



Sara Roosevelt Park Community Coalition
<http://sdrpc.mkgarden.org/>

December 1, 2016 NYC Council Committee on Parks and Recreation Oversight Hearing: "An Examination of Parks Department Properties Currently Inaccessible to the Public"

New York City Council
Parks & Recreation Committee
New York City Hall
City Hall Park
New York, NY 10007
2016

December 1,

Dear Committee on Parks and Recreation,

My name is K Webster I am the President of the Sara Roosevelt Park Community Coalition. I lived on Forsyth Street on this Park from 1978 to 1990 when I moved to the nearby Bowery.

Our narrow Park has four park buildings in it. Three are used by Parks Department to serve the needs of the five boroughs and all of Manhattan. The fourth building houses the BRC Senior Center. That building bristles with joy and purpose and is an oasis of caring for our local community.

SDR Park spans over half a mile from East Houston Street to Canal Street and is 8 acres in size. It currently has one available public restroom on Hester Street.

I am here to testify about the impacts of just two of the inaccessible Park's buildings here. One is at Hester Street and the other is at Stanton Street. Our focus is on Stanton Street as the area most urgently in need of a neighborhood anchor.

Robert Moses built this park in 1934 after a failed Tammany Hall scheme left it a barren wasteland. In 1959 gang wars left two teenagers dead. From 1970 – 1985 the area was an open-air drug market. In 1982 the Coalition founded a Garden along with a Senior Center at Rivington and Delancey Streets (Gail Collins called the Garden the Normandy Beach of the fight to reclaim SDR Park). The neighborhood rose up to remove violent drug dealers and pimps. But in 1994 the steps of the Stanton building were still a shooting gallery.

For a while this building held "a safe haven program for neighborhood kids". It was a rec center until Parks closed it and it never reopened – rumor has it people weren't using it because the park still seemed too dangerous.

The building at Stanton Street currently serves the purpose of a depot for all Manhattan Parks. It cannot hold all the storage – the overflow has been installed in a large cargo container that sits to the side of the building. This takes up yet more park space and provides a hideout for drug use and homeless storage. Its bathrooms have been inaccessible to the public since about 1994 when the neighborhood was promised its return as a recreation center. The Department's cars, trucks and

private vehicles engulf the pathway in front of it. A tree recently planted by young people from LES Prep was run over by one of the vehicles. We think that points up the dangerous condition of using the pathway as an active driveway. The building sits across from a stand of Citibikes, four high schools, a basketball court, a children's playground and a shower spray.

What We've Done:

We have asked for and received Community Board 3 resolutions since 2010 requesting the Stanton building be return to public use. It has been a high priority on our District Needs statement for many years.

Hester Street Collaborative did a study of the building in 2012. I wrote an op-ed in February 2013. Articles have been written, and more studies have been made before and since on returning the building to public use.

In April 2013 Commissioner Castro announced that Parks had officially submitted the Stanton Street Building into their capital project planning process.

In 2013 we were told an alternate site had been found for the storage but it fell through. We've offered other possible options.

In 2014, at our request, we were given an estimate from the Parks Department for the renovation of the entire building (assuming the storage could be moved) of under \$5 Million (including lead and asbestos abatement). We offered to fundraise with nearby, new luxury projects.

We have met with Manhattan Parks Commissioner often on this subject.

In 2013 and 2014 Parks received a combined million dollars in grants from Manhattan Borough President Gale Brewer and Councilwoman Margaret Chin requested by Coalition members for the building.

In 2015 we did a walk-through of the building with the Commissioner and Council Member. It was our second walk-through.

We've organized numerous It's My Park Days to advocate for renovations and done clean ups and plantings. We've organized visionings for the neighborhood and the park-going public to weigh in on their wishes for the site.

In July of last year in partnership and with a grant from NYCommons we held three visionings for the community on the Stanton Street building. Neighborhood's parents who used to play there expressed a strong desire to see it available for *their* children. No one requested it remain a storage facility.

This Parks Department building could serve the community as an anchor for the northern end of the park. It could serve as a crime deterrent. We could have a resiliency center, neighborhood hub, CSA, bottle redemption center, homeless information center, bike repair, solar hub powering station, community center, teen center for young people learning resiliency skills, ...the possibilities are many. We'd like to see Parks turn the building over to one of our strong community partners to program, to share space, to monitor and build a core of stewards for this section of the park. As the Coalition we'd want to hear from the community and Parks Department about these possibilities.

The continuing collapse of structural supports for low-income people is just one of the many reasons we think that all publicly owned buildings must be enlisted to serve the public. It's past time to

activate the creativity and intelligence of neighborhoods, electeds and City agencies to good and collaborative use in solving what looks like will be a very difficult next few years.

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Articles listed on Stanton Building

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<http://thevillager.com/2012/10/18/study-seeks-new-uses-for-forgotten-park-buildings/>
<http://thevillager.com/2016/08/04/building-power-in-local-parks/>
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<http://thevillager.com/2016/07/21/push-to-restore-stanton-storehouse-to-community/>