

CITY OF NEW YORK
MANHATTAN COMMUNITY BOARD FOUR

424 West 33rd Street, Suite 580 New York, NY 10001

tel: 212-736-4536
www.mcb4.nyc

JESSICA CHAIT
Chair

JESSE R. BODINE
District Manager

January 2, 2024

Paul D'Amore
Acting Manhattan Borough Commissioner
Department of Parks and Recreation
Arsenal West
24 W. 61st Street, 5th Floor
New York, NY 10023

Re: Penn South Playground (West 26 Street) Design

Dear Acting Commissioner D'Amore,

Manhattan Community Board 4's ("MCB4") Waterfront, Parks and Environment Committee ("WPE") thanks you for the Department of Parks and Recreation's ("DPR") follow up presentation on November 9, 2023, in which they shared with us an additional proposed redesign for the Penn South Playground located between 25th and 26th Streets and between 8th and 9th Avenues (the "Playground"). At its December Full Board Meeting by a vote of 39 in favor, 0 against, 0 present not eligible, and 0 abstaining, MCB4 supports the following comments and concerns detailed below.

At the November 10th meeting, DPR staff explained that, following the initial presentation to WPE on September 14, which resulted in MCB4's October 12, 2023 letter to you¹, Council Member Erik Bottcher reached out to DPR and asked for modifications to the proposed redesign to include a second basketball court in the Playground. Jordan Feiner of the Council Member's office reported at the November 10th WPE meeting that the Council Member was "adamant" about the addition of the second basketball court. It is MCB4's understanding that the existing two basketball courts are in continuous use by members of the local community, including residents of Penn South and Elliott-Chelsea, housing complexes that border the Playground.

¹ <https://cbmanhattan.cityofnewyork.us/cb4/wp-content/uploads/sites/10/2023/10/15-WPE-Letter-to-DPR-re-Penn-South-Playground-Design.pdf>

MCB4 also understands that there are regular, primarily weekend, users of the existing volleyball court, which is also used by pickleball players.

Unfortunately, the redesign, including three courts (two basketball and one volleyball) seems to require the removal of some of the play equipment specifically designed for special needs children. The original proposed renovations emphasized that the Playground was being designed as a “destination” for children with disabilities and included adaptive play equipment for special needs use. MCB4 recognizes the need for these two different, incompatible, albeit necessary uses of the available space at the Playground.² We also understand the Councilmember’s strong wishes to include three courts in the Playground’s renovation.

During the presentation to WPE by DPR on November 10th, DPR asked MCB4 to provide guidance as to which redesign the community board preferred – the original plans that featured more adaptive play equipment or the subsequent redesign that included a second basketball court. In response to a request that the second basketball court be lined for dual usage as a volleyball court as well, providing for space to maintain all of the play equipment from the original redesign, DPR staff explained that it is customary to avoid dual-lining of courts and fields, as it leads to conflicts between users.

DPR’s most recent renovation plans eliminated the originally planned spot for the Sway Fun, a wheelchair accessible glider, and swing set, which included one inclusive swing. MCB4 asks DPR to provide a third plan maintaining both basketball courts, the volleyball court and the Sway Fun, which may additionally move or remove a planned passive seating area. We recognize that it will be impossible to have all three sports courts and the swings, but WPE has prioritized the courts and the Sway Fun equipment over the swings and additional passive seating areas.

MCB4 appreciates the extensive efforts that DPR staff has already put into two different redesign plans. The third redesign request envisions a compromise between the specific request of three courts and protecting the original, planned use for this park. While MCB4 raised concerns about the timing for the different phases of the Playground reconstruction, WPE feels that the time needed for a third redesign is worth any subsequent delay.

In addition to the proposed third redesign, MCB4 wishes to reemphasize the following requests from its October 12 letter to you, which have not yet been addressed by DPR:

- 1) Maintaining the 7-foot height of the existing fence;
- 2) Inclusion of a public restroom in the Playground; and
- 3) Installation of solar lighting in the Playground.

² It is issues like this that emphasize the need for Mayor Adams to fulfill his campaign commitment to apportion 1% of the City’s budget to DPR so that DPR can provide facilities for all user groups. See MCB4’s letter to Mayor Eric Adams dated November 15, 2023. <https://cbmanhattan.cityofnewyork.us/cb4/wp-content/uploads/sites/10/2023/11/25-WPE-Letter-to-Mayor-re-support-for-making-the-Parks-Department-budget-1percent-of-the-citys-overall-budget.pdf>

MCB4 refers DPR to our October 12 letter for a more detailed discussion of the rationale for these three important issues.

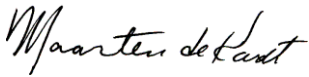
Subsequently, since November's presentation, MCB4 has been informed by DPR that the WPE Committee's suggestions for a third Penn South Playground redesign have been accepted. We appreciate DPR including the above recommendations by providing space for both the disabled-friendly Sway Fun Glider and three courts (two basketball and one volleyball). The Board also very much appreciates DPR's plans of maintaining the 7-foot-high fence, a mainstay ask for parks in our district.

MCB4 would like to highlight the cooperative and speedy nature DPR exhibited during this process and we value our collaborative relationship.

Sincerely,



Jessica Chait
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
Jennifer Hercman, Executive Director, Adaptive Designs