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CITY OF NEW YORK

MANHATTAN COMMUNITY BOARD FOUR

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January 13, 2022

William Castro
Manhattan Borough Commissioner
NYC Department of Parks & Recreation
Arsenal West
24 W. 61st Street, 5th Floor
New York, NY 10023

Dear Borough Commissioner Castro,

At its November 4th Waterfront, Parks and Environment Committee meeting, Hudson Guild and Open Squash requested a letter of support for their proposal to take three of six handball courts in Chelsea Park and transform them into squash courts. With the additional information received during a December 1st conversation with Steve Simon, Chief of Staff – Manhattan, and with and with an informal survey of court usage, the committee supports the proposed project with a few conditions. The full Board at its January 5th meeting approved this letter by a vote of 43 in favor, 0 against, 0 abstaining and 0 present not eligible.

At the November 4th meeting we were told there already is a Hudson Guild/Open Squash program for after school academics and athletics at the Guild using the Open Squash site at 39th Street and Fifth Avenue. The request for squash courts at Chelsea Park is to bring the program closer to the Guild's Elliot Center. The proposed courts would operate using a reservation system to be developed by Parks. It would not require permits, so while similar to tennis court reservations, it would not be the same. The Board is eager to learn the specific system Parks will use to grant access to the squash courts. We hope it will include segments of time when the courts are available to folks coming without reservations on a first come first served basis. Care needs to be taken to assure open availability of these courts to our community without the domination by any one group.

The proposed courts' design would be approved by Parks. At a minimum it would include transparent walls and would be maintained by Hudson Guild/Open Squash. This is similar to another squash location in a Manhattan park. The specifics about equipment availability and storage, supervision, security, and cameras are still being worked out. Hudson Guild/Open Squash will take responsibility for

maintenance of the new courts. The Board is eager to know the specifics of these arrangements as soon as they are worked out.

Parks has a history of experimenting with alternative uses of its athletic facilities. Mentioned during our conversation with Mr. Simon was a basketball court transformed into a soccer pitch in Harlem and the already in-place downtown squash court. The proposed squash court in Chelsea Park would remain in place so long as it was successfully used and maintained.

These six courts are lightly used as a recent informal survey showed.¹ The Board requests that another survey be taken in the late spring or early summer to discern usage during a more active season. Handball courts have usage other than handball itself: tennis practice and wiffle ball to name two. We understand that the squash courts are usable for purposes other than squash and, in line with the multiple uses of handball courts, that such usage will be permitted.

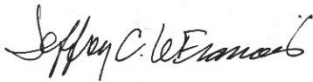
The proposed Hudson Guild/Open Squash program will use three of the courts from 4 to 6 pm on three weekdays and Saturday mornings for 3 hours throughout the year.

With the proviso that any construction to transform these three handball courts to squash courts be performed by union members at union wages approved by Parks, the committee sees this conceptual proposal as a potentially valuable pilot program that would benefit Hudson Guild's Academic and Athletic program for its after school students as well as for a broader segment of our community.

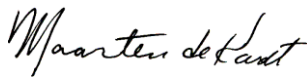
We look forward to learning about plans to:

1. Complete an additional usage survey during a more active time period
2. Indicate the acceptability of usage other than squash during slack time periods
3. Develop a court usage plan that includes time periods for first come first serve and that does not create blocks of time that exclude community use other than the time (indicated above) devoted to Hudson Guild/Open Squash and occasional other groups.
4. Develop procedures for equipment storage and usage, supervision, security and camera placement.

Sincerely,



Jeffrey LeFrancois
Chair
Manhattan Community Board 4



Maarten deKadt
Co-chair
Waterfront, Parks & Environment
Committee

[Signed 1/13/22]

Leslie Boghosian-Murphy
Co-Chair
Waterfront, Parks & Environment
Committee

¹ Open Squash performed the survey between November 8 and December 4, 2021 showed a highest hourly use of six courts in a single day, a highest use in any one hour of 4 out of the six courts. The daily average use was three courts for one hour each. Raw data is available from the Community Board office upon request. We note that the survey was taken on the off season, on days with early darkness and some rain, and an average temperature of 47 degrees. Even though a summer survey may be appropriate, the handball court usage at Chelsea park is sufficiently low that other appropriate uses are welcome.