



MANHATTAN COMMUNITY BOARD FIVE

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David Diamond, *Chair*

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Adrian Benepe
Commissioner
NYC Department of Parks and Recreation
The Arsenal
Central Park
830 5th Avenue
New York, NY 10021

Dear Commissioner Benepe:

Community Board Five would like to express its frustration with the ongoing neglect of the Parks Department to allow proper community review of the multitude of commercial events in our public parks. We have repeatedly brought this problem to your attention to no avail. Enclosed you will find four letters dating as far back as March 2001 all regarding this same issue. The lack of the Parks Department to take significant action to rectify this matter is unacceptable.

Community Board Five has three major parks in our district; Bryant Park, Madison Square Park and Union Square Park. The first two are operated primarily by conservancies. Although we are grateful to the conservancies for their ongoing efforts to maintain and improve these parks, they, along with the Parks Department, continually fail to inform the Board of private or commercial events with enough lead time to allow for community review. We are sympathetic to events that are organized at the last minute. However, many of these large events are planned months in advance and there is no excuse for neglecting public input on the merits to the community. Many of the problems that arise during these events can be anticipated and addressed at our public meetings before they happen. Furthermore, these private commercial events are often closed off to the general public resulting in the inability of New Yorkers to enjoy their public park space.

One of the grossest examples of this neglect is the ice rink at Bryant Park. The Bryant Park Conservancy did appear before our Parks Committee both this year and last. However, at both meetings they did not have any information regarding the specific details of the project and agreed to come back when the plan was more formulated. They never returned and the Board never took a position either in support or opposing this project. Although some are enjoying the rink, we have heard that the diesel generators that supplies electricity have created fumes that have negatively impacted on local residents. *

The recent US Open event at Madison Square Park is another glaring example. The Board was informed of this project less than a week before its implementation. During and after the event we received numerous complaints from those who took great objection to almost every part of the event from the large commercial signage to the late night viewing of the games. Additionally, we were surprised to hear that many parkgoers were turned away from the largest part of the park for they were not American Express card holders.

* An ice rink is in the offing for Union Square Park, too.

The conservancies that run Madison Square Park and Bryant Park need to be reminded that these are public parklands, not private revenue generating venues. Our parklands are meant to offer needed respite from urban life. They should not be used by private entities for private gain.

Although Union Square Park has not been as overwhelmed by commercial events, debacles like the giant melting Snapple popsicle only further validate our concerns. As you may remember, this ill-fated project created a sugary mess that inconvenienced countless parkgoers.

Regardless of the many benefits that come with conservancies or the funds that are raised at commercial events for the Parks Department, the process of public review is essential and commercial events must be limited in order to allow New Yorkers the opportunity to fully enjoy these parks.

We would like to meet with you to discuss this matter. We are confident that this can be resolved with your assistance.

Regards,



David Diamond
Chair



Phil Beer
Chair, Parks Committee

Cc: Manhattan Borough President C. Virginia Fields
Manhattan Borough President-Elect Scott Stringer
New York State Senator Thomas Duane
New York State Senator Liz Krueger
New York State Assemblymember Richard Gottfried
New York State Assemblymember Steven Sanders
New York State Assemblymember Deborah Glick
New York State Assemblymember Jonathan Bing
New York City Councilmember Christine Quinn
New York City Councilmember Margarita López
New York City Councilmember Eva Moskowitz
New York City Councilmember Gale Brewer
New York City Councilmember-Elect Rosie Mendez
New York City Councilmember-Elect Dan Garodnick
William Castro, Manhattan Commissioner NYC Parks and Recreation
Madison Square Park Conservancy
Manhattan Community Boards 1- 12
Bryant Park Restoration

Enclosures (4)