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PARKS & WATERFRONT COMMITTEE

January 6, 2021

The Parks & Waterfront Committee of Community Board #2, Manhattan, held its monthly meeting on Wednesday, January 6, 2021 at 6:30 via Zoom conferencing.

The meeting covered one topic: update on in process open space projects in our district.

Board Members Present: Rich Caccappolo (Chair); Susanna Aaron (Vice Chair); Coral Dawson; Jeannine Kiely; Matthew Metzger; Shirley Secunda; Kristin Shea; Georgia Silvera Seamans

Public Members Present: Nancy Brous; Elizabeth Gilmore; Sharon Woolums

Other Board Members Present: Carter Booth (CB2 Board Chair); Michael Levine; Donna Raftery, Valerie De La Rosa

Board Members Absent with Notice:

Public Members Absent with Notice:

In total, approximately 32 people connected including community members

There were no resolutions created from this meeting

MINUTES

Introduction to and discussion with Will Morrison, newly appointed Deputy Administrator, Washington Square Park:

Mr. Will Morrison introduced himself to our committee, explained his role, conveyed some of his thoughts about it after 7 weeks on the job (he was appointed in November 2020) and answered questions from those in attendance.

He has been employed by the Parks Department for almost seven years in various roles, most recently as manager of marketing and special events during which he worked on large-scale events across the city, including political rallies in Washington Square Park.

In this new role, Deputy Administrator, Mr. Morrison is asked to:

- Be responsible for the stewardship of Washington Square Park's 9.75 acres of lawns, pathways, and plazas.
- Oversee maintenance, operations, events, programming, and film shoots.

- Manage capital development and planning alongside NYC Parks Capital Divisions.
- Foster effective partnerships with the Washington Square Park Conservancy, volunteer groups, partner agencies and other community stakeholders.
- Attend community board meetings and respond to the needs of community organizations, partnership groups and public officials.
- Enforce compliance with Parks & Recreation's rules, regulations, standards of conduct, uniform codes and vehicle operating procedures. Work directly with New York City Police Department and Park Enforcement Patrol to address security concerns.

Committee members and others in attendance posed a series of questions:

- Regarding his title and the scope of the role: unlike his two predecessors, George Vellonakis and Sarah Nielsen, Mr. Morrison does not have a dual role of both administrator of Washington Square Park and the executive director of the Washington Square Park Conservancy. While explaining this change he said, "I will still be working with the conservancy. But they will be like any other community group coming to me to work on the park."
- On the topic of addressing the ongoing "drug trade" that takes place, primarily in the northwest corner of the park, Mr. Morrison explained that addressing it requires interaction with Police Department and that "enforcement issues" at the drug-dealer level are a police matter. He noted that he has been in touch with Captain Stephen Spataro, the commanding officer of the Village's Sixth Precinct, to this end.
- Questions were posed about homeless people in the park. Mr. Morrison spoke about his desire to see the opportunity to provide outreach services to homeless who come to WSP, noting that parks are often last option homeless people have and that it often takes many, many contacts with homeless people for outreach to succeed, and parks are where those contacts can take place. He said that Parks Enforcement Patrol officers and Department of Homeless Services street-outreach workers will be working together multiple times a week to connect homeless in the park with the services they need.
- The issue of broken street lights was raised. Mr. Morrison explained that lighting is managed by the Department of Transportation, that the current large number of lights out might be a wiring problem and that the agency will be sending someone this month to confirm and address it. Question was asked if temporary lighting could be set up in the meantime, which has been done on occasion in WSP. Mr. Morrison noted that diesel-powered generators for light towers are very noisy, which engenders other complaints from local residents and park visitors.
- Skateboarder activity in the park was the catalyst for discussion. Mr. Morrison was asked for his thoughts on having the law enforced (officially, skateboarding, like bike riding, is not allowed in the park) and/or plans for containing the activity and/or maybe even providing a section for use at certain times (in or near the park, e.g., the open street on Thompson south of 4th or on University). He conveyed that PEP officers and police are working to know the skateboarders, to build relationships, that they are not taking a "blunt approach," but rather, are engaging with the skaters so that they can say 'I know you, you know me — this is not the place for skateboarding,'". He also stated "I would really support a skate park being built in the neighborhood, because they need a place to skate."
- Regarding resumption of events and programming in the park: Mr. Morrison said pandemic executive orders would drive activities (the one in place now limits gatherings to 50 people), but planning is underway for when larger events can be held in the future.

- Mr. Morrison shared some information about the recent accident caused by a drunk driver who slammed into a police car under the park's arch in late November. Most importantly, the police officer who was injured is recovering well. Also, a granite slab below the arch and two bollards surrounding the arch were damaged in the incident and will be replaced in time.
- Questions about improvements of existing features, e.g., it was noted that playground equipment is worn and should be replaced or improved. Mr Morrison noted that replacement projects would have to go through the standard capital process and it may be a while before such projects can be undertaken, but until then he is planning activities to clean and spruce up what is currently in place.
- Reinterment of unearthed remains: during park reconstruction and water tunnel projects done in recent years, human remains were found. While intact burials were left alone, as per Landmarks Preservation Commission protocols, some bone fragments were removed. The plan has been to reinter them in the park. The ceremony will take place at the end of February and Greenwood Cemetery will assist with the reinterment process.

We ended the meeting by conveying our appreciation to the Parks Department for the appointment and Mr. Morrison for accepting this position. The Parks Department had explained to us last year, soon after the pandemic started, that due to a hiring freeze it was going to be very difficult for them to fill the open position. Fortunately, due to the importance of the role, the Parks Department identified a qualified and very interested internal candidate in Mr. Morrison and transferred him into this newly designed role of deputy administrator. Our committee is pleased he is in place and we conveyed our willingness to help him succeed in this role.

Respectfully submitted,

Rich Caccappolo,
Chair, Parks & Waterfront Committee
Community Board 2, Manhattan