



**SIERRA
CLUB**
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RESOLVED:

The Sierra Club opposes the construction of 4 vinyl bubbles, 35 feet high and covering 26 tennis courts in the northern portion of Central Park. This construction is proposed for the purpose of winter use of the tennis courts and is a for profit venture by a private company to be chosen.

BACKGROUND:

The Department of Parks and Recreation, with the support of the Central Park Conservancy, has proposed leasing to a private company the right to construct 4 bubbles to cover 26 tennis courts for 5 months of the year. Additional time would be required for construction each fall, and removal in the spring at which time the courts could not be used. The proposed contract would be for 15 years.

The bubbles would be an opaque vinyl 3 1/2 stories high and tethered to deep, permanent footings trenched into the entire perimeter of the tennis court complex and flush with the ground. It is proposed the footings would be made of cement.

The bubbles would be lit 24/7 by one generator with one backup generator. The generators will be supplied by diesel fuel in four tanks; each tank holds 2,300 gallons. At dusk, and through the night, each bubble will appear as a large, glowing building. Noise is classified at 65 decibels at a distance of 50 feet from the generator.

Admission to play will cost from \$30 to \$100 per hour, depending on day of the week and the hour.

Central Park would not benefit from the profit. It is estimated that 15-20% of revenue will go to either to the NYC General Fund or a Parks General Fund.

Tennis bubbles have a capacity of 1,000 people per week which in this case means 4,000 people. Average operations tend to be at 70-80% of capacity. There is a consideration to use golf carts to shuttle east siders.

ARGUMENTS:

Pro:

Since alternative recreation, and park appropriate recreation, is readily available to the public, since there is no benefit to Central Park itself, either financially or to enhance its purpose and

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function, and since the bubbles themselves are inappropriate to the design and setting of the park, the Sierra Club does not see any argument in favor of this proposal.

Con:

The glory of Central Park is having developed a culture of recreation that in no way impinges on the Park's value as a soothing refuge and a contrast to the built environment. In all seasons people can walk, run, bike, skate board, relax. All of these recreational activities are free to all citizens and all of them take place sympathetically with wildlife and the planted beauty of the Park. The encouragement of wildlife, especially birds, is as important to the emotional wellbeing of people, as it is to birds. It is why Central Park functions to some degree as a sanctuary for people and wildlife together. Its aesthetic beauty is a constant source of joy and pleasure for all New Yorkers. It is impossible to overestimate the value that all these qualities have to the people of New York City. It must be understood and guarded. In a city of 8 million, not 1 inch is expendable.

The proposed tennis court bubbles have none of the qualities enumerated above and therefore do not qualify for inclusion in Central Park.

The chief architect of Central Park, Frederick Law Olmsted, considered that the importance of the park was to create a democratic condition of society. Olmsted would therefore object to the bubbles since the user fee excludes all except the very affluent. For that reason, the land on which they would stand would effectively be privatized and no longer function as public park for all citizens. In fact, it would effectively be a transfer of park land from the people who need it most, to the wealthy few who will use it, and to the concessionaire who will profit from it.

Olmsted would surely object to structures in the park that would overwhelm trees visually. He designed the park so that the primary architecture was the trees and nothing should get in the way of their appreciation. One bubble, or a single structure covering at least 6 tennis courts and 35 feet high, is the same as a large building visually. Imagine 4 of them together. (A model should be made as an aid to that visualization.) Without windows they would be even more of a wall. These would be monolithic and ugly. All structures in Central Park were designed to have grace and beauty and be subservient to the dominance of the trees. Just the volume of the bubbles as structures, would dominate and be an aggressively discordant presence in the Park.

In addition, the vinyl building material is an oil by-product and inorganic. Whatever color it would be, it would still be inappropriate in a park environment. As such it would be a constant irritant.

The bubbles would be lit at all times. Unlike buildings of brick, the entire structure would likely glow, becoming a new and very large source of light pollution. Central Park is an oasis and salvation for migrating birds. We cannot afford to deny them more of what little remains for them. The same is true for people. Four enormous bubbles, lit at all times, would be seen from long distances denying people the mystery and comfort of the darkness they would otherwise have.

The lighting would be accomplished by the use of a generator running on diesel fuel. Even if, as

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promised, that generator is the most efficient made, the 24/7 lighting is still expected to use an enormous quantity of diesel fuel. This must be why there would be four fuel tanks holding 2,300 gallons of diesel fuel each. A sane society would be looking for every possible opportunity to cut out the use of fossil fuels. Instead, adding to emissions unnecessarily makes no sense. Considering the consequences of fossil fuel pollution, it can be called immoral.

The generator makes 65 decibels of engine noise at 50 feet. Engine noise is exactly the kind of noise that is not associated with the park experience. We don't want to hear it when we are in a park. For wildlife, it is worse. Their hearing is much better than our own and they flee this kind of noise. For them, this noise diminishes the park size by much more than the bubble/tennis court footprint.

If the footing for the bubble is a trench of cement around the perimeter, there will be several problems for trees. Even if the digging for it is sensitive, cement itself is toxic. Cement is not as hard as stone and disintegrates. Even before it disintegrates, the action of water will cause it to leach into the soil where the toxic chemicals in cement will travel and poison trees.

Lastly, neither the Department of Parks and Recreation nor the Central Park Conservancy seem to be interested in understanding the true impact of the bubble proposal since there are no plans for either an EIS or a study of sight lines.

Tennis in winter is just as inappropriate an activity as ice skating in the summer. Both are out of sync with climate and nature, whereas the purpose of the park experience is to have the opportunity to be in sync with nature and to enjoy it. An enclosure such as the bubbles shields people from experiencing the outdoors. This is the opposite intention of Central Park.

This proposal is not really about providing recreation. It is about initiating a for profit venture. This is not the purpose of the park. As a National Historic and Scenic Landmark, the introduction of an ugly and inappropriate structure, occupying several acres of parkland, is not tolerable and should be refused further consideration.

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The possession of arbitrary power has always, the world over, tended irresistibly to destroy humane sensitivity, magnanimity, and truth.

~~ Frederick Law Olmsted