



OFFICE OF THE PRESIDENT
BOROUGH OF MANHATTAN
THE CITY OF NEW YORK

1 Centre Street, 19th floor, New York, NY 10007
(212) 669-8300 p (212) 669-4306 f
163 West 125th Street, 5th floor, New York, NY 10027
(212) 531-1609 p (212) 531-4615 f
www.manhattanbp.nyc.gov

Gale A. Brewer, Borough President

February 4, 2021

The Honorable Bill de Blasio
Mayor
City of New York
City Hall
New York, NY 10007

Dear Mayor de Blasio,

I applaud your recent announcement to cancel contracts with the Trump Organization at Lasker and Wollman skating rinks in Central Park. The City now has an opportunity to consider a new model so that these important City assets are managed first and foremost for the benefit and enjoyment of New Yorkers, not for the profit of individuals or private business.

Central Park is one of the most important and admired public spaces in America. It is New York City's 843-acre backyard, universally beloved as an escape from the stresses of the City and an essential asset for all during the current COVID-19 pandemic. It is imperative, especially during this time of economic peril, that we leverage all available resources to provide well-maintained open space for all New Yorkers.

I write to express my support for the Central Park Conservancy to be awarded a contract to maintain and operate Wollman and Lasker rinks, both of which have been managed under one license agreement held by the Trump Organization, until its contracts were recently terminated. I have much admiration for the work of the Conservancy and have direct experience with their leadership and management team.

This is not just about moving on from the newly-terminated concessionaire. It is about the opportunity to choose a business model that supports the public good over the profit motives of a commercial operator who takes money out of the Park in the form of a return on investments.

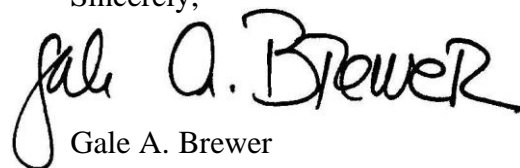
The Central Park Conservancy is a unique partner with a singular mission: to ensure the sustainability of one of the City's most important public assets. The Conservancy invests over \$70 million a year in the maintenance of the Park and over the last 4 decades has invested hundreds of millions of dollars of philanthropic dollars into the Park. Unlike any other private vendor, the Conservancy does not have a profit motive; its sole mission is to maintain and improve the Park in perpetuity. The rescue of Central Park and its resurgence as an icon of the City under the management of the Conservancy is a New York success story which has brought acclaim to the City, established the Park as a major tourist attraction, and secured an irreplaceable amenity for its residents.

There are four main reasons awarding a contract to the Conservancy for both rinks provides the best outcome for the City:

- Maximizing investment in the park's facilities: For-profit concessionaire's operating in the park (by definition) take money out of the park that ideally should be leveraged to reinvest in maintenance, programming, and other activities. Should the Conservancy take over operations, 100 percent of revenues raised, net of expenses would be reinvested in the Park and the rinks, instead of enriching private enterprise.
- Renewing focus on public use and the visitor experience: When these rinks originally opened decades ago the public was charged a nominal fee, and free programming was available. When the City could no longer afford to maintain these facilities, license agreements were granted to concessionaires. At that moment, the priority of the rinks shifted from serving the public, to building profits for a private enterprise, regardless of the impact on public access. While the rinks would still need to generate revenue, allowing the Conservancy to manage both rinks would once again allow the focus to return to serving the needs of the community, prioritizing underserved communities.
- Protecting the city's investment: It is well known that Wollman Rink requires significant capital improvements. It is my understanding that the Conservancy is prepared to make a significant investment in Wollman Rink through philanthropic gifts. The nonprofit already has an established track record of working with the City to improve facilities in the park. The \$150 million project to reimagine Lasker Pool & Rink in East Harlem is set to break ground next year, which will improve the visitor experience, provide greater community access at the north end of the Park, and restore the natural setting surrounding the rink.
- Creating operational efficiencies: There is a great opportunity to create financial and operational efficiencies through linking the management of both rinks with operational management of the Park itself, including the coordination of programming, oversight, and maintenance. This would allow even more resources to remain in the park for long-term maintenance. Throughout the pandemic, the Conservancy's operations and maintenance staff have been unsung essential workers who have ensured that the Park remained a clean, welcoming, safe oasis for New Yorkers. I have no doubt they will bring the same dedication to the rinks.

The City made the right decision in terminating the agreements with the Trump Organization, but it is critical for the residents of New York City that there is no disruption in the operations of the rinks and that the rinks are managed with a community-first ethos. With that in mind, we strongly urge the City to enter into an agreement with the Central Park Conservancy to operate the Wollman and Lasker facilities. It is time these precious assets are managed by an entity that has shown its commitment to the City and the Park, that shares the values of all New Yorkers across the five boroughs, and that will invest in the Park on behalf of those who need it most.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Gale A. Brewer". The signature is written in a cursive, slightly slanted style.

Gale A. Brewer
Manhattan Borough President

CC: Betsy Smith, President and CEO, Central Park Conservancy