

Central Park on Thin Ice

Although there will be no new money at all for Central Park projects in this year's capital budget, the one major item already contracted for is in danger of going desperately wrong. Almost \$4 million will be spent—a distressingly disproportionate amount for a single project in light of the park's unmet needs—on redoing the Wollman skating rink.

The work is required because the Schaefer summer concerts have cracked the rink's concrete slab. They have also demolished the surrounding landscape to a degree that repair and maintenance can no longer cope with. The debate heating up now is between the champions of the concerts, who want the rink rebuilt to accommodate them and who claim that popular democracy is at stake, and the Parks Department, which is in the curious position of fighting to keep the park alive.

The sensitive, naturalistic scheme that the Parks Department proposes for rebuilding the rink for winter skating and a summer pond is an exemplary exercise in park design—for a change. With the corrective landscaping (contributions from the sponsors do not begin to defray the cost of damage), this could be a significant step toward the kind of park rehabilitation that is so badly needed.

But the issue is being warped by the concerts' proponents into accusations of "elitism" or exclusionary policies. The real concern is use versus abuse, or destructive overkill. Certainly if the Delacorte Theater was denied a new and permanent concrete structure on the grounds of violation of land and primary park use, the same standard must apply here. The park is an amenity; anything that destroys that amenity defeats the essential purpose of the park.