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WATCHTOWER PLEDGE \$5.5 MILLION TO FIX BRIDGE PARK 2

EXCLUSIVE: Witnesses pledge \$5.5M to fix crummy Dumbo park

By Lauren Gill
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Community Newspaper Group / Jaime Lutz

A short walk from Brooklyn Bridge Park, Bridge Park 2 is mostly just a large, crumbling lot, bereft of even a basketball hoop — though there is a small, rusty playground tucked away behind some fences.

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They will clean up before they leave.

The Jehovah's Witnesses will give the city \$5.5 million to overhaul a run-down Dumbo park the organization promised to make-over more than a decade ago as part of a lucrative rezoning deal, after local pols demanded the group finally honor its pledge before it sells all its land and decamps from the borough for good.

The sect — officially the Watchtower Bible and Tract Society — believes the money will be enough to cover its share of the long-stalled plans for the land.

"Watchtower has set aside this amount to cover the funds officials estimated the city would need to take over this project and complete the current vision for the park," the group told this paper.

The religious outfit offered to fix the moribund Bridge Park 2 — [a slab of crumbling concrete next to York Street station](#) and [quite possibly the crummiest park in the city](#) — in 2004, when the city agreed to let the group build a huge housing complex on a massive parking lot next door at 85 Jay St.

Plans [at the time](#) included a turf baseball field, a new playground, and a lighted path from the subway station to the neighboring Farragut Houses development.

But Watchtower never actually built the new property, and the planning process for the park facelift dragged for years through various design iterations, eventually hitting an impasse over cost and labor — the Witnesses wanted to [use its members as volunteer workers](#), which is not how the city typically does business.

The group’s announcement last month that [it is selling 85 Jay St.](#) — now incredibly valuable thanks to the residential rezoning — [as part of its mass exodus from the neighborhood it has long called home](#) sparked renewed calls for the Witnesses to keep their vow and put some of the massive windfall to good use.



“It is unacceptable that since the Watchtower committed to work with the Parks Department, over 11 years have passed, the site has seen no improvements, and remains a piece of barren asphalt,” a host of local pols and business leaders wrote in a letter to the organization in December.

It remains to be seen whether \$5.5 million will be enough to take the park from drab to fab, however — the parks department said it can’t estimate the total costs without a concrete plan for the park in place. Watchtower honchos say they have one ready, based on the city’s most recent requests for the site, which now include a skate park and a multipurpose field.

Those pushing for the park renewal say they also want more details before celebrating, but the pledge is still good news.

“Without seeing the details, that seems like a significant step in the right direction,” said Councilman Steve Levin (D–Boerum Hill), one of the letter-writing pols. “I would like to sit down in a formal way with them and the parks department to see exactly what the plans are.”

Reach reporter Lauren Gill at lgill@cnglocal.com or by calling (718) 260–2511.

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Reader Feedback

Terry Goldsmith from Brooklyn says:

This is commendable that the Watchtower is stepping up. They have over \$200 billion in worldwide assets, \$5 mill is chump change to them. They existed here for 100 years tax free while they built up their equities.

Today, 4:15 am

Gb from Heights says: