

March 19, 2021

Dear Commissioner Erik Kulleseid,

Stop the Plastic Park is pleased that the New York State Parks department heard the unified demand of the 1916+ people through the Stop the Plastic Park petition, the more than 26 community organizations, Brooklyn Community Board 1, the local elected officials, and most importantly, the family and strongest allies of Marsha P. Johnson, to drop the plan to cover the large southern slab of the park with thermoplastic and install 8- and 10-foot foam-board flowers and instead design a tribute more in keeping with the spirit of Marsha P. Johnson, who loved real flowers, and which will be treasured by her family, close friends, and admirers.

We are happy to hear that the State already has decided to remove two-thirds of an acre of asphalt from their original design, particularly by halving the northern platform. That is absolutely a step in the right direction.

We are pleased that the State is planning Public Design Workshops. We need to point out though that the state park's listening session dates cross through Passover and include the Saturday of Easter weekend. They also are being held when New York City public schools have their vacation, which means people may be planning to visit family or take care of other responsibilities. Due to the ongoing global pandemic, the in-person dates will also be a danger to immune-compromised people and people who have not received their vaccines. Therefore, if you do not intend to exclude those groups from weighing in, you need to provide an alternative way for their views to be submitted and heard by the community.

The compacted time frame respects everyone's wish to open the park as soon as possible, but given the importance of the park planning, it makes sense to bring the final plan before the Community Board 1, Marsha P. Johnson's family and foundation, and STARR, which continues the work of Marsha P. Johnson and her political partner, Sylvia Rivera, for a final review and endorsement. People make the best parks.

Parks has expressed a strong intention to begin construction immediately on the following:

- Construction of a new Park House with a classroom and public restrooms;
- Stormwater drainage improvements;
- Installation of a new water line for landscape maintenance

But the following construction items are still highly problematic. The State should wait until there is an opportunity for community input:

- Repair of the concrete platforms (smaller by approximately 18,000 sq.ft.)

The slab reduction already promised is needed, but the State Parks Department may be gratified to learn that they can give even more space to a greener vision for the park if they listen to the community. Residents of the area know firsthand how the park is used on a daily basis and the second slab could be reduced still further.

The other item that the state wishes to start work on must be paused for community input:

- Upgraded ADA-compliant pathways and restored cobblestones.

Many stakeholders strongly oppose the removal of the historic cobblestones and want to ensure that the other pathways do not become asphalt. In fact, the Community Board 1 resolution specifically calls on the state to listen to voices on historic elements and pathway and roadway treatments. Those views need to be heard in the public listening sessions! Solutions might very well be presented that appeal to all stakeholders.

That Community Board resolution also asks for the State to hear from the community about the fiscal allocations and open food-market concession. A contract that locks in long-term use and design of the park is of utmost concern to the entire community. It is inappropriate for the State to give a deadline for concession RFP bids that falls on the very day the State is opening listening sessions. We urge the State to hear from the people who daily live, work, shop, run businesses, and volunteer in this community before locking in a large stretch of public land to one commitment.

We acknowledge the State has listened to the family-community-LGBTQ+ coalition to a large extent so far, but we need deeper collaboration on these remaining key items immediately.

Sincerely,

Stop the Plastic Park  
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Cc  
Marsha P. Johnson Foundation  
STARR  
Stop the Plastic Park Petition Signees  
Community Groups and Organizations  
State Senator Brian Kavanah  
State Assemblywoman Emily Gallagher  
Council Member Stephen Levin  
Brooklyn Community Board 1

Brooklyn Community Board 1 Parks Committee Chair Phil Camponegro  
North Brooklyn Chamber of Commerce  
North Brooklyn Neighbors