



June 29, 2020

Honorable Mitchell J. Silver, FAICP
Commissioner
New York City Department of Parks and Recreation

Dear Commissioner Silver,

The Bronx Council for Environmental Quality applauds your recently announced decision to review and rename parkland in honor of black Americans and call to your attention to a park in urgent need of renaming: John Mullaly Park, located on 1055 Jerome Avenue in the Bronx. Since January 2019, BCEQ, in concert with community organizations, has urged DPR to rename this park in light of its namesake's historical contribution to racial violence in New York City. In June 2020, we reaffirmed our commitment to racial justice with a statement calling upon "decision-makers who govern our land use and environmental policies to recognize the disproportionate effect of disease and violence on communities of color." The name "John Mullaly Park" is an enduring reminder of racial violence in the City of New York and should be repudiated with all deliberate speed.

Though cited on the DPR website as the "father" of Parks, Mullaly's place in history is equally secure as prime instigator of the 1863 Draft Riots. These riots remain one of the most devastating incidents in NYC history and have left a lasting mark on US race relations. During the Civil War, Mullaly was an anti-war "Copperhead" Democrat who declared at an anti-draft rally at Union Square rally on May 19, 1863 "the war to be wicked, cruel and unnecessary, and carried on solely to benefit the negroes, and advised resistance to conscription if ever the attempt should be made to enforce the law."¹ His editorials inspired civilian armed resistance to the draft that led to the death of an estimated 500 people, the lynching or beating of at least 19 black New Yorkers, and the displacement of 5000 black Manhattanites to Brooklyn.²

In naming this park after John Mullaly, the City of New York gave its tacit blessing to its namesake contribution to this devastating chapter in our city's history. Renaming this park now is an urgent necessity precisely *because* Mullaly made equally important contributions to our city's modern park system. The Historical Signs Division of NYC DPR has the opportunity to consider how Mullaly's racist history was ignored, and why it did not disqualify him from arguably the highest honor that DPR can bestow upon an individual, a park naming.

BCEQ calls upon DPR to recognize the impact of this 19th century history on our government and our city and to support the renaming. Like all parks throughout NYC, this park is beloved, and actively maintained by communities of color who work together with DPR to keep their neighborhoods healthy and green. We can no longer allow Mullaly's racist history to stain this parkland and confront our Bronx communities with the daily reminder of his contribution to racial violence.

Sincerely,

Robert Fanuzzi, Ph.D.
President

Joyce Hogi
President Emeritus

cc: Bronx Commissioner Iris Rodriguez-Rosa

¹ Man, Albon P. "The Church and the New York Draft Riots of 1863." Records of the American Catholic Historical Society of Philadelphia, vol. 62, no. 1, 1951, pp. 33–50. JSTOR, JSTOR, www.jstor.org/stable/44210148.

² "D." In *The Encyclopedia of New York City: Second Edition*, edited by T.JACKSON KENNETH, KELLER LISA, and FLOOD NANCY V., 340-88. Yale University Press, 2010. Accessed June 29, 2020. www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctt5vm1cb.9.