



## The New York City Landmarks Preservation Commission

1 Centre Street, 9<sup>th</sup> Floor North New York NY 10007 TEL: 212-669-7700 FAX: 212-669-7960  
www.nyc.gov/landmarks



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**CONTACT:** Lisi de Bourbon  
212-669-7938

### **COMMISSION GRANTS LANDMARK STATUS TO THREE MORE PARKS DEPARTMENT SWIMMING POOLS**

*Thomas Jefferson, McCarren and Sunset Park Pools and Recreation Centers Are Among Six Immense  
WPA-Era Swimming Complexes To Be Named City Landmarks*

The Landmarks Preservation Commission today designated the McCarren Play Center in Brooklyn, the Sunset Play Center and bath house interior in Brooklyn, and the Thomas Jefferson Play Center in East Harlem as New York City landmarks, recognizing them for their exceptional design, decorative details and grand scale. Constructed with federal Works Progress Administration (WPA) funds at the height of the Great Depression in the summer of 1936, the three pool and recreational complexes were among 11 that were built across New York City during the administration of Mayor Fiorello H. La Guardia. Collectively, the play centers were quickly recognized as being among the most remarkable public facilities ever constructed in the United States.

"These majestic recreational facilities are the product of some of the most imaginative, productive minds of that era, and offered a haven for tens of thousands of New Yorkers," said Commission Chairman Robert B. Tierney. "They set a benchmark for great design for the City's public projects that's evident in all five boroughs nearly three quarters of a century later."

"The debut of eleven immense outdoor public pools in the summer of 1936 could not have come at a more opportune moment," said Parks Commissioner Adrian Benepe. "The project was financed by the federal Works Progress Administration as part of a massive effort to alleviate adverse health conditions and provide safe recreation in predominantly working-class communities. Since that time they have become an integral part of the City's fabric and I am so pleased that the facilities at McCarren Park, Sunset Park and Thomas Jefferson Park have been recognized as City landmarks."

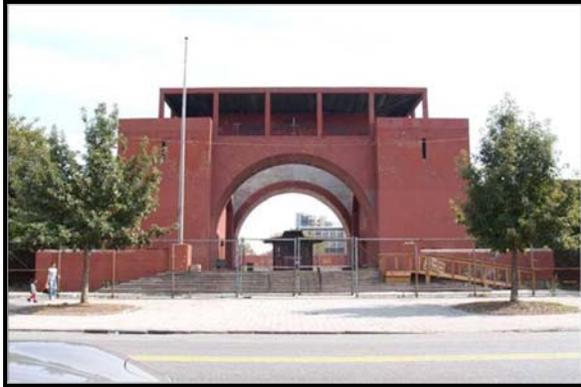
Each of the 11 complexes is unique, yet similar, as they share many of the same characteristics, including low-cost building materials such as brick and cast concrete and elements of the 1930s Art Moderne style. Aymar Embury II and Gilmore Clark, the Parks Department's consulting architect and landscape architect, respectively, oversaw the designs for the pools as well as other park projects under Moses. When Moses became Parks Commissioner in 1934, there were only two outdoor pools in the City, one at Betsy Head in the Brownsville section of Brooklyn, and the other at Faber Park on Staten Island.

Prior to today's vote, the Commission granted landmark status to the Astoria, Crotona Park and Jackie Robinson play centers and pools. The other pools that remain under consideration for landmark designation are the Betsy Head and Red Hook Play Centers, in Brooklyn; Highbridge Play Center in Manhattan; and the Tompkinsville Play Center (also known as Joseph H. Lyons Pool) and interior of the

*More*

Tompkinsville Play Center Bath House on Staten Island. Descriptions and photos of the newly landmarked complexes follow below.

### McCarren Play Center



Set within McCarren Park, McCarren Play Center opened in 1936 in the Greenpoint section of Brooklyn, along Lorimer Street between Driggs Avenue and Bayard Street.

The park was named for a former New York State senator, Patrick Henry McCarren, a Williamsburg native who had worked in the sugar refineries on the Greenpoint waterfront as a young man. The McCarren Play Center, which encompasses nearly an entire city block, opened on July 31, 1936 at the east end of the park, and was the eighth of the WPA pools to open that

summer. The 330' by 165' pool was larger than four Olympic-sized pools combined, and the bath house had capacity for 6,800 swimmers, making it the largest of all of the WPA-era play centers.

The recreation center's iconic, giant arched entryway is topped by a set-back gallery, and decorated with brick patterning that spans the openings onto the street and swimming pool. The entry also features an Art Moderne ticket booth, rounded jambs of the entrances into the locker rooms and decorative metal work in their transoms. Aymar Embury II, the Parks Department's lead architect for the pools, is primarily responsible for the Play Center's design.

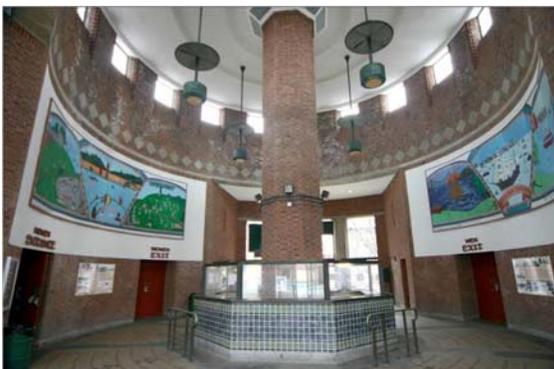
McCarren pool was last open in the summer of 1983, but since 2005 has been used for concerts, film screenings, performances, and other public events. The facility is scheduled to be renovated and used year-round under the City's sweeping PlaNYC initiative.

### Sunset Play Center and Bath House Interior

Herbert Magoon, a junior Parks Department architect who designed the bath houses at Jones Beach, is responsible for the design of the Sunset Play Center, which is located in the 24.5-acre Sunset Park.

The play center stretches between 41<sup>st</sup> and 44<sup>th</sup> Streets along Seventh Avenue, where a monumental stairway forms the main approach to the bath house, the centerpiece of the complex.

The enormous center, which displaced a small lake, officially opened on July 20, 1936, the sixth of the 10 WPA pool complexes completed that summer, and the first to open in Brooklyn. The swimming pool measures 256 by 165 feet and the small semi-circular wading and diving pools at either end each measure 165 feet in diameter.



The I-shaped, one-story bath house, which is partially built into the slope of Sunset Park and considered one of the complex's most distinctive features, is made of cast stone and Flemish bond, English common bond and header bond bricks. Flanked by wings, the building's 1 ½ story rotunda is characterized by stacked cylindrical brick walls and is framed by giant corner piers.

The bath house lobby, which recalls an ancient rotunda, features patterned flooring of glazed brick, ceramic tile and bluestone, copper lamps hanging from the smooth, white ceiling, sweeping brick curved walls and simple, Art Deco geometric shapes. A brick column at the center of the lobby anchors the colorful, octagonal-shaped ticket booth.

Sunset Play Center closed for reconstruction in 1982, part of a project to transform many of the WPA pool complexes into modern recreation centers. When the complex reopened in 1984, the Parks Department called the restoration of the pools “an essential part of the revitalization of the entire public recreational infrastructure of the city.”

### Thomas Jefferson Play Center

Thomas Jefferson Play Center is set along the western edge of Thomas Jefferson Park in the East Harlem section of Manhattan. The 15-acre park opened in 1905 to accommodate the children of the crowded tenement district.

The second of the WPA-era swimming pool centers to be completed, Thomas Jefferson Play Center opened on June 27, 1936, and was designed by Stanley C. Brogren, a Parks Department architect. It is located on First Avenue between 111<sup>th</sup> and 114<sup>th</sup> streets.



Constructed of brick and cast concrete, the center’s U-shaped, one-story bath house frames the diving pool, and part of the 100-by-246-foot swimming pool, which is one of the smaller WPA-era pools. The bath house, clad in brick and concrete is reached by a striking crescent entryway supported by four columns and deep lintels separated by a recessed wall of fixed glass block with four large central square hopper windows.

A \$10.5 million renovation of the pool and recreation center was completed in 1992.

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The Landmarks Preservation Commission is responsible for protecting and preserving New York City’s architecturally, historically and culturally significant buildings and sites. Since its creation in 1965, LPC has granted landmark status to some 24,000 buildings, including 1,167 individual landmarks, 108 interior landmarks, nine scenic landmarks and 88 historic districts in all five boroughs. Under the law, the Commission must be comprised of at least three architects, a historian, a realtor, a planner or landscape architect, as well as a representative of each borough. There are 11 commissioners, all of whom are appointed by the Mayor for staggered three-year terms.