

CB9 Landmarks Preservation & Parks Committee
Meeting Minutes
March 4, 2020

Called to Order: 6:45PM

Jacob Schiff Renovation of Seating Area & Central Walkway

- \$1.52 million with half of the funds put up by the Mayor de Blasio and the other half by Councilman Mark Levine
- This is a replacement in kind project as opposed to a specialty project
- Scope of the project includes the following:
 - Replacement of pavement markers
 - New benches that will prevent persons from lying across and sleeping - number of available seating remains unchanged
 - Improved drainage and enhanced lighting
 - Addition of a new section of perimeter fencing (4 feet high) to allow the park to be closed - Jacob Schiff will now be a locked park with regular hours of operation
 - New drinking fountain
 - Same number of gaming tables with the addition of a handicap accessible one
 - 4 new trees - 3 trees will be replaced due to "poor conditions"
 - Planting beds will be made larger so roots don't spread and break the pavement
- The fencing is about enforcement of hours of operation - according to Steve Simon there is a particularly bad problem of people sleeping overnight which is a violation of park rules
 - There is a concern that locking the park during the summer months will prevent neighborhood residents from enjoying the park - parties and get-togethers are hosted in the park especially during the evening hours and beyond
 - Gaming area is also utilized by families so the hours of operation during the summer months needs to accommodate the activities that longtime residents have long enjoyed
- Completion date is for the year 2022

- **March 30th will be the start of construction for the Sakura Park Staircase**
- **On March 30th at 1:30PM there will be a groundbreaking for the Middle Playground project in Morningside Park**

Lasker Pool/Rink Discussion

- **Preserve Lasker Coalition Presentation**
 - This group has concerns over the ramifications of the proposed design which reduces the size of both the pool and the rink by 26% - a quarter reduction is significant
 - This is particularly troublesome given that pool attendance has been increasing year by year - the summer months are becoming hotter and hotter and the population density is only increasing which will put added pressure on the capacity of the pool/rink
 - The reduced size of the pool/rink will quickly led to overcrowding - a negative environment which can potentially lead to conflicts/violence -

- tempers can flare if people are squeezed into a smaller and smaller space
 - Pools at capacity area are a nightmare and unpleasant - the proposed smaller pool/rink design will exacerbate this
 - Ice rink surface cut by 50% - instead of 2 rinks there will be one larger regulation sized rink which is not adequate
 - No room for overflow for the hockey players
 - Why build a 26% smaller facility that is already at capacity?
- Elimination of the wading pool and its replacement with a splash pad is problematic as wading pools are an important place for kids to learn to swim in a safe environment
- Proposed design is problematic because of the design process, which, according to the Preserve Lasker Coalition, did not receive adequate community input - their suggestions were ignored and questions went unanswered - no voice in the process
- This project is receiving \$50 million in taxpayer dollars
- 10,000 people have signed on to their petition
- The design imposes costly sacrifices on the public
- Students are losing recreation
- Preserve Lasker Coalition are not landscape architects/designers but they propose enlarging the pool/rink by eliminating certain elements of the design which they consider unnecessary such as:
 - Boardwalk along the Meer's edge
 - The nature island
 - Pergola and snack shop
- **Reactions to the Preserve Lasker Coalition presentation:**
 - They're not dealing with all the community stakeholders which number in the millions
 - Restoration of the water course is important for the ecological health of the park not simply for aesthetics
 - The Lasker facility was a desecration - a monstrosity and must be replaced
 - The park should principally be about experiencing nature - a respite from the city
 - Preserve Lasker Coalition needs to present hard data to back up claims of overcrowding - do 311 complaints, for instance, demonstrate this claim?
 - 90% of the people who come to this area of Central Park are not into skating/swimming - small percentage impacted by the new design for the facility
 - For-profit organized sports users can afford to go elsewhere especially since the expected 3 year construction period means they will need to seek other facilities regardless
 - Preserving/restoring the green space is paramount
 - Organized sports users can adjust their schedules
- **Central Park Conservancy Presentation given by Christopher Nolan, Landscape Architect**
 - How does the facility exist within Central Park?
 - Lasker is an eyesore and severely impacts the enjoyment of nature but it does provides space for certain recreational sports - there is a symbiosis that can occur

- The question is: How do you make it all co-exist?
 - Activities inside the pool/rink can co-exist with healthful recreation for all - there is an opportunity to connect with nature and to contribute to everyone's enjoyment
 - Current design of the pool/rink detracts from other recreational uses - respite, walking, enjoyment of nature, sight lines, the movement of the water course, etc.
 - Geological engineering drives the design, not merely aesthetics
 - The Harlem Meer was filled-in partially back in 1966 when it was constructed - this interrupted the flow of water and created terrible flooding issues which persist - the facility broke up the circulation
 - Reintroducing the stream corrects the flooding issues - it is not simply a beautiful design but a functional one, highly engineered - a function of engineering determined by factors such as the existing the watershed, potential storm surges, the movement of the water, etc.
 - Remakes the park into a functioning ecological system
 - The Lasker facility is a concession-run facility - it is a paid activity venue that interrupts park activities outside and disturbs the original intent of the Olmsted design
 - This is about equitable design for all and the 1966 design was inequitable - the new design is trying to make a more balanced approach
 - With regard to the issue of the wading pool, NYC Parks, as a matter of policy, no longer incorporates wading pools into new designs
 - Hotter summer months are not just about access to the pool - access to the park provides cooling as well
 - Lasker is the 8th largest pool in the city and it will remain the 8th largest
 - Hockey is the current concession activity but the venue will go to the highest bidder
 - The real issue is the economic threshold to get into hockey and the Conservancy has worked with the 2 youth hockey programs that directly target the underserved youth population in Harlem
 - Half the year the facility is not used - the proposed design allows the facility to be used year round except during pool season which is run and administered by NYC Parks for free
- **UPDATE:** Below are some major **takeaways** from a conversation with Karen Horry, Chair of the Parks Committee for **Community Board 10**, regarding Community Board 10's support for the proposed Central Park North design and the level of outreach conducted

The Harlem Meer-Lasker Pool Project previously came before the CB10 Parks Committee. It was submitted to extensive vetting and opportunities for community comment and feedback, including:

*Presentations before the CB10 Parks and Recreation Committee on October 10, 2018; June 12, 2019; and September 11, 2019 to discuss proposed design plans;

*An October 13, 2018 community planning workshop at the Central Park Conservancy to garner feedback;

*A November 3, 2018 community planning workshop at the Dana Discover Center, Harlem Meer, to further discuss proposed plans and get additional feedback;

*A June 15, 2019 community planning workshop at the Cathedral Church of St. John the Divine;

*A July 18, 2019 community planning workshop at Harlem Children's Zone Promise Academy; and,

*A September 12, 2019 community planning workshop at the Dana Discovery Center.

As a result of extensive outreach seeking comments, feedback and community input, the CB10 Parks Committee supported the plan and on October 2, 2019 the CB10 Board voted and passed a resolution to support the plan as proposed.