

September 9, 2008

**STATEMENT OF THE NEW YORK LANDMARKS CONSERVANCY BEFORE
THE NEW YORK CITY LANDMARKS PRESERVATION COMMISSION
REGARDING THE PROPOSED MODIFICATION OF 776 LORIMER STREET,
BROOKLYN, THE MCCARREN PLAY CENTER, AN INDIVIDUAL LANDMARK**

Good day, Chairman Tierney and Commissioners. I am Andrea Goldwyn, speaking on behalf of the New York Landmarks Conservancy.

The Conservancy has been a long-time champion of the McCarren Play Center, and is very pleased to see the plan presented today. Over the past 20 years Conservancy staff have been advocating for restoration of this significant property. It is both an architectural masterpiece, symbolic of its era, and a recreational center which has evolved from its original use to address the needs of today's community.

We commend the local activists who have been tireless in keeping the Play Center as intact as it is, publicizing its plight, and working to find a contemporary solution. Phyllis Yampolsky and the McCarren Park Conservancy, in particular, were loud and clear advocates for the pool when many had abandoned it.

Buildings like this one, however, are constructed to withstand the years and survive. In the 1990s, when there were calls that the bathhouses flanking the main entrance pavilion suffered from irreparable deterioration, the Landmarks Conservancy commissioned a report from Robert Silman Associates which stated that, in fact, the bathhouses were built "like bunkers," could not be easily dismantled, and that they needed only temporary roofing to limit exposure to the elements, a project which the New York City Parks Department undertook.

So we also commend the Parks Department for the work it did then, and for restoring the Play Center today. We were pleased to see reuse of the main pool and diving pool, and that the building program will include additional recreational and community uses. While recognizing that this update will require changes, there is however a concern, that the monumentality and symmetrical design which characterize the Play Center could be better honored.

While most of the original plan is being restored, one of the semi-circular pools adjacent to the main pool is proposed to have a new use. That change should not exclude it from the whole design. Ignoring that pool ignores the bilateral nature of the Play Center. Perhaps the walkway paving that edges the other two

pools could be extended around this semi circle, to maintain the balance of the composition.

Overall, the plans to restore masonry elements, and return original door and window details look very promising. It is unfortunate that as soon as the tiers of windows along the bathhouse wings are reopened, the lower tier will be blocked by the new changing pavilions. The public will certainly benefit from having additional space for a gym and all-purpose rooms in the old bathhouses, but it is regrettable that the new changing areas will block the view of the pool from the inside, and diminish the monumentality of the exterior.

The grandiose size of the main pool was one of the most significant features of the original design. The cut-out “beach” should reference the original pool by creating a transition that delineates the original dimensions.

Finally, the presentation available to the public last week contained one board showing a plan for glass-enclosed rooftop additions to the bathhouse wings. There is far too little detail included to consider supporting this addition. Even if it is being shown only as a place-keeper for a future plan with a promise of more details to come, it should not be approved at this point.

Despite these concerns, it must be said again that the Landmarks Conservancy enthusiastically supports the restoration of the McCarren Play Center. This is another milestone in a long story of determined advocates and solid craftsmanship. We look forward to taking a swim in Summer 2011? Thank you for the opportunity to present the Conservancy's views.