



CITY OF NEW YORK

**MANHATTAN COMMUNITY BOARD FOUR**

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**COREY JOHNSON**  
Chair

**ROBERT J. BENFATTO, JR., ESQ.**  
District Manager

October 10, 2012

Mr. William T. Castro  
Manhattan Borough Commissioner  
NYC Department of Parks & Recreation  
Arsenal West  
24 West 61<sup>st</sup> Street  
New York, New York 10023

**Re: Proposed New Design for Ramon Aponte Park.**

Dear Commissioner Castro:

On July 12, 2012, a proposed design for Ramon Aponte Park was presented to the Manhattan Community Board 4 (MCB4) Waterfront, Parks & Environment Committee (WPE) by NYC Department of Parks & Recreation (DPR). While esthetically pleasing, and containing many desirable features, members of the community and WPE Committee members expressed concerns over the current use of the park, during which DPR informally agreed to take into consideration. This letter will outline these concerns and offer some suggestions.

The primary issue concerns the presence of the full basketball court at the rear of the park, a feature of the current park and proposed to be retained in the new design as presented. Many neighborhood residents and park users believe that the current basketball court (as enclosed at the rear of the property and hidden by surrounding buildings) is not exclusively used for basketball or recreation and instead invites threatening, unsavory and even illegal activities (i.e. drug dealing). Further, DPR already owns and maintains several full and half courts within a short radius of Ramon Aponte Park:

DeWitt Clinton Park -- 2 full and 1 half court  
Gutenberg Playground -- 2 full courts  
Hell's Kitchen Park -- 2 full and 1 half court  
Mathews-Palmer Playground -- 1 full and 1 half court  
McCaffrey Playground -- 1 full court

Neighborhood residents insist that these basketball courts remain frequently underused. The prevailing preference from the community and MCB4 is to remove the basketball court and repurpose the space entirely.

Uses suggested to replace the basketball courts fell into two categories: (1) An extension of the playground area, to include swings (if they will fit) or other children play equipment and/or (2) additional features such as chess/checker tables, dominos tables and other features aimed at mature & elderly users. Even uses such as shuffleboard and/or bocce, or other such senior adult activities, were mentioned.

On other topics, community members said that the current park has an active rodent population and urges DPR to take all possible mitigation measures to remove this problem. The community would also like to respectfully request that only male trees of certain varieties (Ginkgo & Crabapple) be planted to reduce or prevent airborne particles.

However, on the positive side, the general layout of the new park was well received, including moving the fountain feature to a sunnier central location, moving the entry westward, and the pleasing curves that were introduced. The increased seating areas and new plantings are also welcome, and all these features should be retained in the re-design.

MCB4 greatly appreciates the willingness of DPR to listen to the desires of the neighborhood users of the park, and recognizes the challenge of satisfying many, and perhaps sometimes conflicting desires, in a small place. We look forward to seeing a revised design plan in the near future, and we thank DPR for this commitment to upgrade this much needed park. We believe that these recommendations will help create a friendlier and safer park.

Sincerely,

Corey Johnson  
Chair

John Doswell  
Co-Chair  
Waterfront, Parks and Environment Committee

Marten de Kadt  
Co-Chair  
Waterfront, Parks and Environment Committee

Cc:  
Speaker Christine Quinn  
Steve Simon, DPR  
Elke Fears, West 47<sup>th</sup>/48<sup>th</sup> Street Block Association  
Elected officials