

**Minutes of the Parks & Recreation Committee Meeting**  
**December 22, 2022**  
**Via Zoom**  
**DRAFT**

**Attendees**

Committee:

Present: Bob Bender, Rob Jacklosky, Ramdat Singh, Deb Travis (Chair), Leona Teten,

Absent: David Gellman, Robert Fanuzzi

Other Board Members:, Laura Spalter

Department of Parks and Recreation: Stephanie Ehrlich (Van Cortlandt Park Administrator/Executive Director of Van Cortlandt Park Alliance); Christina Taylor (Deputy Director, Van Cortlandt Park Alliance); Captain Domingo Sanchez (Commanding Officer, South Bronx Parks Enforcement Patrol); Captain Juan Bayron (Commanding Officer, North Bronx Parks Enforcement Patrol); Michael Ortiz (Chief of Staff, Bronx Borough Commissioner, DPR); Jessenia Aponte (Bronx Borough Commissioner, DPR); Joe Magneri (Parks Manager, DPR); Annie Weinmayr (Landscape Architect, DPR); Tyler Wilcox (Director of Forestry, DPR)

Community: Bart Fried (Executive Vice President, Amateur Astronomers Association); Alex Hart (Dirtworks)

The meeting commenced at 7:03pm

A quorum being present, the November 1, 2022 Committee Meeting minutes were unanimously approved.

**Chair's Report**

**Committee Update** - Scott Krompinger has been elected as Community Board 8 Treasurer and consequently has left the Parks Committee. We wish him all the best in his new role. Robert Fanuzzi has joined the Parks Committee.

**Mulchfest** – New York City Parks Department will be hosting Mulchfest from December 26 – January 8. This yearly program allows members of the community to drop off their Christmas tree to be converted into mulch. Select sites will have bags of free mulch available for pickup on January 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup>. Call 311 for locations or visit [nyc.gov/mulchfest](http://nyc.gov/mulchfest). Lights, decorations and netting must be removed prior to bringing the tree to the site.

**Flooding** – Remember if you experience or witness flooding to please report it to 311. Flooding is so common in our district that we often neglect to inform the city. This leads to an undercount of incidents and reduces our eligibility for DEP programs and resources. If you see something, say something!

**Don't Forget Our Nonprofits** – We have many nonprofits who do important work protecting our local parks and green spaces. Many are having end of year fundraising drives and all can use donations any time of the year. They include Van Cortlandt Park Alliance, Friends of Brust Park, Wave Hill, Friends of Spuyten Duyvil. Kingsbridge Heights Community Center is an important provider of community services and is located in a Parks Department owned building that is in need of substantial repairs. We encourage you to also consider them when you are deciding on your charitable giving.

**Update on our Request for a new Parks Enforcement Patrol (PEP) Command in Van Cortlandt Park** – Community Board 8 Chair, Laura Spalter, and Parks Committee Chair, Deb Travis, sent a letter November 17, 2022 to Margaret Nelson, Deputy Commissioner of the Urban Park Service and Public Programs requesting a new PEP Command located in Van Cortlandt Park. This was in support of the letter sent previously by Council Member Eric Dinowitz and Assembly Member Jeffrey Dinowitz. The Community Board received a response on November 29, 2022 from Edwin Rodriguez the Assistant Commissioner for Urban Park Service. They believe current coverage is adequate because in addition to the current PEP patrols, Van Cortlandt Park has a dedicated PEP Mounted Unit, a Bronx Command of Urban Park Rangers and receives a deployment from the citywide task force as needed. They also feel they have successfully partnered with the 50<sup>th</sup> Precinct to successfully address crime and quality of life issues in the park. The committee will discuss next steps during Old Business

**Bronx Borough Commissioner Jessenia Aponte and Chief of Staff Michael Ortiz**

We invited Jessenia Aponte, our newly appointed Bronx Borough Commissioner, to introduce herself and discuss with us some of our outstanding issues:

**Pickleball** – The Committee has been waiting for the Parks Department to select a site in or near Seton Park for a pickleball court. Previously, the Parks Department said that converting a tennis court in Seton Park to pickleball was not an option, however, their backup location next to PS 24 was not acceptable to the principal of the school. The Parks Department is still considering sites and Seton Park is now back on the table. They will have a decision by March in time to have a pickleball court in place for the summer. They are also looking at the pickleball site in Van Cortlandt Park to see what improvements can be made and are investigating how to expand pickleball throughout the Bronx. Chair requested an update in January.

**Composting** – During the November Community Board 8 Environment and Sanitation Committee meeting, DSNY informed committee members that they provide paper bags for Parks to compost leaves, but would like to see more adoption. According to Parks, they do currently compost some leaves, although where possible they prefer to mow over leaves in grassy areas to mulch into the grass. This is the best solution for parks that are primarily grassy. There are two sites where leaves are taken to compost within the Bronx, Orchard Beach and Soundview. Parks will consider composting in parks that have a fixed post supervisor. Active park stewardship groups can request paper bags to collect leaves and if the park is large enough, leaves can be composted on-site. The process generally takes about two years to fully convert the leaves to useable mulch. Parks will make a bin if the stewards request them

through their Joe Magneri, the District Manager. Composting leaves with the bin just requires putting the leaves in the bin and jumping on them to crush them. Community Board 8 has active parks steward groups in Shorefront Park, Brust Park, Ewen Park, Fort Independence Park, Washington's Walk, Fort Four Playground and Henry Hudson Park. Of these, Washington's Walk and Brust Park would be too small for on-site composting. Stewards of Brust Park, Fort Four and Strong Street Playground could request paper bags. Washington's Walk is primarily grass covered and would be a candidate for mowing leaves into the turf. Shorefront Park and Henry Hudson Park already compost some portion of their leaves. Ewen Park and Fort Independence Park would be potential candidates for on-site composting of leaves if the stewardship groups had capacity to support it.

**No Mow May** – No Mow May is a movement to discourage mowing lawns in May in order to encourage pollinators who are often reproducing at that time. The Parks Department does not participate in No Mow May, but would consider it if it made sense. The program is designed for suburban lawns with fewer vines and invasives. There is a concern that weeds and grass would get a head start if mowing started later in the year and could negatively impact the lawn rating. It would need to be determined at the Parks senior leadership level and would require community education.

**Our request for a new PEP Command in Van Cortlandt Park** – Our request was rejected in part because there are mounted Parks Enforcement officers stationed in Van Cortlandt Park. There are actually six total mounted officers and horses citywide and two total in Van Cortlandt Park. The captain of Mounted Command is Captain Jessica Cowan. The mounted command is deployed based on need throughout the whole borough. Their shift hours are 8:30am to 3:30pm with one hour in the morning spent caring for the horse. Mounted officers are very good for crowd control and along trails, however, the two mounted officers stationed in Van Cortlandt Park are assigned outside of the park.

There are four mounted auxiliary officers with horses also stationed in Van Cortlandt Park to assist them. This would bring the total of mounted PEP officers and auxiliary to six people for the Bronx to cover all shifts. There are four Urban Park Rangers stationed in Van Cortlandt Park in the Nature Center. They are technically peace officers and can issue summons, but they run the Nature Center and their primary duties are educational. In practice, they rarely do enforcement. Community members expressed concern about the ongoing bikes, motorcycles and atv's on the trails. Captain Sanchez said they would be issuing summons to bicyclists if they continue to violate the park rules in Van Cortlandt Park. The NYPD Citywide Traffic Safety Forum Team has been made aware of the motorbikes and atv's on the Putnam Greenway. Commissioner Aponte will be meeting with Captain Cowan, Stephanie Ehrlich and the borough captains to see what can be done to address the current Van Cortlandt Park needs with mounted officers.

**Van Cortlandt Golf Course Condition** – The fences, paved greenway between the parking lot and Old Croton Aquaduct Trail, the club house and birding bridge are all in poor condition and their maintenance is part of the concession agreement with the Van Cortlandt Golf Club. Parks

is responsible for inspecting concessions and works closely with the Concessions Unit and Director of Concessions to make sure concessions are fulfilling their obligations. When the contract comes up for renewal, the Parks Department can take the feedback it has received to modify the contract and add requirements. Parks has also had concession contracts that give preference to concessions that are green or build an LEED building or require electric vehicles. Parks is always modifying its agreement to improve to be more green with renewals. The Chair requested the inspection reports for the Van Cortlandt Golf Course for 2022. The Van Cortlandt Golf Course concession contract expires in 2027 and the Mosholu Golf Course concession contract expires in 2024 so there is an opportunity to make the next version more green and include important repairs and improvements. The Parks Department is beginning to review concession contracts in general with Climate Change goals in mind and is open to feedback and suggestions.

**Spray Painting Rocks from the Track Races** – Community members reported that in Van Cortlandt Park prior to this year’s cross country season all of the rocks along the cross country trail were painted white. Some members of the community were pleased with this because it makes it easier to see the hazards on the cross country trail. Stephanie Ehrlich said that she would follow-up.

**Old Croton Aquaduct Trail Pedestrian Bridge** – The proposed pedestrian bridge over the Major Deegan connecting the Old Croton Aquaduct North and South trails has been delayed due to COVID and now has increased in cost by \$15.3 million since the Public Design Commission’s last presentation prior to the pandemic. Parks is looking at “forest friendly” alternatives that will be more affordable. The project had been fully funded prior to the pandemic. The public money allocated already is: \$3 million from the State Assembly, \$1 million from the State Senate, \$9.5 million from Parks and \$9 million from DEP. Parks believes it will be able to present a new proposal in January.

**Swimming Programs to Progress Youth from Beginner to Life Guards** - At a recent community forum for Washington’s Walk, community members asked for better access to swimming lessons and a pathway to city lifeguard jobs. Pre-COVID there were more swimming programming at outdoor pools, which has not entirely come back yet. Swimming lessons are held at indoor pools only and there is only one indoor pool in the Bronx at St Mary’s Park which is closed. Alternatives are in Manhattan, Queens and Brooklyn which are inconvenient. This year they are offering an academy for skills training for lifeguards but do not have their previous offerings. Parks is looking for a partner in the Bronx who can host swimming programs such as colleges like Lehman or Hostos who have pools. Chair asked how the committee could support classes through the budget process that teach youth to swim within our Community Board. Parks will investigate with the Aquatics Unit and get back to the committee.

**New Local Laws Impacting Green Space** - The Commissioner was asked for comment on two recent city laws which were passed: Local Law 680 – Survey to Determine the Feasibility on Public Streets with Dead Ends to be Converted to Open Space and Local Law 842 – Reforming the Parks Capital Project Process which would require the Parks Department to develop a

strategy to reduce the capital project timeline. The Commissioner did not feel prepared to comment on them at this time.

Herb Barrett thanked the Commissioner for Park's supporting of Memorial Grove in Van Cortlandt Park which contains memorials to 37 soldiers who were killed in action. The condition of the park has improved greatly over recent years and he thanked the Van Cortlandt Park staff.

**Update on Jerome Park Reservoir Trees** – Tyler Wilcox, the Director of Forestry, provided an update on the inspection of the trees around the Jerome Park Reservoir. Forestry has reviewed the old work orders and identified trees with unacceptable levels of risk which will be removed. The inspections happened in 2021, however, Forestry has been low on vehicles and eligible climbers and pruners since the start of the pandemic. They have been able to keep up with high priority work, but had little funding for anything else. These trees fall in the middle of the pack in terms of risk which has delayed their removal and replacement. Forestry has gotten their funding back and now can proceed. Greg Haber met with the senior forester for the Bronx and they are planning successional planting to reduce the time between removal and re-planting. Additionally, they are looking for other options for preservation like canopy reduction to maintain the canopy cover. There are concerns that their online tree database is not 100% accurate with site conditions but Forestry says their geospatial database has been updated and is now accurate. They also tag trees that are slated for removal with a 1" whitish gray square metal tag that is hammered into the tree. They are currently compiling the list for removal across different fiscal years. As a side note, Forestry is doing injection treatments for emerald ash borer which have been very successful.

Spuyten Duyvil / Henry Hudson Trees had a recent death on a private property due to a tree branch and so there has been concern within the community about tree condition. The tree risk management protocol is available online and can be understood by a lay person. It outlines the risk scoring and mitigation measures. There is a Park Planting Team in addition to the Street Tree Planting Team (who is focused on heat islands) which is focused on succession planting for areas where older trees are aging out.

#### **Discussion of Safety in Van Cortlandt Park**

Van Cortlandt Park is working closely with NYPD to address the recent muggings. When people are moving through the park they should remember this is the city and be careful. People are advised to run and walk in pairs and stay in areas that are well lit after dark.

#### **Presentation by the Amateur Astronomer's Association and Dirtworks Landscape Architecture of their Proposal for a Public Observatory in Jerome Park**

The Amateur Astronomer's Association has been approved by the Parks Department to install a small observatory on public park land in New York City for public programming. The Amateur Astronomer's Association is a 95-year-old nonprofit with 60 years of experience working with the Parks Department on citywide events as large as 800 people. Their proposal is to position the observatory in Jerome Park, aka Harris Park, on Goulden Avenue, adjacent and south of Gatehouse 5, near the stone wall of the Jerome Park Reservoir. The site is optimal because it is

relatively dark for New York City and has eight schools within one mile. Bronx Science and Lehman College have already expressed interest in the observatory and will have keys to use it independently as part of their classes. The Amateur Astronomers Association will pay for the installation costs and the maintenance of the facility including graffiti removal. The observatory will have a zero carbon footprint with solar panels for electricity. It will have a security camera attached to the structure itself in addition to the reservoir cameras. There will be modest landscaping to make the path accessible to wheelchairs and conceal the solar panels. The current proposal includes the use of concrete for the path from the sidewalk to the observatory. The committee requested that they use permeable materials, particularly as this is site will be frequently used by children. The committee has a budget priority for lighting along the reservoir because it is perceived as unsafe when it is dark. The association feels that it can work with the Parks Department to install lighting with less glare and light pollution which is appropriate to the observatory. They will be reaching out to DOT to add or adjust shielding for a street light nearby to direct its light downward which would reduce the light pollution and make stars easier to see. DEP has been involved with their planning and approves the location. Their next step is to present their proposal to the Public Design Commission for approval. They need a resolution from the committee for their PDC proposal. It was agreed that the observatory would be a benefit to the community and a unique opportunity for our students and star gazers. The committee voted unanimously to support this project with a permeable walkway. The resolution is below.

### **Old Business**

New PEP Command in Van Cortlandt Park – We have sent a letter in support of this initiative and we have been told that Van Cortlandt Park has adequate resources. Two mounted officers with limited schedules who also have duties outside of VCP is not adequate and suggesting the Urban Park Rangers are a viable resource to discourage atv's is disingenuous. Next steps for our committee will be to pass a resolution requesting a command and encourage Community Board 7 and 12 do the same. Limiting the current mounted officers to Van Cortlandt Park and requesting additional members of the Mounted Patrol is a possible short term solution to address issues we will face in the coming summer. Next month we will assemble budget priorities and will reach out to Community Boards 7 and 12 to coordinate with them on our expense and capital budget priorities requests to support this command. A resolution will be discussed at the January meeting.

### **New Business**

None

The meeting adjourned at 9:43pm

Minutes submitted by Deb Travis

Recording Link:

[https://us02web.zoom.us/rec/share/BquztZ1XTX7Ib189WwcDiHogTkSMO9u\\_7IGFeYd9BZPdtDKshgQKUmS9TwXy6a0r.byjXMIR7b3tVQ9HR](https://us02web.zoom.us/rec/share/BquztZ1XTX7Ib189WwcDiHogTkSMO9u_7IGFeYd9BZPdtDKshgQKUmS9TwXy6a0r.byjXMIR7b3tVQ9HR)

**Parks and Recreation Committee**  
**Bronx Community Board No. 8**  
**Approval of Amateur Astronomers Association Public Observatory**  
**from December 22, 2022 Meeting**

**WHEREAS**, the Amateur Astronomers Association presented their proposal for the first public observatory in New York City to be located in Harris Park along Goulden Avenue south of Jerome Park Reservoir Gatehouse #5 to the Community Board 8 Parks and Recreation Committee on December 22, 2022;

**WHEREAS**, the Parks Department has granted initial approval for the observatory structure, which previously resided on the campus of Nassau Community College in Garden City, New York and was transferred to the Amateur Astronomers Association to be used as a public observatory as part of their citywide programming;

**WHEREAS**, the Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) who operates the Jerome Park Reservoir, has been consulted on the planned programming and approved the siting of the observatory;

**WHEREAS**, the observatory will have a zero carbon footprint and the Amateur Astronomers Association has agreed to modify their planned observatory walkway to construct it of permeable materials which they will maintain;

**WHEREAS**, the Amateur Astronomers Association is a 95-year-old not-for-profit organization with 60 years of experience planning events in New York City parks;

**WHEREAS**, the Amateur Astronomers Association has already formed programming partnerships with Bronx High School of Science and Lehman College and will be reaching out to all schools around the Jerome Park Reservoir to encourage their participation in programming at the observatory;

**THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED THAT**, Community Board 8 supports the Amateur Astronomers Association's proposal for the observatory at Jerome Park Reservoir with a permeable walkway.

**Committee Vote:**

Favor: Ramdat, Rob Jacklosky, Ramdat Singh, Deb Travis (Chair), Leona Teten

Oppose: None

Absent: Bob Bender





**City of New York  
Parks & Recreation**

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Tuesday, November 29, 2022

Laura Spalter & Debra Travis  
Chairperson & Chair  
5676 Riverdale Avenue, Suite 100  
Bronx, NY 10471-2194

**Re: Need for a Dedicated PEP Command in Van Cortlandt Park, Bronx, NY**

Dear Chairperson Laura Spalter and Chair Debra Travis:

Thank you for your letter regarding Parks Enforcement Patrol (PEP) at Van Cortlandt Park.

Overall, we currently have four dedicated PEP commands throughout the Bronx with a day-to-day focus on providing safety and security at all parks in the Bronx and educating park patrons on rules and regulations.

In addition to routine PEP patrols, Van Cortlandt Park also currently has a dedicated PEP Mounted Unit that is based out of the park. In addition, the park is also home of the Bronx command of our Urban Park Rangers who are also sworn NYS Peace Officers. Our citywide task force unit is also deployed to the Bronx on occasion to supplement borough operations at all parks whenever the need arises.

We are aware of the overall public safety concerns at Van Cortlandt Park and have forged a strong partnership with the 50<sup>th</sup> Precinct of the NYPD to help address these concerns in conjunction with our PEP personnel. The concerns regarding muggings, stabbings and other violence is a topic of frequent collaboration with NYPD as well quality of life concerns related to excessive noise and nighttime usage.

While the establishment of a dedicated PEP command at Van Cortlandt Park is something that we are unable to commit to in the immediate future, we are dedicated to supporting the park with all the resources and partnerships that we currently must keep the community safe.

Please feel free to contact me directly if you have any additional questions.

Edwin Rodriguez  
Assistant Commissioner