

The Villager: Letters to the editor

Hey, Bob — not running

To The Editor:

Re “Stop the silly lawsuits” (letter, by Bob O’Sullivan, April 11):

Bob O’Sullivan’s letter provides insight into the thinking and tactics of that increasingly rare Villager: one who still supports the immensely unpopular radical redesign, unnecessary closing and fencing in of Washington Square Park.

Bob has no tolerance of anyone who lobbies for something different than what the Parks Department has — from on high and with no consultation, survey or study — chosen to “give” us. According to Bob, community activism should be the art of pleasing the powerful as they do what they, in their munificence, choose with our tax dollars and public space. As a strategy for advancing his brand of community involvement, O’Sullivan borrows a page from Karl Rove’s playbook: When the facts are stacked against him, he chooses to ignore the message and insult the messengers.

Without one word responding to my March 21 talking point’s documentation of the deception that the Parks Department used to gain approval for its radical redesign, he accuses me of being “divisive” in “pursuit of publicity.” He asserts that I am “attacking New York University,” in my desire to run for City Council. Had he bothered to actually read our legal filings or court rulings, he would have found that we never mention N.Y.U. The “attack N.Y.U.” lie comes right after he disparages Councilmember Alan Gerson’s “painful and incompetent” tenure.

While I continue to oppose many of Alan’s positions regarding the park redesign, I know of nobody who has devoted himself so selflessly to public service to our community, and I find O’Sullivan’s allegation of Alan’s incompetence inaccurate and obnoxious.

Community Board 2 is another of O’Sullivan’s targets. C.B. 2 representatives and “numerous Democratic clubs” are characterized as “blowhards of the Village political establishment” for trying to stand up for preserving the park so many of us love, and daring to question the three-year construction job and radical transformation that is about to happen. In the world according to O’Sullivan, the struggle for C.B. 2 to insist on reviewing Parks’ full plans before the bulldozers start becomes objectionable grandstanding.

The full C.B. 2 board will vote on Thursday evening, April 19, whether to rescind its earlier approval if Parks continues to refuse to submit its final plans for review. O’Sullivan would have everyone shut up and rubber-stamp whatever the Parks Department thinks is best for us.

All in all, I find that O’Sullivan’s nasty letter represents the desperate flailing of a dwindling but powerful minority. He stands with the Washington Square Park Association and at most a few dozen Villagers in supporting an immensely unpopular radical redesign that has been bulldozed through our community on a road of distortions, lies and withheld information.

Meanwhile, Judson Church recently joined the growing ranks of institutions and officials opposing this plan and the Parks Department’s manipulation of the public process to get it passed. Village Independent Democrats has long been against it, the Greenwich Village Block Associations opposes it, surveys show that some 98 percent of park users are against it, as are the editorial pages of The New York Times, the New York Post, The Villager and the Washington Square News. Even the Washington Square Park Council, of which O’Sullivan was once president, refuses to support the plan.

The only true statement O’Sullivan makes is that most Villagers want the park “renovated as soon as possible.” Certainly, we all want it repaired and improved; but “as soon as possible” means repairing, not radically redesigning. The unpopular redesign plan would close at least half the park for two to three years, possibly much more, and transform its very spirit. Repairs could start next week if Parks would only listen to our community and drop its insistence that it be their radical redesign or nothing.

O’Sullivan reveals his real feelings at the end of his letter when he complains that it took 40 years to change the park’s existing design. Bob O’Sullivan, like the members of the Washington Square Park Association whom I have heard speak, finds the current open assembly and impromptu performances in the park a misuse of this great public space, instead of a unique asset that characterizes the open spirit of Greenwich Village. Hence the park needs a radical redesign so it can be fenced, manicured and admired from Fifth Ave. terraces, while the people who visit it are forced to adapt to a place inhospitable to “hanging out.”

In closing, Mr. O’Sullivan, let me clearly state that I am not running for City Council.

Nor, however, am I running from anyone. Not Parks Commissioner Adrian Benepe, nor our billionaire, privatization-mad mayor, nor the fact-reversing fiction-writing Appellate judges intent upon inventing a revisionist cover for their political fix. Nor, Bob, from the slimy innuendos of a tiny, powerful minority. There are many more Villagers who feel as I do about the park than there are elitists like Bob O’Sullivan who hate the way the park is and want it transformed into something else — and they’re not running either.

Jonathan Greenberg

Greenberg is coordinator, Open Washington Square Park Coalition