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COMMUNITY BOARD NO. 2, MANHATTAN

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PARKS & WATERFRONT COMMITTEE MEETING

April 6, 2022

The Parks & Waterfront Committee of Community Board #2, Manhattan, held its monthly meeting on Wednesday, April 6, 2022 at 6:30 via Zoom.

The meeting covered two topics: Representative(s) from the NYC Department of Parks & Recreation gave updates on various in-process projects such as Little Red Square, Petrosino Square, Passannante Ballfield, the DEP water tunnel sites, the Grand and Canal Courts, and Duarte Square and spoke about questions at Tony Dapolito Recreation Center and Washington Square Park

Board Members Present: Rich Caccappolo (Chair); Susanna Aaron (Vice Chair); Chris Dignes; Matthew Metzger; Shirley Secunda; Kristin Shea; Georgia Silvera Seamans; Frederica Sigel

Board Members Absent Without Notice:

Board Members Absent with Notice: Coral Dawson

Public Members Present: Elizabeth Gilmore; Sharon Woolums

Public Members Absent with Notice:

Other Board Members Present: Jeannine Kiely (CB2 Chair); Carter Booth; Donna Raftery
In total, approximately 50 people attended the meeting.

There were no resolutions created from this meeting.

MINUTES

Presentation by representatives from the NYC Department of Parks & Recreation (DPR) on various in-process and planned projects in our district including specifics on the latest status of the Tony Dapolito Recreation Center:

DPR representatives Terese Flores, Regional Park Manager Manhattan, William Morrison, Administrator of Washington Square Park and Ken Conyers, Manhattan Chief of Recreation, presented status of and fielded comments and answered questions about various open space projects, providing updates as follows:

Washington Square Park: Mr. Morrison provided initiative and status updates:

- All lights in the Park are being updated to LEDs (working with DOT). Work should be completed in two weeks.
- Eleven new street trees are being installed on the perimeter of the park (all sides but the eastern edge).
- A tombstone and historic sign displaying and describing a historic item found during the water tunnel upgrade project will be installed in the park house in coming weeks.
- Granite bollards under the Arch, which have been damaged by car crashes over last few years, will be replaced. Installation will be completed by end of June.
- Golden Swan Garden, located nearby to WSP on 6th Ave and W 4th St.: the WSP team, with support from Washington Square Park Conservancy who will help with fundraising, is working to update and upgrade this public space. (Fun fact: the “vest pocket garden” is named to commemorate the Golden Swan Cafe, also known as the “Hell Hole”, a long-standing sawdust-floored bar with a gilded, weather-beaten stuffed swan mounted in the back room, that was demolished in 1928 when the IND subway was built and 6th Avenue was widened). \$10K for plants was allocated by Councilmember Johnson last year and will be utilized this year. There is no new seating plan set yet; in response to a question / request, Ms. Flores replied that she will try but installing new benches would require “footings”, so they would not sink into the soil, which complicates the initiative.
- Mr. Morrison has 160 volunteers who help with maintenance of WSP; some will work maintenance of the 6th Avenue parks including Father Demo Square, Winston Churchill Square, Minetta Playground, Minetta Green, Father Fagan Park, and Golden Swan Garden.

Ms. Flores provided updates on other park projects:

Mercer Playground: The interim renovation project, which has been funded by NYU, is nearly complete though the final decision on the back wall is still undecided. Investigation of “power washing” the structure revealed that the process could cause many “holes” in the brick. Leaving the brick unwashed and unpainted would prove unattractive, so it will be painted green.

Little Red Square: A few plants are going to be planted in the new beds in the recently opened space, but trees will not be put in until the fall.

William F. Passannante Ballfield: The project involves re-surfacing, re-paving and painting lines for sports activities including basketball, baseball field, soccer field, rollerblade hockey and pickleball courts. Estimated duration of the work is three to four months. This proposed rendering was presented showing colors and lines to be painted on the re-surfaced surface:



Concerns were expressed about the number of courts – many more than just two were requested. Suggestion was to bring up the debate with Councilmember Bottcher’s office. In addition, there was a report of recent issues with owners allowing their dogs to run off-leash. Ms. Flores said that PEP officers can be sent over periodically to enforce the rules.

James J Walker Park: Similarly, issues with dogs off-leash soiling the baseball / soccer field; PEP officers now visit the field each morning to address issues that happened over night or are occurring at that time. Other topic: there are ADA issues and there are concerns with the fences and the Keith Haring mural; a more structured discussion about the space is required.

Bleecker Playground: DPR is embarking on a “replacement program” for the childrens play area – there will be no changes to the design, just replacement of worn out equipment.

Grand Canal Court: No new news on the project, but the MTA still believes they must build a new substation below the popular basketball court located at Thompson St., Canal St., and Avenue of the Americas, it expects to start working this summer, and they estimate that the project will take four years, and they will announce a 90 day notice before the start of the project. So, the DPR and the community should be hearing from the MTA shortly.

Juan Pablo Duarte Square: No new news on the renovation project of the triangular plot bounded by Sullivan St., Grand St., and Avenue of the Americas at the intersection with Canal St., which is being funded by Trinity Real Estate, the real estate arm of Trinity Church. Again, design was nearly complete, but the project has been put on hold because the NYC Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) is considering installing a new pump station under the de-mapped Sullivan Street section of this lot and our committee will be notified when a decision is made.

Tony Dapolito Recreation Center: A planned repair and renovation project was started two years ago, which exposed greater structural issues than anticipated, requiring DPR to close the entire facility, including both the indoor and outdoor pools. Renovations and repairs continued during this closure, but identified issues will require a second project, i.e., the scope of the project will eventually include the original scope of work plus the discovered issues through that resulted in the closing of the facility. These issues include the need for additional shoring, crack monitoring, and more probes which are still needed

before the full scope of work can be finalized. ***The Center cannot be opened until the full project is completed – which includes the outdoor pool – so the facility and the pool will, once again, not be opened this summer.*** This will be the 3rd summer in a row that the pool will not be open. Emergency funding from the Mayor’s office has been allocated to stabilize the building and make it safe. **The best case scenario is that it can re-open in the spring of 2024.** Disappointment and frustration were expressed by many attendees. Committee members questioned how much has been spent to date and how much is thought to be required to complete the full project. DPR representatives were not sure and pledged to get back to us with that answer. Questions were posed concerning possible alternatives for the community. DPR reps explained that there are none available nearby; the only options are the existing Rec Centers north in Chelsea and east on Houston St. A request was made by our committee to investigate the viability of offering bus service to these alternative Centers.

Water Tunnel sites: Development of open spaces on two of the water tunnel sites continue:

- DEP Shaft Site 30B at Grand and Lafayette Streets <https://www.nycgovparks.org/planning-and-building/capital-project-tracker/project/7014> and
- DEP Shaft Site 31B on East 4th Street (next to the Merchant’s House Museum) <https://www.nycgovparks.org/planning-and-building/capital-project-tracker/project/8869>

Both are expected to be opened to the public in October, 2022.

Options for development of the water tunnel site (or half the site) at Hudson St between Houston and Clarkson Streets should be re-opened with DPR and the Hudson Square BID and the community. Our committee will set up a community meeting in the near future.

Vesuvio Playground: trash situation is very concerning and additional new, safer trash cans have been requested

DeSalvio Playground: The renovation project has been nearly completed since 2019, but the rock climbing wall is still not accessible because the owner of the adjacent building, 75 Kenmare Street, has still not installed the promised awning barrier. Question posed: could the rock climbing feature be moved to another wall in the park?

Seravalli Playground: neighborhood is looking for a way to get the planting area on the northwest side outside the fence watered so the flowers and bushes will not dry out again this year.

Sixth Avenue bike lane divider north of 9th St.: a local restaurant has donated access to water so the plants in the divider can be watered, but the volunteer(s) who have been doing the watering need help lugging buckets. Committee member Shirley Secunda raised the issue; Ms. Flores stated she may have a solution and offered to discuss with Ms. Secunda offline.

Also discussed:

- **Washington Square Park:** a recent article in the Gothamist suggested that Washington Square Park Conservancy has special access to Mr. Morrison and exerts undue influence on him. Our committee asked Mr. Morrison to respond to these claims. Mr. Morrison stated that no group gets preferential treatment, that he responds to the many people who come up to him or contact him with requests, complaints and suggestions. He noted that the WSPC is not the only organization that donates to the park, e.g., dog run groups donate, too, and none of them get preferential treatment or have greater influence because they donate.

It was also raised that WSPC is supposed to come to our committee twice per year, but has not presented in a while. Sheryl Woodruff, Deputy Director of WSPC, responded in the chat reminding me that she

offered to come and update our committee in February. I confirmed that that was true, but had not been able to fit the topic into the agenda that month and I pledged to arrange for them to attend and present at an upcoming committee meeting.

Respectfully submitted,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Rich Caccappolo".

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