



The City of New York

Manhattan Community Board 1

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**The New York City Council Committees on Parks and Recreation
And Lower Manhattan Redevelopment
Oversight Hearing on
The Status of Parkland Redevelopment in Lower Manhattan**

**Testimony by Julie Menin,
Chairperson,
Manhattan Community Board 1**

**Monday, October 31, 2011 at 10:30 a.m.
250 Broadway, 16th Floor**

Good morning. My name is Julie Menin. I am the Chair of Manhattan Community Board 1 and I am accompanied by Jeff Galloway, the Chair of our Planning and Infrastructure Committee. Thank you for giving us this opportunity to present testimony on this important topic.

As you know, Lower Manhattan is the fastest growing residential community in New York City. A good portion of this growth is the direct result of incentives instituted by City government designed to foster the redevelopment of Lower Manhattan after 9/11. Unfortunately, our population boom has not been met by a corresponding strengthening of infrastructure, including park space, and specifically including active recreation park space.

Lower Manhattan's public elementary school overcrowding problems have been well publicized. In 1997, there was a single zoned elementary school in CB1 – PS 234 in Tribeca. Today, there are four zoned elementary schools, each of which is overcrowded, with the Department of Education threatening to send some of our elementary school children to schools outside of CB1 next year. Our population boom has included thousands of school-age children.

During this same time period, there has been almost no change in available active recreation park space in CB1. Then as now, we had a single set of ballfields located in Battery Park City. Through the work of Community Board 1, those fields have now been converted to all-weather, state-of-the-art turf fields, but their square footage has actually decreased. Tennis courts that sat in Battery Park City in 1997 have been eliminated, replaced by new residential buildings. To be sure, park space has been upgraded in certain areas of CB1 since 1997. Pier 25 is a good example. But the total available parkland has not materially increased.

Our Planning and Community Infrastructure Committee has been studying green space in CB1 for the last year, and expects to issue new recommendations early next year. Among the findings so far is that the vast majority of park space in CB1 is dedicated to passive, rather than active, use. While we believe that passive green space is important to a community, we also believe that careful consideration needs to be given to assuring sufficient active space to support a vibrant and growing residential community.

Our community's over-abundance of passive green space is an artifact of its legacy as a largely commercial neighborhood for most of the last hundred years. Office workers need a place to relax and eat lunch or take a break from a hard workday. Those same workers generally do not need a place to play soccer or baseball, or to walk their dogs, close to the office.

Lower Manhattan has long been a popular tourist destination. We all expect that the daytime tourist population will grow substantially as the construction of the World Trade Center is completed. We have already seen a huge influx of tourists with the opening this year of the 9/11 Memorial. Tourists have an impact on parkland that is more like the impact of workers than residents. Tourists and workers are less likely to engage in active recreation uses than residents. Tourists and workers are also more likely to confine themselves to walkways and paths within parkland, and to benches and tables along the edges of those walkways and paths, as opposed to making use of lawns, fields, playgrounds or dog runs.

As a result, a properly designed and programmed park need not result in conflicts between residential and worker/tourist populations. Large lawn and playground areas can be programmed for active use without undue negative impact on workers or tourists who may use the same park. Indeed, some active uses, dog runs and basketball courts for example, often become spots where workers and tourists come to observe the "life" of the community. The basketball courts just off 6th Avenue in Greenwich Village are a famous example. We have our own example with the Sirius Dog Run at the North Cove Marina in Battery Park City, which is often surrounded by the World Financial Center lunch crowd, watching the local dogs play.

Another finding by our Planning Committee is that not only is active green space limited in Lower Manhattan, but the programming and design of our local parks are generally not well coordinated with one another. Each park tends to be something of an island unto itself, often with insufficient consideration given to whether other nearby green space is lacking in programmed areas, or whether other nearby space already meets needs that a new or newly redesigned park is intended to meet. A good example of this problem is that Wagner Park in southern Battery Park City, which is entirely passive, is side-by-side with historic Battery Park, which is also almost entirely passive.

We have found that community engagement is needed to design and program park space to meet a community's needs. Community Board 1 followed this process recently with the redesign of the Battery Park City Ballfields and with the rebuilding of the West Thames Park portion of the Route 9A Project. In each of these cases, we set up Community Board-led task forces to work with the designers and operators of the park spaces and to engage and learn the desires and expectations of the local community for the park space. Each case has resulted in park space that is among the most loved and used in Lower Manhattan.

The World Trade Center redevelopment will bring at least two, and possibly three, new green spaces to Lower Manhattan: the 9/11 Memorial Plaza, Liberty Park and possibly a "temporary" park space at the site of the future "Tower 1," which may not be built for many years. Each of these spaces will have to meet special challenges, and each will have stakeholders in addition to Lower Manhattan residents. Nonetheless, these spaces will have a significant impact on the

character of our community. A Community Board-led task force model to advise on programming at the largely completed 9/11 Memorial Plaza; programming and design finalization of Liberty Park; and programming and design of a Tower 1 site park would benefit all users of these park spaces.

We also believe that the use and programming of existing parks in Lower Manhattan would benefit from a Community Board-led task force model. We stand ready to create such a task force to assist the NYC Parks Department, the Battery Conservancy and the Battery Park City Authority in better coordinating the programming of Lower Manhattan park space operated by each of these bodies.

A park is not a work of art, whose character and design is within the sole province of the artist. A park is a community space, which can only be successful if it meets a community's needs and expectations. While some park spaces serve needs beyond those of people who live and work in the area, all park spaces in Lower Manhattan are by geographic fact in a residential neighborhood and must be places where residents interact in a positive way with workers and visitors. Under the City Charter, a Community Board is the eyes, ears and voice of its local community. Our Board has served that role with distinction in the years since 9/11, and we stand ready to continue that role in the redevelopment of parkland in Lower Manhattan.