

**Open Space Oversight Organization  
Meeting Minutes 12-18-2013**



In Attendance: Rachel Belsky, NYU  
Arlene Peralta, NYU  
Terri Cude, Community Board 2  
Matthew Viggiano, Office of Councilmember Margaret Chin  
Yume Kitasei, Office of Councilmember Margaret Chin  
Brian Cook, Manhattan Borough President's Office  
George Vellonakis, NYC DPR  
Michael Bradley, NYC DPR  
Nina Kramer, Nina Kramer Landscape Architecture  
Anne Berman, Nina Kramer Landscape Architecture

**Bleecker Street Seating Area**

**Paving/Layout**

- 1.1 OSOO representatives stated that the current layout creates a redundant double walkway on either side of the chain-link-fenced area and they expressed a desire to widen the sidewalk and possibly eliminate the inside, southern walkway.
- 1.2 The landscape architects confirmed that the sidewalk seemed narrow but pointed out that widening the sidewalk will affect the roots of the existing trees.
- 1.3 They will meet with Parks Forestry to determine how much paving can be added on the north side of the planted areas.
- 1.4 The landscape architects also suggested that the new design might make more interesting spaces out of the interior paved areas between the trees and that the entire site could be thought of as a unified plaza.
- 1.5 George Vellonakis stated that it was important for the paths to be kept active.
- 1.6 OSOO representatives brought up the concern of some residents that problems may arise from nonresidents congregating at new benches on Bleecker Street when they are walking from local bars to the subway station.
- 1.7 They request that seating be designed to discourage sleeping to avoid use by the homeless and late-night bar patrons. There was a suggestion that seating be oriented towards the Oak Grove.
- 1.8 Michael Bradley pointed out that some people want to face the flow of pedestrian traffic and that there should be options for seating in both sun and shade.
- 1.9 The OSOO representatives reiterated that some residents may not want any seating in this location.

**Lighting**

- 1.10 The OSOO recommends new lighting but is concerned about light pollution.
- 1.11 The landscape architects suggested that upgrading the lighting would discourage undesirable activities.
- 1.12 Options for lighting the space include pedestrian light poles, up-lighting the trees and plantings within the beds and/or installing lighting in the new railing surrounding the planted areas.

## **Fencing/Planting**

- 1.13 OSOO representatives stated that there was a desire to fence in the planted areas in such a way that it can't easily be stepped over but can be easily seen through.
- 1.14 There was a discussion of fences ranging from 24" to 48".
- 1.15 The OSOO emphasized that they are looking for creativity from the design team in the design of fencing, which is attractive and inviting but effectively creates a barrier for dogs.
- 1.16 The landscape architects pointed out that further down Bleecker Street, alongside Coles GYM, there are elaborately planted areas with no fencing that are in good condition.
- 1.17 There was general agreement that well-maintained planting areas and effective rodent control are key to the success of the space.
- 1.18 Having evident trash receptacles may also help to keep the public from throwing garbage in planting areas.

## **LaGuardia Park**

### **Program**

- 1.19 OSOO presented a master plan for the entire LaGuardia strip between W. 3rd and Bleecker Street that they believe was approved by the Community Board and PDC in 2009.
- 1.20 Rather than creating another playground, the OSOO members envision a walk and discover space.
- 1.21 The community believes that with the nearby Adrienne's Garden, Key Park and Mercer Playground, there are enough play spaces.
- 1.22 They feel that more planted areas, walkways and moments of discovery would be welcome.
- 1.23 The landscape architects questioned how active play, as mandated by ULURP, could be defined.
- 1.24 It was pointed out that it would be necessary to work with City Planning since they wrote the Restrictive Declaration, but that it could be proposed that active recreation might take the form of an engaging walkway, a discovery path with boulders used as a climbing element.

### **Seating**

- 1.25 It was pointed out by the OSOO that there are people in the community who don't want seating in this area, particularly on the south end, near Bleecker Street.
- 1.26 The community appreciates that the area is green, but does not necessarily like the ivy, which provides cover for rats.
- 1.27 There was discussion about the need to continue the vocabulary introduced in Adrienne's Garden but not necessarily to adhere to the design shown in the Master Plan.
- 1.28 It was pointed out that the slotted and curved seating discourages use by the homeless.

### **Pathways**

- 1.29 George Vellonakis stated that the PDC will want to see that the newly designed area relates to what is happening near W. 3rd Street.
- 1.30 The landscape architects stated that the existing paths and those shown on the master plan do not necessarily reflect how people move through the space and they would recommend restudying the layout and the potential to create a north/south woodland walk through the space.
- 1.31 The OSOO members stated that the master plan was created with a lot of community input but they believed that the community remains open to improvements to the plan.
- 1.32 There was general agreement that the plan should take into account the preservation of all

healthy mature trees. There was some additional discussion about incorporating historical elements about LaGuardia or NYC mayors into the park.

## **Mercer Playground**

### **Program**

- 1.33 There was a lot of community support for maintaining the park as an open unstructured play space to accommodate bike and scooter riding and casual ball games such as catch, soccer and football, possibly with active play occurring at the north end of the park.
- 1.34 Other ideas included creating an outside track, with a play area in the middle.
- 1.35 There was also interest in providing a softer play surface or possibly artificial turf.
- 1.36 Also mentioned was whether an activator could be added to the water feature so that it wasn't constantly running and the request to remove the concrete spiral around the fountain as it was seen as a tripping hazard.

### **Fence/Gates**

- 1.37 There were differing points of view on access to the playground, but general agreement that it would be beneficial to add an entrance on Mercer Street to improve the perception that this is a public park and open to use.
- 1.38 Some residents like having north and south entrances but for safety concerns, the number of unlocked entrance should be limited.
- 1.39 Some are in favor of having the Mercer Playground have a connection to Key Park while others want to limit access points.
- 1.40 It was pointed out that the goal is to make changes to Mercer Playground, not to make any changes to Key Park.
- 1.41 The use of the adjacent 'fire lanes' on NYU property was discussed, though it was pointed out that they are not city owned land and would have to be addressed separately.
- 1.42 Terri pointed out that there was community involvement with the design of the perimeter fence and therefore it is important that it remain while inviting users with improved signage or added gates.

## **Next Steps**

- 1.43 Designs will be developed based on OSOO recommendations and plans and perspective renderings will be prepared for presentation to the OSOO.
- 1.44 Once OSOO comments are incorporated, the design will be presented to DPR for reviews.
- 1.45 After designers have responded to DPR comments, there will be a CB 2 hearing.
- 1.46 With CB 2 approval, the design will go to the Public Design Commission for review.
- 1.47 There was discussion as to whether the projects can be advanced and reviewed at the same time, with the conclusion being that this can only be determined over time.