

January 15, 2021

*Via Email*

Commissioner Erik Kulleseid  
NYS Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation  
Albany NY, 12238

Dear Commissioner Kulleseid,

We are writing to express our deep frustration at learning about the State's decision to close Marsha P. Johnson State Park for a six-month renovation project. This project is ill-timed, and a full closure is unwarranted. We urge you to immediately halt the park's full closure.

Ten months into a global pandemic, it is widely known that open space access has multiple healthful impacts. Residents can safely socially distance, escape cramped apartments, exercise, and experience the mental health benefits of being in nature. Closing this park while the virus is peaking and continues to spread in the community fails to account for the physical and mental health of New Yorkers.

This park is part of a legacy of community activism to reclaim the waterfront that groups like NAG and GWAPP were intimately involved in. Neighbors organized to shut down a polluting and illegally operating waste transfer station, blocked a proposal to expand a barge processing facility, and rallied against construction of a power plant to demand that more parks be built. Years of advocacy led to this park's designation in 2000 and its opening in 2007. Last year when the park was named for Marsha P. Johnson its activist identity was reaffirmed. This process, however, flies in the face of community engagement and does not prioritize its needs during this crisis.

We understand that elements of the renovation project are worthwhile and important – particularly construction of the park house/education center and upgrading stormwater management systems – but the case has not been made to justify a full park closure. Furthermore, the State has not collaborated with the community to explore opportunities to pursue phased renovation while maintaining public access.

Mr. Commissioner we strongly urge you to halt the current closure plan and work with community members on a strategy that best meets our needs. We look forward to swift resolution of this important issue.

Sincerely,

  
Anthony Buissereth  
Executive Director

cc: Governor Andrew M. Cuomo

Brooklyn Borough President Eric L. Adams

State Senator Brian P. Kavanagh, D-26

Assembly Member Emily Gallagher, D-50

Council Member Stephen Levin, D-33