

COMMENTS OF EDITH SHANKER ON APPLICATION FOR LIQUOR LICENSE FOR THE PAVILION RESTAURANT IN UNION SQUARE PARK. JUNE 14, 2012, CB5 FULL BOARD MEETING

My name is Edith Shanker of the USCC. I oppose privatizing the pavilion in Union Square Park by way of a for-profit restaurant and the restaurateur's application for a liquor license for use in the pavilion and the North Plaza. There is a glut of restaurants and bars within a stone's throw of the park. A restaurant in the pavilion is not an amenity needed by the community. After almost four decades of deterioration of the pavilion, the residents are now entitled to reclaim the "Women's and Children's Pavilion" for community uses—ones of real benefit with appropriate programs and events for the youngest to oldest of our residents.

My main concern about a liquor license for the pavilion and the North Plaza is the proximity to young children on its south flank and to older children on its north flank. I believe it is deleterious, not beneficial, to both groups of young people, because of their impressionable ages, being able to see adults engaged in a sedentary, non-active lifestyle-- eating and drinking daytime through evening in the pavilion and the North Plaza. Children come to parks to let off steam, to exercise, to engage in outdoor games and sports. Adapting such unhealthy leisure activity is at the heart of the epidemic of childhood obesity and can lead to early experimentation with alcohol. Let's face it, serving liquor so close to where children play in our parks is not a beneficial mix.

What our older children need is year-round safe and healthy indoor and outdoor activities suitable for their age. Unfortunately, there now is no such place in the park where a young teenager can go after school. They have been left out of the plan for the park's use. Currently, middle schoolers are too old for the playground, and older children's major activity is severely limited to roller-blading and skate boarding after school along the Park's eastern pavement or sometimes even in the Union Square East island at Fourteenth Street—a very dangerous intersection with traffic and its fumes flowing north and south around them. Their weekly use of the North Plaza is restricted to three days after our wonderful greenmarket closes at 6 PM and after school on Tuesdays and Thursdays. No doubt those children would lose even that access to the Plaza should the al fresco dining and drinking restaurant patrons object to their loud and robust play. Full use of the pavilion and the Plaza, as in Columbus Park, for sports and socially desirable activities would begin to address the needs of our apartment-bound, footloose, young people. It would enable them to gain a sense of being part of a community.

Simply put, what we want for Union Square Park's pavilion and its expansive North Plaza is what a real park should be without benefit of alcohol or an all-hours private restaurant. Let the park continue to be a public park, not a cash cow to benefit commercial interests which are not of benefit to children and the community. I urge, you, the appointed members of our community board to represent what is truly beneficial for our children by unequivocally denying the requested alcohol license for use in Union Square Park.