

Neighborhood Report

CENTRAL PARK

Adventure vs. Safety in Playground Renovation Battle

When the Adventure Playground was built in 1966 on the west side of Central Park near 67th Street, it was a bold experiment in unprogrammed play with none of the usual playground staples like swings and seesaws. Instead, it featured mazes, a wooden pyramid, a splashing pool, a treehouse and plenty of cement and sand. It was designed to encourage children to explore, get dirty, and occasionally, suffer bruises.

Over the years, the playground has deteriorated, and Michael R. Bloomberg, president of Bloomberg Financial Markets, re-

cently donated \$500,000 for renovation. Now the question is: What kind of renovation?

Some older mothers and grandmothers who raised children there want any restoration to hew quite closely to the original playground's design and materials. But some younger mothers whose children currently use the playground would like to see a major overhaul, including the installation of new equipment (although they are undecided about specific items), removal of the pyramid and installation of a less treacherous climbing structure, railings around the

treehouse, and brighter colors throughout.

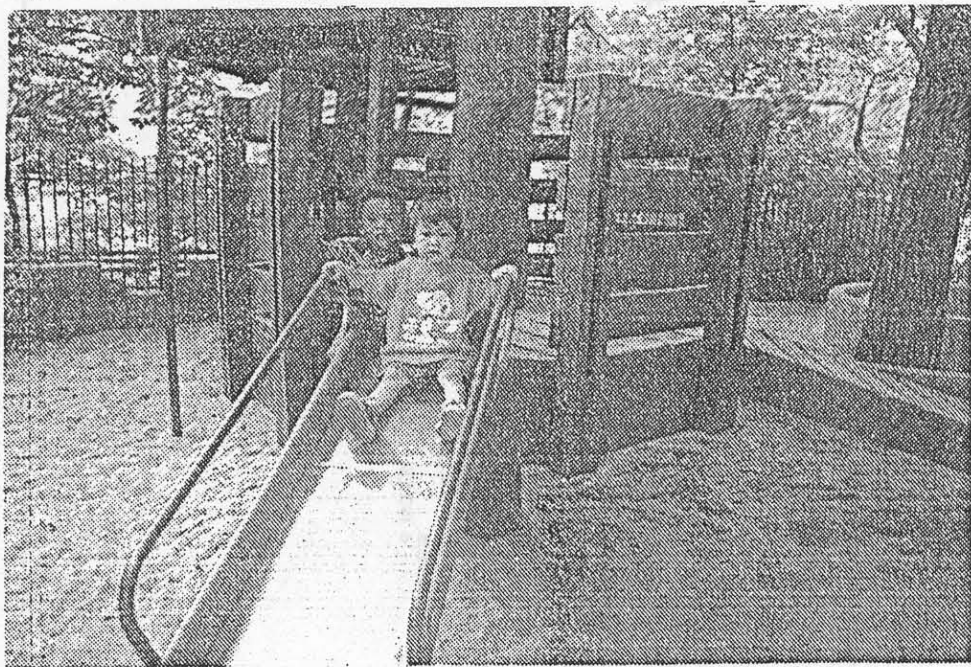
"I think nostalgia is getting in the way of practicality," said Tami Aisenon, whose children are 3 and 6. "My kids have fun there; they use lots of imagination, which is the point, but there are too many hard surfaces."

The older mothers and their supporters say that the current users lack a long-term concern for the playground. "The life span of a playground user is six years, maybe," said Arlene Simon, who is leading a group to preserve the playground. On the other side, she said, are "people who come back 20 and 30 years later, people who have a commitment to the playground for a long time."

The Central Park Conservancy, the non-profit group that runs the park along with the Parks Department, has held a few informal but increasingly contentious meetings with playground users and community members. At one last month, participants voted 22 to 7 against the Conservancy's proposed redesign, which includes replacing the pyramid with a ziggurat climber, removing climbing poles, putting railings on the treehouse and installing a rubberized safety surface. Some wooden structures would be replaced with metal and plastic.

"The community thought it compromised the original organic intent of the playground," said Michael Conard, an urban design professor whose children played there when they were younger.

A Conservancy spokeswoman, Deborah Kirschner, said other modifications would be studied before the design is presented to the five local boards surrounding the park next month. The proposed changes face a lengthy review not only by the boards, which act as advisers, but also by the Landmarks Preservation and Arts Commissions, whose approvals are necessary. JANET ALLON



Brian K. Diggs/The New York Times

As playground debates go on, Morgan Durkel and Lilah Silverman still enjoyed a slide.