



# Ribbon cutting for Seward Park upgrades on Lower East Side



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The ribbon cutting at Seward Park on Jan. 16. (Photo by Gabe Herman)

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City officials and Lower East Side community members celebrated on Thursday the renovation of Seward Park — the first completed project in the city's Parks Without Borders program.

The \$5.9 million reconstruction of the park, which is bordered by East Broadway and Essex Street, included renovations to several areas. These included the courtyard around the Seward Park Library, an adjacent garden, a promenade on Essex Street, and sidewalks around the perimeter.

The project also added new pavements and curbs, benches and tables, a storytelling alcove, fitness equipment, new lighting and plants. Fence heights were also lowered, as the existing fences were cut down to size.

Seward Park – named for William Seward, the New York statesman and secretary of state, William Seward, who helped spearhead the U.S. purchase of Alaska in 1867 – opened in 1903 and was the first permanent, municipally-built playground in the United States, according to NYC Parks.

Officials at Thursday’s ribbon cutting noted that before the renovation, the park had been much less welcoming.

“Seward Park looks amazing,” said Matthew Washington, Manhattan deputy borough president. “I can remember all the nights I would come by and it seems like a dark cloud was over it, but now the sun is shining on it.”



The Seward Park Library and part of the renovated area of Seward Park. (Photo by Gabe Herman)

Parks Commissioner Mitchell Silver said that in 2014 he was introduced by Mayor de Blasio as commissioner at Seward Park. He recalled being told by locals that the park looked a lot better for that ceremony than it had the previous week.

“I never forgot that,” Silver said. He thanked the Seward Park Conservancy for its advocacy.

“And here’s the best part, it was on time and under budget,” he added.

Silver noted that a temporary sign at the “Togo” statue, honoring the heroic leader of an Alaskan dog sled team, would soon be replaced with a permanent plaque, with support from the Seward Park Conservancy and Disney +.



(Photo by Gabe Herman)

“One of the unique aspects of this park is its beautiful library,” Silver said, adding that the renovation had “married” the Seward Park branch and the park.

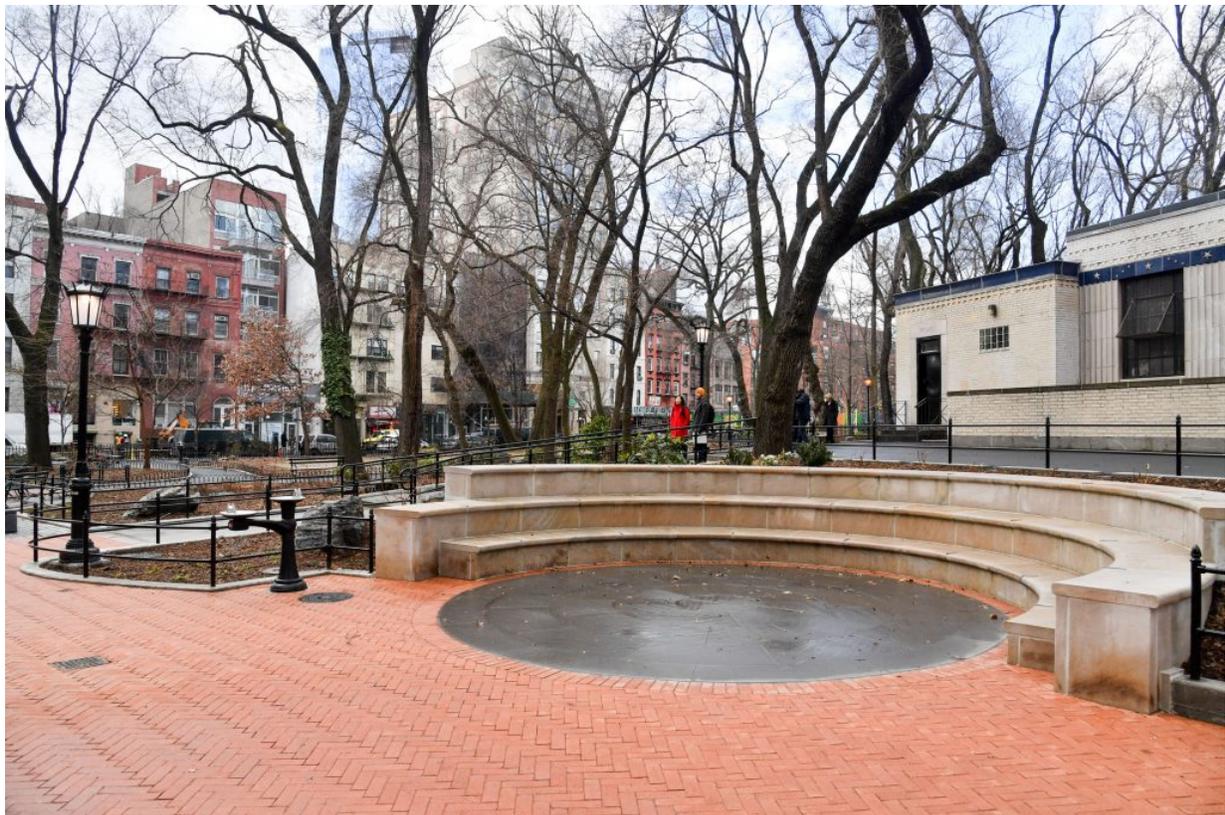
Vicki Been, Deputy Mayor for Housing and Economic Development, said she came to Seward Park 15 years ago for a program, “and it was not the pleasant experience that this is today.”

“Parks Without Borders,” Been added, “is about breaking down barriers and making things accessible to all our residents, making all New Yorkers feel like every amenity is for them and open to them.”

Parks Without Borders has the stated goal to upgrade city parks and make them more accessible. It was announced in 2015 with a call for New Yorkers to nominate sites they thought would benefit most from the project.

Seward Park is one of the eight selected showcase projects, which are getting \$40 million in funding. The others include Fort Greene Park, Prospect Park, Van Cortlandt Park, Hugh Grant Circle/Virginia Park and Playground, Jackie Robinson Park, Faber Park, and Flushing Meadows Corona Park. An additional \$10 million is also going to 40 other capital projects in the works.

Other officials at the Thursday ceremony and ribbon cutting included Council Member Margaret Chin, State Senator Brian Kavanagh, and Bill Castro, Manhattan's Parks Borough Commissioner.



(NYC Parks / Daniel Avila)

“This is now your park and garden,” said Amy Robinson, President of the Seward Park Conservancy. She quoted Marcus Tullius Cicero: “If you have a garden and a library, you have everything you need.” Robinson added, “We are lucky enough to have both on the Lower East Side.”

Trever Holland, Chair of Community Board 3's Waterfront and Resiliency Committee, said the park was used by a diverse community of people in the area. "So we're happy to see the investment in parks, especially in this neighborhood," he said.

After the ceremony, Robinson and Holland said there were separate efforts underway to renovate the park's Jacob H. Schiff Fountain, which was dedicated in 1895 and is in disrepair. The Seward Park Conservancy is trying to raise funds, along with funds hopefully coming from NYC Parks as well, Robinson and Holland said. They added that they were confident the project would get done, though there was no specific timetable yet.