

CITY OF NEW YORK  
**MANHATTAN COMMUNITY BOARD FOUR**  
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**JEFFREY LEFRANCOIS**  
Chair

**JESSE R. BODINE**  
District Manager

October 12, 2023

Anthony Perez  
Manhattan Borough Commissioner  
Department of Parks and Recreation  
Arsenal West  
24 W. 61<sup>st</sup> Street, 5<sup>th</sup> Floor  
New York, NY 10023

Re: Penn South Playground (West 26 Street) Design

Dear Commissioner Perez,

Manhattan Community Board 4's (MCB4) Waterfront, Parks and Environment Committee (WPE) thanks you for your staff's clear and detailed presentation on September 14, 2023 in which they showed us the proposed redesign for the Penn South Playground located between 25th and 26th Streets and between 8<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup> Avenues. At its October Full Board Meeting by a vote of 40 in favor, 0 against, 0 present not eligible, and 0 abstaining, MCB4 supports the following comments and concerns detailed below.

MCB4 is delighted that the funds have been made available for a long overdue reconstruction of Penn South Playground and we are pleased with the overall vision of the redesign, including accommodations and adaptive solutions for children with disabilities.

We would like to thank Councilmember Erik Bottcher's office for allocating primary funding for this project along with Mayor Eric Adams and Manhattan Borough President Mark Levine's office for providing supporting funding. The total project costs are budgeted for \$4.967 million spread through fiscal years 2023-2028. The timeline for reconstruction results in a completion date of June 2026 with the hope that a speedier process will be implemented.

**Included in the initial design:**

- A 4 foot fence to replace the current 7 foot fence
- Repositioned courts: one basketball court alongside a volleyball court
- Seating area on the north (26<sup>th</sup> Street) side

- Ground permeability increased from 9 percent of the park's area to 20 percent
- Protection of existing trees including the removal of the single tree deemed to be in distress along with the planting of additional flowering plants
- Removal of the flagpole to make more room for new features
- Drinking fountains with bottle filler
- Two separate play areas for 3 to 5 and 5 to 12 year old children
- Double gates on all entrances of the children's play areas
- A children's water feature area
- All accessible play features including access ramps and Sway Fun to enable use by those in wheelchairs
- A swing set including inclusive swings for disabled children
- Redesign of the narrow southeast strip leading to 25<sup>th</sup> street focusing on child games and a basketball triple hoop

**Points to be Addressed:**

We want to strongly stress the Community Board's request to keep the current fencing design height of seven feet. This is a consistent and repeated request from this Board. We frequently field community concerns regarding nefarious and unintended activity inside our parks, both day and night. We also understand the hurdles Parks staff encounters each morning opening the parks and playgrounds. Higher fences are needed to prevent park use after they are closed and keep children and their caretakers safe. They also provide natural barriers for errant balls and play equipment. This need outweighs any argument for uninterrupted sight lines into the park during the day.

MCB4 offers this complete overhaul of Penn South Playground is a perfect opportunity to include a much needed restroom facility. Supporting the Borough President's mission to identify suitable spaces for public bathroom facilities, this playground seems optimal. Both Parks and Councilmember Bottcher have described this unique, all-inclusive playground as a "destination park." If this is the case, a restroom is a necessity and would be maximally utilized. We understand that Parks is experimenting with restroom facilities in other spaces that have much smaller footprints than existing restroom facilities. We request a small footprint restroom facility be included in the coming design phase.

MCB4's long-standing request for the use of solar energy in all new public facilities and renovations in our district applies here. No electric features should be installed in any new facility without the adoption of solar energy. From our perspective the bureaucratic nature of the agency responsible for lighting (Parks or Transportation) does not mitigate our urgent call for the use of solar power with battery backup in this park. In fact, due to the heavy use of both basketball and volleyball courts at this playground, solar lighting will allow longer play times at a lower cost.

We were pleased to learn that the permeable area of the new park would be 11 percent greater than the current park affords. Nevertheless, we were disappointed to learn that the new facility would only be 20 percent permeable. We hope that a great deal more attention will be paid to this issue in the continuing design of this park including careful design of runoff into well

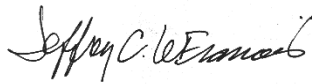
designed bioswales where permeable pavement is not appropriate. We also would like to learn more about the design of the water runoff capture from the much needed spray shower feature.

Several issues concerning signage and art installations were raised during the Committee discussion. We appreciate Parks agreement to look into an art wall feature at this park. In addition, a “rules of park use” sign and way finding signs to nearby facilities were suggested. We also request the placement of recycling bins to accompany trash cans throughout the park, an action that should now be customary.

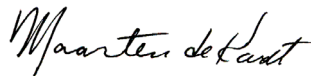
We understand Councilmember Bottcher is requesting a 2nd design option to include an additional basketball court. WPE will welcome an updated presentation including these edits and look forward to continuing our discussion to include the suggestions made above as the Penn South Playground project moves forward.

Thank you again for the presentation.

Sincerely,



Jeffrey LeFrancois  
Chair  
Manhattan Community Board 4



Maarten deKadt  
Co-chair  
Waterfront, Parks & Environment Committee



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

cc: Hon. Eric Adams, Mayor  
Hon. Mark Levine, Manhattan Borough President  
Hon. Erik Bottcher, City Council  
Ed Pincar, Manhattan Borough Commissioner, NYC DOT