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Von King Park: The Buck Stops Where?

Other parks are cleaner. But who is responsible for keeping our park clean?

Bed-Stuy, NY

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By Christopher J. Brooks (Open Post) - (<http://patch.com/users/khristopher-j-brooks>) August 23, 2011 6:23 pm ET | (<http://contribute.patch.com/moderation/230841>)



Although both parks have roughly the same number of staff assigned to clean them, it appears that Fort Greene Park (<http://www.nycgovparks.org/parks/FortGreenePark>) is better maintained than Bedford-Stuyvesant's Herbert Von King Park (<http://www.nycgovparks.org/parks/herbertvonking>).

Inspection reports between 2008 and 2011 from New York City's Department of Parks and Recreation (<http://www.nycgovparks.org/index.php>), interviews with local park-goers and several walk-throughs of both parks show a glaringly different picture of the upkeep between the two parks, which are less than two miles apart.

Although Fort Greene Park (30.16 acres) is three times as big as Von King Park (7.82 acres), still there are sections of both parks that can merit comparison.

At Fort Greene Park, most litter finds its way into the trash bins. The lawn boasts lush green grass that has been watered and mowed regularly and meticulously-- enough so that park-goers feel comfortable enough to lay down or take a nap right in the grass.

However, at Von King Park, trash is sprinkled across the walkways, playground and center lawn. The lawn boasts jungle-like overgrown grass and weed, large spans of dirt patches where grass should be, and missing bars from the fence that outlines the lawn.

Local residents who frequent Von King Park agree that Fort Greene Park appears to be kept much cleaner, but they say the long commute to Fort Greene Park keeps them from making the trek.

"This is our neighborhood park," said Taleisha Hunter of Bed-Stuy. "I shouldn't have to go that far for a nice park. This should be as clean as all the others."

Earlier this month, Bed-Stuy Patch a three-part investigation looking into why Von King Park has lacked adequate upkeep in recent years. Local residents called for parks department employees to clear the litter, trim the shrubbery and re-paint the park benches and amphitheater.

Since then, the benches have received a fresh coat of dark green paint, but the trash remains scattered across the ground and the grass inches taller and taller.

Philip Abramson, a spokesman for the parks department, said, "a crew mowed the lawn and maintained the area around the benches, flowerbeds, lamp posts and perimeter" on August 8 and 9. He added that, "Our horticulture crews have continued to wood chip and weed the park on a weekly basis."

Abramson said there are three parks employees charged with cleaning Fort Greene Park along with roughly 6 to 12 job training workers. Von King Park also has three dedicated cleaners who are also "augmented by the mobile crews who clean and pick up the garbage daily," Abramson said.

“In addition, the central Borough Crews and Horticulture staff, and the Von King Recreation Center workers, also help the district staff in cleaning and maintaining the park,” Abramson said.



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Bed-Stuy Patch caught up with two of the three parks department staffers assigned to clean Von King Park. The workers, who did not want their names mentioned in this article, said their job was solely to empty the trash bins and re-fill them with a new bag.

The workers boarded a garbage truck, stopped at every trash bin in the park, emptied them and ignored the litter laying on the ground.

“We just do the trash cans,” the male worker said before jumping back into the truck. “It’s a whole separate parks department staff that’s suppose to clean up the garbage.”

A Bed-Stuy Patch reporter contacted the [Herbert Von King Cultural Arts and Recreation Center](http://www.nycgovparks.org/facilities/recreationcenters/Bo88) (<http://www.nycgovparks.org/facilities/recreationcenters/Bo88>) to confirm if the center's staff indeed helps clean the park. When reached, Lemuel Mial, the center's manager, did not wish to comment on the center's part in park upkeep and referred all questions to the parks department public affairs office.

But perhaps, some of the extra litter that remains lying around, even after trash pickup, can be reduced if the park-goers and other residents shared in the responsibility of throwing their own trash in the garbage instead of on the park grounds.

For example: Ronald Stevenson of Bed-Stuy said he believes the Fort Greene Park is cleaner, partly because the people who use that park are more likely to throw their garbage in a trash bin.

Those who visit Von King Park aren't that polite, Stevenson said; "They don't pick up after themselves here, it's just sad," he said. "If I was the trash collectors, I wouldn't clean up after grown folks either."

In the analysis Fort Greene Park received an "acceptable" cleanliness grade



inspectors labeled the park's litter, benches and playground equipment unacceptable. A similar unacceptable grade for litter was filed for Von King Park on August 30, 2010.

In the final installment of this three-part series on cleaning up Von King Park, we will talk about the Parks Department's role in helping to improve Von King Park's condition, and also what the community is doing on its own to help change things.

[Click here to read the first story in this series, Von King Park: The Pride or Shame of Bed-Stuy? \(.../.../.../articles/von-king-park-the-pride-or-shame-of-bed-stuy\)](#)

PHOTO GALLERY

