



THE GARDEN CONSERVANCY

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James Brayton Hall
President and CEO

July 23, 2019

Mr. Mitchell J. Silver, FAICP
Commissioner
New York City Department of Parks and Recreation
830 Fifth Avenue
New York, NY 10065

Dear Commissioner Silver,

The Garden Conservancy, the nation's leading nonprofit organization dedicated to saving and sharing outstanding American gardens for the education and inspiration of the public, joins a growing number of organizations and individuals who oppose the proposed and approved redesign of Fort Greene Park under the "Parks Without Borders" initiative.

As you are aware, Fort Greene Park's history dates back to the American Revolutionary War and includes the imprint of several major designers. Originally completed in 1850, the park was later redesigned in 1867 by prominent landscape architects Frederick Law Olmsted and Calvert Vaux, who also designed Central Park and Prospect Park. In the early 1900s, the prominent architecture firm of McKim, Mead & White carried out a partial redesign, including the installation of the Prison Ship Martyrs' Monument. In the early 1970s, landscape architect Arthur Edwin Bye, Jr., a pioneer of American landscape architecture of the modernist period, designed cobblestone-and-grass relief mounds that create separate rooms, which are used in multiple ways by the public.

We are concerned about the proposed project for multiple reasons. First, it calls for removing between 50 and 70 healthy, mature trees. According to the Parks Department's own website, ***"Trees play a vital role in growing a stronger, greener, and more beautiful city scape" and "a large, healthy tree removes almost 70 times more air pollution each year than a small, newly planted tree."*** This is particularly significant in light of New York State's new climate goals for reducing greenhouse gas emissions and in light of the importance of green space in urban settings.

In addition to the removal of trees, the proposed plan also includes the flattening of the significant multipurpose mounds to create a paved plaza in the northwest corner. Elimination of the mounds would significantly cut back the root structures of additional nearby trees, with potentially fatal results. It would also effectively erase the design contribution of A.E. Bye, whose legacy includes very few public commissions.

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We believe, as do many local residents and other advocacy groups, that this proposed redesign would have an adverse effect on much of the historical and horticultural value of Fort Greene Park. We respect the mission of the "Parks Without Borders" initiative and support its efforts to make parks more accessible and welcoming to all. However, we believe it would be prudent to conduct a full environmental review and to explore alternative redesign plans that would better preserve the historic character and cultural significance of this important park.

On behalf of the Garden Conservancy and our board of directors,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "James Brayton Hall". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large initial "J" and "B".

James Brayton Hall
President and CEO

cc: Ms. Sarah Carroll, Chair, New York City Landmarks Preservation Commission
Mr. Lenu H. Singletary, Chair, Brooklyn Community Board 2