

Park Plan Ruins Romance, Critics Say

By DENNY LEE

So much for a romantic stroll along Central Park South. The Central Park Conservancy is planning to install bigger and brighter lights along the park's southern perimeter, a move that could sharply alter the fairy-like ambience of that particular patch of Manhattan.

Preservation groups and would-be lovers criticized the plan.

"What happens to people who want to walk along the park under moonlight?" Michael Gotkin, a preservation advocate, asked. "Currently, the street lights are filtered through the trees, and you get a beautiful dappled effect. You get a magical quality."

The plan calls for replacing the 32 garden-variety aluminum lampposts currently on Central Park South, between Grand Army Plaza at Fifth Avenue and Columbus Circle at Eighth Avenue, with 40 so-called Type M lampposts.

The Type M lamppost, which is constructed of cast iron, resembles an upside-down L, braced by softly curving filigree. The lamppost supports two lights, one positioned high above traffic, the other fairly low above the sidewalk, which cast pools of light over the heads of pedestrians.

"We want to improve the lighting and make the park as safe as possible," said Ed Benson, director of government and community relations for the conservancy. The \$390,000 project is being financed by the

city and the Central Park South Improvement Corporation, a nonprofit group created by local residents and businesses.

But some critics say the Type M lamp is not historically accurate for the park. "It doesn't fit the overall vision for the park perimeter," said Kate Wood, executive director of Landmark West, a local preservation group.

Ms. Wood argued that the conservancy should install so-called Fifth Avenue lampposts, a twin-arm fixture still seen on parts of Fifth Avenue and Central Park West.

Some residents along those streets, however, have complained of glare from the Fifth Avenue lamps invading their apartments. Preservationists fear that those complaints will prompt the conservancy to install Type M lamps around the entire park.

Conservancy officials said that there were no plans to install the Type M lights elsewhere in the park.

The lighting plan requires approval from the city's Landmarks Preservation Commission and the Arts Commission, which is expected to hear the proposal next month. Preservationists vow to press for the Fifth Avenue lamp.

"The M poles will create very bright pools of light," Mr. Gotkin said. "It would ruin the romantic effect."



Barbara Alper for The New York Times

The street lights on Central Park South may be replaced with brighter ones.