

SEPTEMBER 15, 2003

Comfort and Oy! Park Amenities Cause Friction

All was quiet on the western front of Manhattan in Community Board 7's Sept. 2 meeting, when the group voted unanimously to approve the initial blueprints for a concession stand and restroom on West 70th Street in the new Riverside Park South. But the contention-free green light belied the rancorous nature of a more than two year effort to bring food to hungry *flâneurs*.

Under the current design, the food stand and two wheelchair-accessible bathrooms will occupy a structure whose walls undulate. Further keeping with the river theme, the structure will be covered in mosaic tiles in three shades of watery blue. The construction, operation and maintenance of the space are the sole responsibility of Steven Colucci, president of the special-events business Colucci and Co. He will invest about \$500,000 in the project and will not receive any other private or public funding during the course of his lease, which runs through 2008 and may be extended through 2009.

Batya Lewton, vice president of the Coalition for a Livable West Side, balked at the plan, telling *The Observer* that the responsibility for the park's public bathroom should fall on Donald Trump's shoulders. Riverside Park South (which will eventually run from 72nd Street down to 59th Street and is now open to 65th Street), Ms. Lewton pointed out, exists because of a 1992 agreement in which the city required Mr. Trump and his partners to construct and maintain the park in exchange for permission to build the 16 high-rise apartment buildings that run adjacent to the park.

Michael Bradley, executive director of the Riverside South Planning Corporation, a nonprofit organization

that outlined the original design of the park on the land owned by Hudson Waterfront Associates, said Ms. Lewton had a gap in her reasoning. The city only required that Mr. Trump and H.W.A. spend \$13.4 million on the first phase of the park—from 72nd Street to 70th Street—and yet the partners had already doled out over \$14 million when the space opened in April 2001, Mr. Bradley told *The Observer*. At that point, certain amenities—such as a pair

ate their own restrooms at 62nd Street when that segment of the park opens. (There are also bathrooms at 74th Street.) Besides, he suggested, no matter who takes responsibility for the stand, "the public will get a concession stand and a comfort station that will be as nice as if [Trump] built it."

The second source of tension in the concession stand's creation began over two years ago, when Michael O'Neal—the restaurateur whose family owns the Boat Basin Cafe on 79th Street in Riverside Park—made a bid to the board to operate a scaled-down restaurant with waiter service in the 70th Street space. Mr. O'Neal told *The Observer* last week that he would have

"There were people on the board who felt that would be an outrage," Ms. Adler recalled, stating that she supported the restaurant-style table service vision.

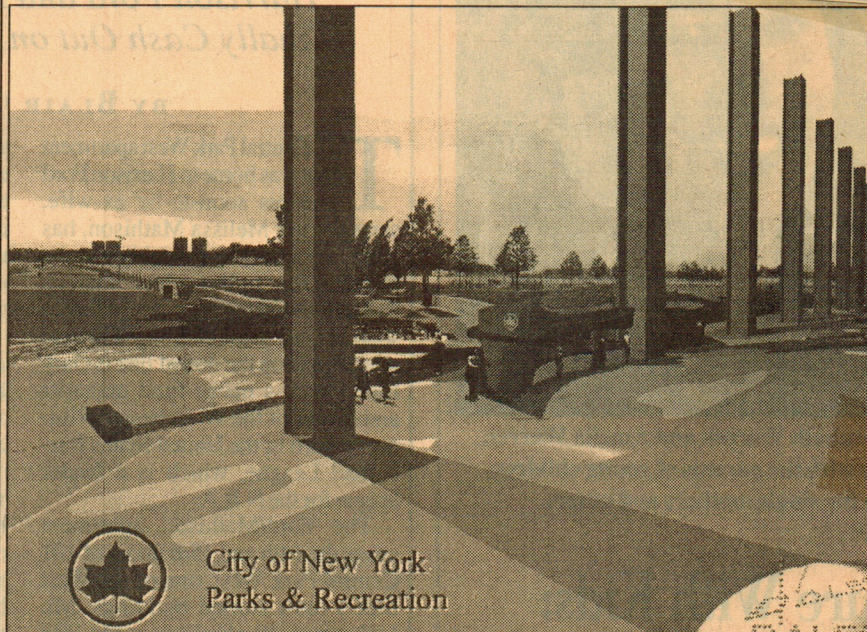
The board subsequently rejected Mr. O'Neal's plan, and he abandoned the project in frustration. Later, Mr. Colucci was brought on board as his replacement. His version, called the Bella Vista Café, will serve salad, seafood, Tuscan sandwiches, wraps and drinks, but will have no waiters.

"I personally feel that's very unfortunate," said Ms. Adler of the scaled-down eatery. "The community board doesn't have the right to dictate those kinds of things," said Mr. O'Neal (who himself served on a community board for 25 years) of the board's rejection of his table service establishment, "the whole deal smells to me."

On the other hand, Mr. Colucci told *The Observer* that he was "very, very happy with Community Board 7. They work very hard."

While the board still awaits more concrete designs from Mr. Colucci, the stand, thanks to the approval of the Parks Department and the Art Commission, should open next summer.

—Benjamin Ryman



City of New York
Parks & Recreation

Feeding the *flâneurs*: An initial rendering for a concession stand and public restroom, coming soon to the new Riverside Park South.

of toilets—were still missing. So the Parks Department decided to direct the partners to their spend money on other, still-to-be-completed aspects of the park, while the responsibility to provide restrooms was transferred to another private party. Mr. Bradley added that Mr. Trump and H.W.A. will cre-

needed to run a full-service establishment in order to turn a profit, arguing that a simple stand was too risky. But according to Barbara Adler, co-chair of the board's parks committee, some of her colleagues were loathe to create tables that would be "privatized" for paying customers only.