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May 1st, 2017

Mitchell J. Silver, FAICP
Commissioner
N.Y.C. Department of Parks & Recreation
The Arsenal, Central Park
830 Fifth Avenue
New York, NY 10065

Martin Maher
Brooklyn Borough Commissioner
N.Y.C. Department of Parks & Recreation
Litchfield Villa, Prospect Park
Brooklyn, NY 11215

Dear Commissioner Silver and Borough Commissioner Maher,

I am writing to express my dismay and strong objection with OneNYC's "Parks without Borders" proposal to redesign and renovate the Myrtle Avenue portion of Fort Greene Park without input from the community.

My constituents residing in the Walt Whitman Houses, Ingersoll Houses, Kingsview Houses and University Towers have long viewed Fort Greene Park as part of their backyard. The park area on Myrtle Avenue between Washington Park and St. Edwards Street, where the barbecue pits, tables, benches are located are heavily utilized by people from the neighborhood.

For generations, residents have gathered in Fort Greene Park with family members and friends for an array of recreational and social activities. On any given day you can find family events such as birthday parties and family reunions taking place; kids playing on the basketball court; families and seniors gathering on benches to enjoy the fresh air; and people exercising on the outdoor gym equipment. These family memories and experiences of camaraderie have become part of our neighborhood's social fabric and encapsulates the sense of community that has built Fort Greene into what it is today.

My office has received numerous complaints about the Parks Without Borders proposal and the perception that the plans for Fort Greene Park will only worsen the "Tale of Two Cities" divide. Existing disparities in park regulations such as different closing times on the Myrtle Avenue side (which closes at 9 PM) and the DeKalb Avenue side (which closes at 1 AM) only reinforce community perception that a dividing line exists within the park.

I absolutely agree Fort Greene Park is in need of capital improvements such as better lighting, installation of curb cuts and handrails at all entrances for ADA compliance; repairing potholes and uneven spaces to prevent accidents and puddles on rainy days; upgrading gym and play equipment; additional green space and areas designated for families to hold gatherings. There is also widespread community support for improvements.

Fort Greene Park is an important public resource that is enjoyed by neighbors of all ages, cultures and incomes. It is a staple of the community and a gathering space that needs to be preserved. It is an affront to an entire community to even suggest that they should be displaced solely in the name of creating visibility for a historic monument.

While I appreciate the historical importance of the Fort Greene Park monument, I do not support modernization at the expense of taking open space away from people who utilize this resource for all the reasons mentioned above and many more. My constituents residing along Myrtle Avenue deserve the same access as those who live on the other sides of the park. **The need for improvements should not be used as an opportunity to restrict access to open space and eliminate trees from a public park.**

I am deeply troubled by perceptions of segregation evoked by the Parks Without Border proposal. I cannot support a plan that does not engage neighbors and stakeholders in all stages of the planning process. I join hundreds of my neighbors in opposing the proposal for Fort Greene Park that does not include input from the entire community.

I respectfully request a meeting with you to discuss Fort Greene Park. I urge the New York City Parks Department to develop an inclusive engagement process that includes an extensive outreach plan that will permit all residents to weigh in on the redevelopment of this important urban space.

I look forward to your response.

Sincerely,



Senator Velmanette Montgomery
25th Senate District

cc: Mayor Bill de Blasio
Assemblyman Walter Mosley
Brooklyn Borough President Eric Adams
Councilmember Laurie Cumbo
Fort Greene Park Conservancy