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News: Campus News

Protest staged against WSP renovations

by Nick Brennan
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Amid the cheerful songs of holiday carolers at the annual Christmas tree lighting last night in Washington Square Park, a small group of NYU students and community members gathered in protest against the proposed park renovations.

The group, Open Washington Square Park, held signs and handed out fliers in what group organizer and CAS senior Kaveri Marathe, called a “non-disruptive protest” against the park’s redesign.

“We want to spread awareness of the looming danger of the park construction,” said Marathe, a former WSN staff member. “A lot of NYU faculty and students don’t know what is going on in the park.”

The small group of protesters stood behind Manhattan Borough Parks Commissioner Bill Castro as he led the carolers in a countdown to the tree lighting, holding signs that read, “Rejuvenate, don’t excavate” and “Repair, don’t redesign,” as more than 100 carolers looked on.

Over the past year, community activists have filed a series of lawsuits against the parks department, claiming the city failed to adequately disclose information to the community during the reviewing process.

Proposed changes include raising the central plaza around the fountain to ground level and aligning it with the park’s arch, replacing the concrete mounds in the southwest corner with a playground and building new, taller fences around the park.

“I don’t think they should shut the park down — this is NYU’s campus,” GSP freshman Amanda Coleman said. “Doing things like this in the park is what you remember about college, not the classes.”



KEITH LAU/WSN

The BBQ on University Place near campus is one of six restaurants near NYU that failed health inspections.

Steinhardt freshman Libby Carlson questioned where students would graduate if the park were to close.

“It feels like they’re closing our quad,” she said.

Last year, the All-University Commencement was scheduled to take place at Shea Stadium before the university announced in March that, due to pending litigation that halted construction on the park, graduation would be taking place in Washington Square as usual.

If the construction plan is approved by the New York State Appellate Court, the park could be under construction for more than three years, forcing graduation to be relocated, Marathe said.

Maria Derr — chairwoman of Community Board 2 — said she supports the renovations.

“The park hasn’t been renovated in 30 years. Something has to be done,” she said.

“However, I think its good to have students protesting. I may not agree with what they have to say, but they have the right to say it.”

The issue is not simply two-sided, however, said Matt Davis, a community member and director of a documentary on the redesign of the park.

“It is important for people to realize the features of the park that matter most to them,” he said. “Hopefully, we will all learn how to listen.”

Although the park would remain open during construction, Marathe said, it would still detract from the surroundings.

“It is still a construction zone, and no one wants to hear jackhammers while they’re trying to romance someone in the park,” she said.