

Parks Chief Says Permits Rarely Needed

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Published: September 23, 1999

The New York City Parks and Recreation Department's review of its rules governing the use of public parks has set off a groundswell of criticism over a little-noticed and rarely enforced requirement that large groups must obtain permits before holding events.

The controversy began when the Parks Department, after a review of its administrative rules, published a notice in The City Record on Aug. 16 announcing revisions, including a slight change in the definition of groups required to get permits.

The published notice, first reported yesterday by The Daily News, called attention to the seldom enforced 1989 administrative rule, which requires permits for groups of 21 or more who hold special events such as picnics, concerts, readings and athletic events. An application for a permit costs \$25.

Last night, 17 people made impassioned pleas during a public

hearing not to restrict access to the parks. More than 70 people attended the meeting at the Parks Department offices in Central Park, breaking into spirited cheers and applause at times.

But Henry J. Stern, the city's Parks Commissioner, announced at both the public hearing and an earlier news conference that the notice in the City Record did not signal any change in either the substance or enforcement of the large-gathering rule. He said that groups planning informal picnics or birthday parties would not have to apply for a permit, even if they included 21 or more people.

"No one intends to enforce this against families or groups of friends who are having a reasonable picnic," he said. "You come in with your friends. If your friends meet more friends, that's all the better. We want people to enjoy the parks."

Mr. Stern added that the rule was retained after the department's review because it lets park officials control inappropriate behavior, such as the playing of loud music, and keep track of large protests and athletic competitions.

Smaller events involving 20 people or fewer may also be required to have a permit if they want to reserve a particular place in the park, he said.

Although park users can be fined \$50 for hosting such events without a permit, Commissioner Stern said only "a handful" of summonses have been issued in the past. He was unable to provide specific numbers.

But despite the Commissioner's assurances, several park users who attended last night's hearing remained wary.