

TESTIMONY FOR CITY COUNCIL, 7 JULY 2012 AT 9:30 AM (Item 532)

I'm Wendy Rahm. Thank you for letting me speak about the South Park Blocks Master Plan. As Downtown Neighborhood Association Board Vice Chair and long-time downtown resident, I'll raise concerns in my neighborhood about this plan.

The last census had the DNA area with about 15,000 people. This neighborhood has the densest concentration of affordable and subsidized housing in the city. That's significant. There's enormous economic diversity and 11% are Asian immigrants.

I have questions for you before you vote.

Why are you considering approving one of Park's largest capital improvement programs, when the majority of permanent DNA area residents we hear from oppose it? There is little local support. Most like the park as is. That's a costly disconnect that's hard to understand. Is there an explanation? Before voting, I hope you answer that question for us. Why spend so much to make changes no one nearby wants except one developer? This Park works well. It's the east side that needs more investment.

Above all, this is a neighborhood park. The NYTimes and The Skanner both reported a lack of canopy as an equity issue in poorer neighborhoods. This very neighborhood is on those maps as inequitable and deficient. Many residents live without cars. For them, this is their local and only green park, their back yard. No leafy green, single-family neighborhood here. Surrounded by glass and concrete, the park is critical for the neighborhood's health and well-being. Tall, mature deciduous trees and greenery impact both mental and physical health. So why plan for construction that endangers these trees?

Who does this plan serve? Not neighborhood residents. It does serve affluent bikers who live elsewhere and the educated and cultural elite.

Who does this plan impact?

Those in subsidized housing, badly. The fauna and flora, with more heat islands as grassy areas are covered with concrete. Permanent neighborhood residents of all economic situations, for whom this is the sole green space where they find respite. They're not looking for imposed activation – whatever that is. They want equal access to tree canopy, winter sun, summer shade and Nature. They want the trees properly maintained to prolong their lives as long as possible. Spend money on maintenance. Not on cement.

Who was left out? Interests of nearby permanent residents, including a large local Chinese immigrant community, retirees, children, the elderly, vets, and those in subsidized housing, have been left out.

Why isn't the historic nomination preceding this Master Plan? The DNA refiled the nomination today with SHPO.

The Master Plan was just released to the public. My last question is, what is the rush?

Expression of thanks to City Commissioners

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