

From Bulldozers to Bloomberg: New Adventure for a Playground

Thirty years ago a group of West Side mothers fought a plan by Robert Moses to build a parking lot in Central Park at 67th Street off West Drive or Tavern on the Green. The mothers favored a children's playground.

Moses had already begun to clear the area, but the mothers lay down in front of the bulldozers. Many of the women's husbands were influential journalists, helping their cause. In the end, they won, and Adventure Playground was built. The battle is the subject of a chapter in Robert Caro's book on Moses, "The Powerbroker," and was seen as the beginning of the end of the Moses era

of dominance in land use issues. Now, the historic '60s style playground is in need of renovation. The parents, many of whom still live near the playground, are now grandparents to children who play there. While they seek improvements, the Friends of Adventure Playground want to preserve the playground's historic character. They have brought in the playground's original

architect, Richard Dattner, to work on the renovation.

Michael Bloomberg of Bloomberg Radio has donated \$500,000 for the upgrade. The Central Park Conservancy, a nonprofit group that co-administers the park with the parks department, is handling the project. Erana Stennett, a spokesperson, said the Conservancy would also like to preserve as many features of the playground as possible, but safety concerns necessitate rebuilding a wooden pyramid and mon-

key bars. Stennett said some of the mothers approached parks as early as 1990, asking for safety improvements to the playground, and that safety was a main concern of a user survey it conducted last August. Stennett said many of the moms support the Conservancy's plan.

However, last Monday, a group of parents voted 22-7 against the plan at a meeting with the Conservancy. The first public meeting on the issue was held last August. There have been a few meetings since, but

the mothers say the Conservancy has not been as open as it should be.

"The Conservancy has not wanted the mothers to participate," said Arlene Simon, executive director of Landmarks West, and a mother of three children who grew up playing in the playground. Simon said she was speaking as a mother, not as director of Landmarks West, which has not officially taken a position on the issue. "This is what happens when you cut taxes," said Simon.

Lincoln Anderson