

CITY OF NEW YORK
MANHATTAN COMMUNITY BOARD FOUR
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Burt Lazarin
Chair

Jesse R. Bodine
District Manager

September 11, 2019

Mitchell J. Silver
Commissioner
NYC Department of Parks & Recreation
830 Fifth Avenue
New York, NY 10065

Re: Proposed Park Design for 705 Tenth Avenue “DEP Site”

Dear Commissioner Silver,

Manhattan Community Board 4 (MCB4) appreciates your staff’s July 11th presentation to the Waterfront, Parks, and Environment Committee (WPE) at which plans for the park to be built on the Department of Environmental Protection’s (DEP) Third Water Tunnel Site between 48th and 49th Streets on Tenth Avenue were described. A park on this approximately one-half acre site has long been promised to the Hell’s Kitchen Community. MCB4 would like to particularly commend Steve Simon, Chief of Staff to the Manhattan Borough Commissioner, Allan Scholl, Landscape Architect, and George Bloomer, Senior Landscape Architect.

We object to the current design and ask the Parks Department to continue to work with the community on a revised design. At its July 24th Full Board meeting, MCB4 voted by 35 in favor, 0 against, 0 abstaining and 0 present but not eligible to vote, to oppose the design presented at the WPE meeting.

DEP has left a practically unobstructed surface at ground level now that the work on the water tunnel at this location has been completed. We understand that the Department of Parks and Recreation (Parks) was charged with creating a park catering to passive recreation. This is an ideal use as the site is just across Tenth Avenue from the already existing Hell’s Kitchen Park and playground.

The design shared with us shows a large open circular right-of-center space covered with an artificial grass-like cover. The left-of-center space is to be covered with concrete, permeable pavers. The reason for this unattractive choice, we were told, is DEP requires 24/7 access and that there will be periodic trucks moving among the water tunnel access points in this section of the proposed park. The site is to be surrounded with trees and a year-round pallet of vegetation. It is to be a dog free site. The proposed lighting seemed adequate. The entire site is to be

surrounded with Park's standard 4-foot fence on the three street sides and an 8-foot steel fence between the site and a building yet to be constructed.

The site immediately west of the proposed park is scheduled to be developed into an affordable housing development and a DEP facilities management building. As such, there is the opportunity to provide a public restroom facility into this project and immediately adjacent to the proposed park. Such a restroom would serve the DEP Park as well as Hell's Kitchen Park. We are pleased that the restroom, a welcome addition, is promised. We hope there will be coordination between the building of the park and its adjacent DEP building.

We understand that with the assistance of Speaker Corey Johnson approximately \$3.7 million has been allocated for the construction of this facility. As explained by your staff it is not likely that the current design would cost that much. We appreciate the hard work that has gone into the design of the proposed park and the difficulties of interagency coordination that the design encountered.

Not only did we find the proposed park esthetically unpleasing, we were distressed to learn about the restrictions being placed on inclusion of innovative elements this park should have.

This is a site like no other as it requires consideration for the security of the City's water, of the site itself and it requires continuous access to the underground facility by DEP personnel. These constrictions present an opportunity for both agencies to exercise design originality. The plan we saw does not come close to this potential. On several occasions in our discussion the Committee was told a particular request could not be accomplished because DEP would not permit it. Frankly, the Committee was unable to discern whether the resistance to our suggestions (some that your staff acknowledged it had heard before) was coming from DEP or Parks or both.

We were told that there could be no superstructures on this park including: no sheds for storage of gardeners' equipment, no water facilities, and no electricity for events. We also learned small and large scale events will not be permitted.

The restriction on superstructure items led Parks to reject any storage shed for gardeners' tools. The same restriction was the reason there could be no water elements on the surface of this space. We find it difficult to believe the construction of the DEP facility below ground is so flimsy as to necessitate prohibition of elements like these on the surface. MCB4 would ask that Parks investigate whether a use such as composting station can be added to the design.

We found the cement pavers on the left side of the park particularly unattractive. They do not invite passive use of this section of the space. It would be much better if this section of the space were also covered by a green cover that could be used for lounging, thus promoting the passive use of the entire park. Your staff offered two objections to our requests: 1. DEP would not permit it (no reason given) and 2. Infrequent truck traffic would destroy any type of cover other than pavers. We find it difficult to believe DEP has a valid reason for objecting to a green cover over this section of the park. We also find it difficult to believe that there is no eco-friendly green cover that would both be comfortable to lounge on and that would withstand periodic vehicle crossings.

The conversation about the use of the section of the park requiring truck access led us to understand a serious safety defect in the plans for the park whether the left element is green or

not. There seems to be no in-place protocol for the safety of park users when DEP trucks need to enter and leave. There also seems to be a lack of an overall security design for this park focusing on the safety of users and of the facility below.

We understand the underground facility is an important element of the Third Water Tunnel and as such any breach jeopardizes the City's drinking water supply. We therefore agree that no large scale events should occur on this site. However, we do not understand why small parties would be inappropriate. To help facilitate small events, Parks should overcome its prohibition of usable electricity and include it in its design.

The site contains several structures that jet above the surface. Both as a protection for them and to enhance the esthetics of the site, we'd like to see some design mitigation of their starkness.

Parks is proposing its standard 4-foot fence along the street sides of the park. MCB4 has long argued for 7-foot fences in other parks in our district to discourage after hours misuse of parks. While MCB4 understands the 4-foot fence is Parks current policy we strongly believe the 4-foot fences do not discourage these often disruptive uses and should not be used here.

This park has the potential to be a wonderful addition for our community, yet the apparent design restrictions placed on this park limits its potential. In addition, DEP is missing an opportunity to educate the public in the build out and operation of this park by including water elements along with appropriate signage describing the breadth and complexity of the City's drinking water delivery system. Furthermore, this park provides the City's environmental watch dog the opportunity to offer education about solar energy by including small windmills or solar collectors in the park's design.

Thank you again for the presentation. We look forward to continuing this conversation with you.

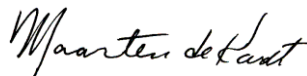
Sincerely,



Burt Lazarin
Chair
Manhattan Community Board 4



Lowell Kern
Co-Chair
Waterfront, Parks & Environment
Committee



Maarten de Kadt
Co-Chair
Waterfront, Parks & Environment
Committee

Cc: Hon. Jerrold Nadler, U.S. Congress
Hon. Brad Hoylman, New York State Senate

Hon. Richard Gottfried, New York State Assembly
Hon. Corey Johnson, New York City Council Speaker
Hon. Gale Brewer, Manhattan Borough President
Steve Simon, Chief of Staff, Manhattan Borough Commissioner's Office, NYC DPR
Vincent Sapienza, Commissioner, NYC DEP
Elke Fears, West 47th/48th Street Block Association