



August 11, 2026

Hon. Zohran Mamdani
Mayor, City of New York
City Hall
New York, NY 10007

Tricia Shimamura Commissioner
NYC Department of Parks & Recreation
The Arsenal, Central Park
830 Fifth Avenue
New York, NY 10065

Re: Demolition Plans for the Tony Dapolito Recreation Center, 1 Clarkson Street, Manhattan

Dear Mayor Mamdani and Commissioner Shimamura:

We write to strenuously oppose the continuing plans by the Parks Department to pursue demolition of the landmarked Tony Dapolito Recreation Center at 1 Clarkson Street, Manhattan, in contravention of the campaign pledge by Mayor Mamdani to repair and reopen the Center. The rationales for doing so offered by Parks Commissioner Shimamura at an August 5 meeting convened by Borough President Hoylman-Sigal were deeply troubling, reflecting the continuing refusal of the Department to listen to overwhelming calls for the Center's preservation, and has far-reaching and destructive implications for the Parks Department's maintenance of its scores of other historic properties.

Since the Parks Department first announced in the summer of 2024 its intention to seek demolition of the beloved landmarked center, shuttered since 2020, they have sought to convince the public that it was impractical or infeasible to repair, preserve, and productively reuse the building for recreation purposes. We and others long maintained this claim was false, and earlier this year it was incontrovertibly disproven when FOIed documents showed the Parks Department's own analyses indicated the building could be repaired,

and Parks Department consultants had even drawn up plans for doing so. And yet the Parks Department continued to pursue demolition plans.

With this claim now debunked, at the August 5 meeting we were presented with a new and perhaps even more troubling rationale for demolishing the Dapolito Center: it was simply easier than repairing and maintaining it, and any of the many recreational uses that could be located in a repaired building have now been committed to a new recreation center at 388 Hudson Street.

These two justifications are especially problematic for several reasons. The public and Community Board 2 have been emphatically clear from the beginning that while a new recreation center at 388 Hudson Street was welcome, it should supplement rather than replace the existing Tony Dapolito Center. The clear message has been that the Dapolito Center should be repaired and reopened for recreational uses, containing those activities best suited for this building, while those which make the most sense in the new center should be located there.

The Tony Dapolito Center site must continue to provide locker rooms, changing stations, and other enclosed facilities connected to the adjacent outdoor pool. While some of the past uses at the Dapolito Center may be best suited for the new facilities at 388 Hudson, undoubtedly the remainder of Dapolito's space could easily be utilized for any number of recreation-related uses planned for and needed in this area. In spite of this, the Parks Department has moved ahead with planning to remove all recreational uses other than pool changing stations from the Dapolito site, thus claiming there are no other necessary uses which can be housed in the majority of the building, necessitating its demolition.

This is a situation purely of the Parks Department's making, and entirely the result of the Parks Department's refusal to listen to the clear and consistent feedback they have received from stakeholders and representatives of the community. It is also reversible, in spite of the Parks Department's claims that it's locked into this plan.

Secondly, even if one accepts the Parks Department's unsubstantiated and questionable assertion that it would be more expensive and less efficient to repair and locate recreational facilities at the historic Tony Dapolito Center, to claim that as justification to demolish a landmarked structure has broad and deeply disturbing implications. The Parks Department is one of the largest owners of landmarked properties in New York City, with literally scores of landmarked buildings and structures within the portfolio it's responsible for maintaining. This includes the majority of its Manhattan recreation centers, many of which are as old as or older than the Dapolito Center, and like Dapolito were originally built as public bathhouses. Many of these were updated and adapted to present-day needs and standards, as Dapolito can be.

The Department's portfolio also includes numerous other landmarked recreation centers throughout the five boroughs, from Brooklyn's McCarren and Sunset Park Play Centers to Queens' Astoria Pool to the Bronx's Crotona Play Center. Additionally, iconic landmarked structures across the city, including all 23 houses of the Historic House Trust, Coney Island's Parachute Jump and Cyclone, Greenwich Village's Washington Square Arch and Brooklyn's Soldiers and Sailors Memorial Arch, Central Park's Carousel, Belvedere Castle, Marionette Theater, and even the Arsenal, where the Parks Department's own headquarters are located, are among the many landmarked properties owned by the Parks Department. One could easily argue that any of these structures would be cheaper to demolish than repair or maintain, and that pure efficiency would call for their replacement. To allow the landmarked Tony Dapolito Recreation Center to be demolished on this basis would mean the same argument could be applied to any of these beloved structures, to which landmark designation was granted to ensure their

preservation. It should be noted that all these designations took place as part of a robust public process, in which the Parks Department participated. The Department is now seeking to, in effect, nullify that action post facto.

The Parks Department moving ahead with its demolition plan would also make a lie of the Mayor's clear and well-publicized campaign pledge not to allow this to happen on his watch, and his statements that he would reverse the path towards demolition pursued by his predecessor, Mayor Adams. Thousands of New Yorkers have sent messages to the Parks Department, the current and prior Mayor, and local elected officials calling for this plan to be rejected, and repair and reopening of the Tony Dapolito Recreation Center to commence. It's clear lacking so far is the leadership and political will to do so. But both of these are entirely within the realm of possibility.

For these and many other reasons, we urge you to immediately change course, and put forward a plan to repair and reopen the Tony Dapolito Recreation Center, as promised by Mayor Mamdani.

Sincerely,



Andrew Berman
Executive Director
Village Preservation

www.villagepreservation.org



Sommer Omar
Founder
Coalition to Save the Public Recreation Center Downtown

www.sprcd.org

Cc: Manhattan Borough President Brad Hoylman-Sigal

City Councilmember Carl Wilson

Community Board 2, Manhattan

Assemblymember Deborah Glick

Assemblymember Grace Lee

City Council Landmarks Subcommittee Chair Christopher Marte

Brad Lander

David Siffert