

Nyack Parks Commission Meeting Minutes January 2023

Held Feb 1, 2023

Members in attendance:

Jim Willcox
Carolyn Cairns
Bert Hughs
Andrea DeVitto
JordanTurner

Meeting started at 7:00 p.m. in Memorial Park

Point of discussion: Park changes, including removal of children's sandbox, ball field.

Commission discussed these two issues, drafted a memo to the Village Board, as follows:

Removal of the sandbox in the children's playground. As part of the renovation of the children's playground, the Parks Commission has no objection to removing the sandbox, for several reasons. One is that there has long been a concern about the health and safety of sandboxes due to the potential for germs, bacteria, animal feces, insects, and other types of detritus. This is especially true of sandboxes that aren't covered every night, and maintained on a regular basis. Both the NYC Parks Department and the Central Park Conservancy rake the sand daily for debris and change the sand at least once a year, and we don't think the village has the capacity to do this. Also, many parents already limit their kids' access to sandboxes for these reasons. Another consideration is more practical: Sandboxes can't be placed on the new rubberized surfacing that will be installed, as the sand has a corrosive effect on the surface. The current playground plan calls for all the play elements for smaller kids and toddlers to be placed in one area, so it's easier for parents with more than one child to supervise their kids. A sandbox would have to be located elsewhere, outside the toddler play area, making it more difficult for a parent with more than one small child. That said, kids do seem to enjoy the pirate ship-like structure that surrounds the sandbox. It would be great if the play area could contain some ship-like play piece after the sandbox is removed.

2. Removal of the ball field and backstop. This presents a bit more of a challenge, and the Parks Commission isn't yet convinced that the ball field is under-utilized. While the field isn't currently used by Little League teams for official games, all the parks commissioners say they do see it being used by parents and some coaches in a more ad hoc manner. One question we have is if the field isn't used more because of its poor condition rather than a lack of interest/desire. We also want to note that since the hospital isn't re-installing the MacCalman ball field that was on Midland Avenue—it will simply be a grass field—the one in Memorial Park is now the only existing public ball field in the village. (Also note that 1,500 Nyack residents filed a petition that opposed losing the ballfield when the idea was proposed.)

While we understand that the "great lawn" grant could cover turning the ball field into more grassy open space, we feel that the decision shouldn't be made simply due to expediency. Once removed, the ball field will be gone, if not forever at least for a considerable amount of time. We are also not yet convinced that enough people don't

want to use the ball field. And given the amount of open space already in the park, we are not sure that replacing the ball field with another grassy area is a needed improvement. Another argument we've heard for removing the field is that kids often climb on the backstop, but we feel this is more an issue of parental supervision than one of inherent danger. Kids like to climb things.

For these reasons, the Parks Commission believes that greater outreach to the community is warranted before removing the backstop and ball field. Other than the grant, there is no reason for the decision to be made without additional input, and a real assessment of the ball field's actual use. Perhaps if the village improved the ball field and did a better job maintaining it, more people, or even teams, would want to use it. If not, we can revisit the issue next season with a clearer vision that removing the ball field is in the public's best interests.