

May 3, 2006
For Immediate Release

Contact Elena Glasberg 646-942-7729
openwsp@hotmail.com



Unpopular Redesign of Washington Square Park Halted By New LawsUIT

“Bait and Switch” Approval Process, Withholding of Info, and Parks Dept. Pattern of Deception Alleged

New York City, May 3. New York State Supreme Court Justice Emily Goodman agreed to hear arguments this week in a new lawsuit filed by local Greenwich Village residents against the New York City Parks Department. The suit charges that by receiving approvals first, from the Community Board and Landmarks Commission, and later dramatically changing its redesign plans for Washington Square Park, the city failed to comply with legal processes in place for an open and fair review.

The Parks Department has already put and received bids to dramatically redesign the 178-year old Washington Square Park, and plans to break ground on the two to three year project within a few months. In responding to the court’s “Order to Show Cause,” the city agreed that no contracts would be entered into or work performed on the Park prior to the May 18 argument before Justice Goodman. Plaintiffs in the case are Jonathan Greenberg, a local parent and founder of the Open Washington Square Park Coalition, Luther Harris, the city’s best known Washington Square Park historian and author, Fusun Ateser, a disabled resident who uses the park regularly, and Rebecca Parelman, an N.Y.U. freshman living along the park.

In the case, Plaintiff attorney Arlene Boop, of Alterman & Boop argues that a preliminary injunction should be granted restraining the Parks Department from entering into any contracts or commencing work on the Park until its final plans for the redesign are resubmitted to the legally empowered oversight agencies that reviewed the plans last year. The Park plans were dramatically altered after these approvals to transform the performance fountain at the heart of the park into an ornamental fountain, and shrink the size of the park’s popular central plaza by one-third.

“The Parks Department has waged a campaign of deception and withholding of public information critical to the public review process,” plaintiff Greenberg explained. “We all

want the park renovated immediately, but survey after survey has shown that the public loves this park's design, and sees no reason to close much of it for three years to have the heart of our community transformed into a lifeless garden park. The approval of these plans was built upon a classic bait and switch operation."

The lawsuit provides transcripts of public Landmarks Commission hearings in which the Parks Department assured Commissioners and the public that the Park's vibrant central plaza would remain the same. "Had the Landmarks Commission and Community Board known when they approved this plan what we now know, they might never have approved this plan," said Alterman & Boop attorney Arlene Boop. "What is indisputable is that these agencies had a legal right to approve a final plan, and receive vital information in making their decision, and this basic legal process was violated."

For more information about the lawsuit, please contact Carolyn Goodwin at Alterman & Boop LLP, at 212-226-2800. The legal pleadings can be found on the web at www.openwsp.com.