



THE NEW YORK CITY LANDMARKS PRESERVATION COMMISSION  
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# ADVISORY REPORT

<b>ISSUE DATE:</b> 10/04/2006	<b>DOCKET #:</b> 07-1010	<b>CRA #:</b> CRA 07-2181	
<b>ADDRESS</b> CENTRAL PARK  <u>Ancient Playground</u> SCENIC LANDMARK		<b>BOROUGH:</b>  MANHATTAN	<b>BLOCK/LOT:</b>  1111/1

To the Mayor, the Council, and the Commissioner, Department of Parks and Recreation

This report is issued pursuant to Sections 3020 and 854 (h) of the New York City Charter and Section 25-318 of the Administrative Code of the City of New York, which require a report from the Landmarks Preservation Commission for certain plans for the construction, reconstruction, alteration, or demolition of any improvement or proposed improvement which is owned by the City or is to be constructed upon property owned by the City and is or is to be located on a landmark site or in a historic district or which contains an interior landmark.

At the Public Meeting of July 18, 2006, following the Public Hearing of July 11, 2006, the Landmarks Preservation Commission reviewed a proposal for alterations to the Ancient Playground in Central Park.

The proposed work consists of the replacement of pathways, planting areas, fencing and play equipment with new installations of different designs and placement; the reinstallation of the Osborn Gates, designed by Paul Manship and previously removed from the entrance to the Toddler Play Area, as an independent sculptural element, located between the playground entrance gates and the park entrance gates; and the replacement of an existing fence at the southern perimeter of the playground and adjoining greenspace with a new masonry wall and fencing, as shown on presentation boards, labeled L1 through L15 by the Commission staff and prepared by the Central Park Conservancy, consisting of drawings and photographs; and one board, labeled L16 and prepared by the Commission staff, consisting of photographs, all presented at the Public Hearing and Meeting.

In reviewing this proposal, the Commission noted that the Ancient Playground was designed by Richard Dattner and constructed in 1972; and that the playground is located on a triangular site bound by a perimeter wall, facing Fifth Avenue, and two transverse roadways at East 84th and East 85th Streets, within an English Romantic style public park designed in 1856 by Olmsted and Vaux. The Commission also noted that the footprint of the site was modified in 1945 with the realignment of the transverse roadways; that a playground was initially constructed within this site in 1936, and modified and expanded in 1945 and 1953; that the current Ancient Playground was designed as an "Adventure Playground;" and that the Osborn Gates, commissioned in the 1950s and designed by Paul Manship, were relocated from a nearby playground to the Ancient Playground in 1972 and were removed in 1974.

With regard to this proposal, the Commission expressed a general consensus that the proposed pathways leading to the comfort station and related grade change were appropriate and that modifications to the playground could be appropriately achieved. However, the Commissioners also expressed specific concerns about the following segments of this work:

The modifications and expansion of the Toddler Play Area: Some of the Commissioners expressed support for the proposed modifications or a preference to defer to those with expertise in playground design with regard to these changes. Other Commissioners found that the relocation of the Obelisk and the creation of a prominent secondary pathway into the rounded section of the Toddler Area would weaken the termination of the major axis within the playground; that the proposed toddler swing area was not well integrated into the overall design; and that this work would disrupt the unity of the playground design.

The proposed reinstallation of the Osborn Gates: All of the Commissioners expressed support for the reinstallation of the gates. However, they unanimously opposed their installation as an independent sculptural element, instead of as functioning gates. Several of the Commissioners also expressed concerns about the placement of the gates near the entrance to the playground, instead of their previous location at the entrance to the Toddler Play Area, and the redundancy of the three sets of gates in close proximity. Some of the Commissioners recommended possible alternative installation locations for the gates to be considered, including returning the gates to the Toddler Play area or installing the gates as the entrance gates to the playground.

The replacement of the existing southern perimeter fence with a masonry wall and fencing: The Commissioners expressed support for this work. However, some of the Commissioners expressed concerns about the transition of the fencing at the western portion of the new masonry to the proposed adjoining pier and recommended that this connection point be revised.

Additionally, several of the Commissioners indicated that the existing water feature should be restored or that an equivalent element be incorporated into the proposed design.

Please note that this report is being issued in conjunction with Binding Commission Report 07-0418 (LPC 06-8353) issued on October 4, 2006 for alterations to the adjoining comfort station; and that the Commission requests the submission of final filing drawings for the playground alterations when they are available.

This permit is issued on the basis of the building and site conditions described in the application and disclosed during the review process. By accepting this permit, the applicant agrees to notify the Commission if the actual building or site conditions vary or if original or historic building fabric is discovered. The Commission reserves the right to amend or revoke this permit, upon written notice to the applicant, in the event that the actual building or site conditions are materially different from those described in the application or disclosed during the review process.

All approved drawings are marked approved by the Commission with a perforated seal indicating the date of approval. The work is limited to what is contained in the perforated documents. Other work or amendments to this filing must be reviewed and approved separately. The applicant is hereby put on notice that performing or maintaining any work not explicitly authorized by this permit may make the applicant liable for criminal and/or civil penalties, including imprisonment and fines. This report constitutes the permit; a copy must be prominently displayed at the site while work is in progress. Please direct inquiries to Bernadette Artus.

Robert B. Tierney  
Chair

cc: Caroline Kane Levy, Deputy Director of Preservation; D. Blonsky, Central Park Conservancy; Thomas Rinaldi, Central Park Conservancy