

CITY OF NEW YORK

MANHATTAN COMMUNITY BOARD FOUR

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CHRISTINE BERTHET
Chair

JESSE BODINE
District Manager

July 22, 2015

Mr. Mitchell Silver
Department of Parks and Recreation Commissioner
City of New York Parks & Recreation
Arsenal West
24 West 61st Street
New York, NY 10023

Re: Issue with Private Fitness Classes in City Parks

Dear Commissioner Silver,

Manhattan Community Board 4 (MCB4) is concerned about the increased use of city parks and playgrounds for private fitness classes and personal training sessions. MCB4 is aware that DPR requires permits for gatherings of 20 or more people in city parks, but we believe there is currently no policy in place regulating fitness groups of a smaller size in adult areas of city parks. We would like to request that the Department of Parks and Recreation (DPR) determine whether a policy regarding private fitness classes in city parks and playgrounds is necessary. If in fact there is a policy in place, we urge DPR to actively enforce the rules.

MCB4 is encouraged by our fellow residents' focus on health and we are pleased that we all have access to some open green spaces within our district for general use including fitness, but in many cases the presence of large numbers of people engaging in a workout or even a few avid athletic people in or near the playground areas is intimidating for young children and parents alike. Members of our community have reached out to MCB4 to report such activity in May Matthews-Palmer Park which is a between Ninth and Tenth Avenues spanning from 45th to 46th Streets and Gertrude Kelly Playground which is between Eighth and Ninth Avenue on 17th Street. Most likely this is an issue in parks throughout the city and is not unique to these two sites. Residents of the district have shared with our Board photos and videos which show an entire class being conducted by an adjacent gym at Gertrude Kelly. Residents have stated when they asked adults not to use playground areas for their workout they have generally been greeted with offensive language and aggressive behavior. There have also been reports of adults using the playground equipment in their workout routines.

The lack of clarity of how our small parks and playgrounds should be used has created conflict among some residents. Some parks in the city have equipment specifically designed for adult fitness and these are separated from the playground areas. Design becomes so much more important in the smaller spaces. And while MCB4 is thankful our community board has been part of the conversation that revolves around capital improvement of our neighborhood parks, we are not entirely sure of the methods used by DPR to determine the optimal design of our park spaces and if the designs are aligned with the desired use of the residents. In light of the inappropriate use of playground areas for adult fitness classes, MCB4 believes where funding and space allow, adult fitness equipment may be a desirable addition to our some of our neighborhood parks in the future.

To be clear MCB4 does not oppose fitness classes in parks. On the contrary, MCB4 welcomes the fitness classes that are sponsored by DPR which are conducted in appropriate areas of our parks. Our experience has been that these participants have been respectful of all park users. Bottom line, we all want to enjoy outdoor space and feel safe and comfortable in our own neighborhoods. The current trend of personal training sessions and fitness classes in city parks may not be an issue for park patrons of large parks like Central or Prospect Park, but this is overwhelming for residents in our small neighborhood parks. For this reason we again urge DPR to investigate the use of city parks and playgrounds for private fitness classes and consider implementing a policy to regulate such use so all of New York can enjoy our open green spaces in the multiple ways for which they were designed.

Thank you and we hope to receive a timely response from your office and at the least we would like if you can send members of your staff to observe the activity we are reporting within our district.

Sincerely,



Christine Berthet
Chair



Maarten de Kadt Co-Chair
Waterfront, Parks &
Environment Committee



Delores Rubin Co-Chair
Waterfront, Parks &
Environment Committee

cc: William Castro, City of New York Parks & Recreation
Brad Hoylman, NY State Senator
Richard Gottfried, NY State Assemblymember
Jerrold Nadler, Congressman
Gale Brewer, Manhattan Borough President
Corey Johnson, NYC Councilmember