 - ix. PCA member Daryl Cochrane, who works for the NYC Commission on Human Rights, raised the issue of greater ADA accessibility. *[Note: there was a joint walk-through 9/19.]*
 - x. A child who sat through the whole session asked that the existing twisty-slide be retained.
- It was noted that the Success Academy's frequent use of the Javits playground encroaches on general public use of the playground. Groups larger than 25 should have an events permit. Jennifer Hoppa will look into this issue and report back to the committee. Ms. Lorrin Ritter reiterated that the renovation is being done in response to community demands/advocacy and precedes the advent of the Success Academy. It is not for the SA's benefit, which has not been involved in the redesign or planning meetings. The community must be vigilant to ensure that it has use of the playground and that it is not overrun by the SA, which has its own gym.
- A resolution supporting Parks' preliminary schematic plan while taking into account the above recommendations/concerns was approved by the Committee by a vote of 4-1-1 (Lorrin Ritter, Cochrane, Glenn, Lewis in favor; Kaminer opposed; Espino abstaining); public opposed 2-13-7.

The meeting was adjourned at 10:07pm.

Community Board 12, Manhattan Parks
Resolution Supporting a Preliminary Design Concept for the Jacob Javits Playground Renovation
March 22, 2016

Whereas: Fort Tryon Park's Jacob K. Javits Playground ("the Playgrounds") has not been renovated since 1995, and Councilmember Ydanis Rodriguez, Borough President Gale Brewer and the Fort Tryon Park Trust recently earmarked a total of \$2.45 million (\$1.5m, \$600k, & \$350k, respectively) for design and construction to renovate this landmarked playground, the only playground within a mile, and a destination for residents throughout Community District 12; and

Whereas: the NYC Department of Parks & Recreation had a well-publicized public visioning session in February, 2015, attended by a large and broad cross-section of stakeholders, including residents of the adjacent apartment buildings, to determine community priorities for the long-overdue renovation of Fort Tryon Park's Javits Playground, and the public overwhelmingly favored active recreation including a playground, swings, exercise areas for adults and teens, basketball, sprinklers, natural plantings, sitting areas, and a comfort station; and

Whereas: a working group composed of local stakeholders, including residents of the adjacent residential buildings, met regularly beginning in January, 2016 to discuss design priorities and ideas for the Playground's renovation; and

Whereas: the basic footprint of the Playground is limited by the existing retaining walls, natural wooded area in the southwestern corner, and steep grade along the western side; and

Whereas: the NYC Department of Parks & Recreation (DPR) Capital Projects Division (CPD) could fully articulate only one design for the renovation and asked the community for clarification as to whether it preferred a basic design concept which preserved the current usage footprint (i.e., basketball on the Cabrini Blvd. side and children's playground elements on the Ft. Washington Ave. side) or which "flipped" the two uses (i.e., basketball on the Ft. Washington Ave. side and playground elements on the Cabrini Blvd. side); and

Whereas: Community Board 12, Manhattan (CB12M) passed a resolution on March 22nd with 24 votes in favor, three abstaining and none opposed, "supporting this second concept... as the better overall option at this time, and call[ing] on the Parks CPD to begin the process of developing a detailed design and schematics without delay for further community review"; and

Whereas: C/M Rodriguez, BP Brewer and the Fort Tryon Park Trust hosted a public meeting on August 30th so DPR CPD could share the preliminary design schematic for the new playground pursuant to the agreed-upon ("flipped") design concept, and a number of community residents expressed significant concerns with the design, with particular regard to noise, safety, design aesthetic, and the width of the central *allée* of trees; and

Whereas: the proposed design maintains the same sized full- and half- basketball courts and incorporates public demand for better differentiation and use of areas to minimize user conflicts; a children's playground one-third larger than the current playground, with more swings, and a new, protected area for small children; integration of the existing wooded/natural area; facilities for teens; an expanded workout area for adults that is more than three times the current size and has its own benches; improved access and ADA-compliant facilities; space for a future comfort station; more drinking fountains; more social seating; more trees for shade; game tables and tables for eating; while preserving scenic river views and the central north/south *allée* separating playground elements from basketball; and

Whereas: the CB12M Parks & Cultural Affairs (PCA) Committee heard a second presentation by DPR CPD on September 6th which incorporated feedback on a number of points regarding specific components; and

Whereas: the NYC Commission on Human Rights and NYC Parks did a walk-through of the Playground on September 19th with an eye towards additional accessibility improvements of the proposed design; and

Whereas: no 311 were calls logged in the last two months (July/August) for noise complaints in the Playground; and

Whereas: the Playground is not part of Parks Enforcement Patrol (PEP)'s regular patrol, but is part of the regular patrol of the new 34th Precinct Neighborhood Coordination Officers for the southwest sector; and

Whereas: there remains significant concern regarding noise, particularly from residents directly across the street though many in the building favor the proposed design, and while DPR CPD and the PCA Committee share some of these concerns it was concluded that people being in the playground after it is closed has less to do with design than with enforcement; now, therefore be it

Resolved: that Community Board 12, Manhattan supports the design schematic proposed by the Department of Parks & Recreation (DPR) at the September 6, 2016 Parks & Cultural Affairs Committee meeting with the following suggestions/caveats:

- That DPR conduct an acoustical/noise study to get a clear idea of just how loud are sounds of children's and adult play as the playground is currently configured and as it is proposed;
- That DPR consider higher fencing as a deterrent to entering the park after it is closed;
- Signs be added to the southwest entrance to advise as to the location of the accessible entrance, and railings be added to the steps leading to the basketball and flagpole area;
- That the playground equipment include a "twisty slide" such as is currently in place;
- The adult workout area include chin-up bars and other equipment as noted at the 9/6 PCA meeting;
- That DPR consider the addition of temporary shade structures since even fast-growing trees will take several years before they provide shade;
- That signage be added which prominently states the Playground's closing hours;
- That DPR evaluate the playground's lighting, possibility eliminating flood lights on the basketball court which had previously been added at the request of residents of 720/730 Ft. Washington Ave. as several residents of the building have identified this light as a nuisance and an attractant of late-night (i.e., post-closing) playground users;

and be it further

Resolved: that Community Board 12, Manhattan urges the NYC Landmarks Commission to approve the proposed schematic design of Javits Playground; and be it further

Resolved: that Community Board 12, Manhattan calls on elected officials to allocate sufficient funds for installation of security cameras in/on/around Javits Playground and the Phase II comfort station project; and be it further

Resolved: that Community Board 12, Manhattan urges NYC Parks CPD to study the acoustical impact on neighboring residential buildings of moving the basketball courts closer to those residential buildings; and be it further

Resolved: that Community Board 12, Manhattan demands that Parks Enforcement Patrol begin and the 34th Precinct maintain a concerted effort to enforce the 10pm closing to reduce after-hours use and noise at Javits Playground.

Approved by the Committee: 4-1-1-0 (Public: 2-13-7)