



Manhattan Community Board 7
Joint Meeting of Preservation and Parks & Environment Committees
Hearing on Proposed AMNH Gilder Center Expansion
September 20, 2016
Tupper Thomas, Executive Director

Good evening, my name is Tupper Thomas, and I am the Executive Director of New Yorkers for Parks, the city's independent research-based advocacy organization championing quality parks for all New Yorkers. We have been closely following the American Museum of Natural History's plans for the construction of the Center for Science, Education, and Innovation. I will restrict my testimony tonight to the plans and impact this project will have on Theodore Roosevelt Park.

We believe that the Center, as planned and presented to New Yorkers for Parks, will be a fitting addition to the Museum's campus and to the surrounding park. We are pleased that the progression of the design for this expansion has incorporated community concerns and feedback, and we are especially pleased to see that this most recent revision of the design will impact less parkland and fewer trees than what had originally been planned. In response to community concerns over the proposed removal of nine mature trees, two will be preserved, and the landscape around them will be better designed to ensure their long-term health. To make up for the loss of the seven other mature trees, we are pleased to hear that the Museum is committed to planting six new canopy trees, and 13 understory trees within the park, as well as additional tree plantings throughout New York City.

While some fencing will be retained, we believe the reconfigured and widened entrance at 79th Street and Columbus Avenue will provide a more welcoming entrance to the park, while increasing accessibility overall. Additionally, the proposed setbacks of the building's higher floors will allow light and air to reach the Arthur Ross Terrace that runs parallel to the 81st Street perimeter of the park and Museum. The expansion of the Margaret Mead Green will also allow for better circulation in the park, while creating new space for both passive and active recreation.

It is our understanding that the institution's original land grant agreement with the City was upheld in 1999, and the footprint of this new Gilder Center would fall within the original Master Plan for the Museum. For these reasons, NY4P does not believe this expansion constitutes an alienation of the ¼ acre of parkland that would be impacted by the project. We are pleased to see the Museum's commitment to soliciting community input and feedback in the ultimate design of this space, and feel that appropriate concessions have thus far been made to minimize the impact of this project while improving and retaining the original character of this lovely corner of Theodore Roosevelt Park. We offer our approval to the Museum's planned expansion and construction of the Gilder Center. Thank you.