



THE COMMITTEE TO PRESERVE THE UPPER WEST SIDE

**Testimony of LANDMARK WEST!
Certificate of Appropriateness Committee
Before the Landmarks Preservation Commission
West 85th Street Playground - Central Park
January 9, 2024**

LANDMARK WEST! is a not-for-profit community organization committed to the preservation of the architectural heritage of the Upper West Side.

The Certificate of Appropriateness Committee wishes to comment on the West 85th Street Playground (aka the Abraham and Joseph Spector Playground), a playground built in the 1930s, and pathways, within an English Romantic style public park originally designed in 1857-1858 by Frederick Law Olmsted and Calvert Vaux, and designated a Scenic Landmark in 1975. The application is to modify the playground footprint and pathways, and replace fencing.

The LANDMARK WEST! Certificate of Appropriateness Committee appreciates that this playground is getting an update after many decades of heavy play. Taking inspiration from the natural landscape of the park and also its cultural landscape will benefit the playground in many ways. We also acknowledge the necessary accessibility features that will be incorporated in order for the park to be enjoyed by all.

Our Committee is glad to see the Conservancy has implemented their management plan, Plan For Play, for rebuilding and maintaining the playground in the park and more oversight and regulation on our scenic landmarks is always positive. We like the idea of utilizing natural materials like wood for the play structures and hope through this framework that these are monitored and maintained effectively. We understand the need for accessible routes to the playground, but seeing as Section A-A is the most severe change, we wonder if both pathways from West 85th Street need to be altered. Adapting only the secondary path, accessible by the pedestrian-used road, will achieve accessibility while maintaining more of the graded landscape.

Our Committee's other main concern lies with the Conservancy's undefined "future project" for interpreting Seneca Village, a largely African American community erased to build Central Park. This is currently independent "but related" to the playground redevelopment, but as this is the first major disturbance to the ground since 1934, it seems the ideal moment to honor the past, and do a proper archeological survey of the grounds under this playspace.

It's highly unlikely that any remaining archaeological material will not be disturbed during construction. Material could exist outside of any archaeological structure, such as trash or deposits on the exterior or a foundation trench wider than the walls themselves. Surveys or excavations may help reveal what potential materials exist and mitigate their damage. We recommend that archaeological research is undertaken at this critical site for understanding African American history on the Upper West Side and the City as a whole. We also advocate for the interpretation of Seneca Village to then be sensitively incorporated into the playground design for educational purposes.

Thank you.