



NYC Parks

William Castro
Borough Commissioner
Manhattan

T 212.408.0100
F 212.408.0202

E william.castro@parks.nyc.gov

City of New York
Parks & Recreation

Arsenal West
24 West 61 Street
New York, NY 10011
www.nyc.gov/parks

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Hon. Bill de Blasio
Public Advocate
1 Centre St., 15th floor
New York, NY 10007

Dear Public Advocate de Blasio,

Thank you for taking the time to inquire about the creation of the Washington Square Park Conservancy. I apologize for the delay in responding to your letter.

The creation of this organization has probably undergone more scrutiny than almost any other partnership group that we work with. The founding members of the Conservancy reached out to Community Board 2-Manhattan's leadership early on in the summer of 2012 to discuss their initial idea, and also met with the Washington Square Association and the Village Alliance BID. They met with the Community Board chair again last March when we hired the Park Administrator. During the spring the Conservancy members responded to a full range of questions at a well-attended public meeting held by the board's parks committee on June 5. The committee then voted 11-1 in support of the Conservancy. They spoke at the full board meeting on June 20, whereupon the board overwhelmingly voted 31-13 to approve the parks committee's resolution.

The Conservancy's role will be that of a typical "friends-of" park group – to enlist volunteers, sponsor programming and raise funds to support the park. For example, it has already raised funds to pay for a Parks Department playground associate to run kids' programs last summer and to extend the Parks' maintenance crew's assignment in this heavily used park for an extra month this fall as well as worked with Parks on four volunteer gardening events. These were all valuable additions to the park and provided a clear benefit to the public.

Parks' financial commitment to the park will remain the same (contingent upon our regular expense budget); the Conservancy's support will be supplementary. Most importantly, NYC Parks will continue to have full responsibility for managing and operating the park.

The Conservancy's mission statement perfectly expresses the reason why they have taken the trouble to create this organization:

The Washington Square Park Conservancy is a not for profit organization working with the New York City Parks Department and other neighborhood groups to ensure that Washington Square Park continues as a diverse and historical urban green space through engaging volunteers and raising funds to keep the park clean, safe and beautiful.

We do not have a license or other formal agreement with the Conservancy because it is not assuming any maintenance or operating responsibilities or overseeing any capital work in the park. Its role, as described above, is limited. With respect to the responsibilities of the Park Administrator, who also serves as the Executive Director of the Conservancy, this dual role is not unusual; we have a number of Parks staff who serve as both park administrator and executive director of a conservancy or friends group. We have found that it works to our mutual benefit and ensures that the group is working in sync with the Parks' objectives and not using any of the funds it raises for unnecessary administrative expenses. I am enclosing a letter from the Conflicts of Interest Board delineating Sarah Nielson's responsibilities in each position and confirming that she can serve in this dual role.

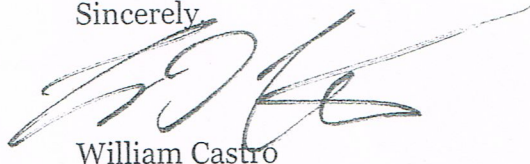
As you requested, I am also enclosing a copy of the Conservancy's by-laws, which have been provided to Community Board 2 and to The Villager newspaper. In addition, the group has received 501(c)(3) status from the Internal Revenue Service and will follow all of the laws and regulations required of that status.

Finally, as a direct result of the "Gerson-Quinn Letter," the Conservancy has invited Council Member Margaret Chin and the chair of Community Board 2 to have ex-officio seats on the board, and they both have accepted – a further indication that the Conservancy plans to have "transparency and community involvement" in its ongoing activities.

All in all, Parks believes that the Washington Square Park Conservancy will grow to become an excellent example of a public-private partnership that will help this historic park become an even greater resource for the residents of the Village and the City as a whole.

Please feel free to contact me if you have any other questions.

Sincerely,



William Castro

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