

**Minutes of the Parks & Recreation Committee Meeting
January 25, 2025
Via Zoom**

Attendees

Committee:

Present: Bob Bender, Rob Jacklosky, Ramdat Singh, Debra Travis (Chair), Leona Teten, Robert Fanuzzi

Absent: David Gellman

Other Board: Sergio Villaverde

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); Joe Magneri (Parks Manager, DPR);

Community: Daniel Abram, Project Manager of Research and Policy, New Yorkers for Parks; Kadajah Caban (Kingsbridge Heights Community Center)

The meeting commenced at 7:05pm

A quorum being present, the December 22, 2022 Committee Meeting minutes were unanimously approved.

Chair's Report

Croton Filtration Monitoring Committee Meeting – Van Cortlandt Park Pedestrian Bridge
DEP will be making a presentation on the current state of their proposed pedestrian bridge in Van Cortlandt Park at the Croton Filtration Monitoring Committee Meeting. This bridge was to be partially funded by DEP with money connected to the construction of the filtration plant. The meeting will be held on January 31st at 6:30pm via Zoom. Please contact the office for the link. There will also be an update on the construction at the Mosholu Golf Course and Golf House, the status of their mitigation projects, a report on Croton costs so far, and the Jerome Park Reservoir reconstruction.

Paul's Playground Toys - Thank you to everyone who has donated toys to Paul's Playground. The playground is well equipped again.

Amateur Astronomer's Association Observatory in Jerome Park was approved by the Public Design Commission. - The first public observatory was approved by the Public Design Commission earlier this month. We saw a presentation on this at last month's committee meeting. They are on track for a Spring 2023 completion.

Tibbett's Brook Extension of the Putnam Greenway Reached a Major Milestone - January 18th, Mayor Adams announced the completion of the acquisition of the property along the Major Deegan where the Putnam Greenway extension will be. The property was purchased for a final price of \$11.2 million dollars. When the daylighting project is done, it will not only provide new parks

space, but will create 228 million gallons annually of additional capacity in the sewer systems in and around the Broadway corridor and reduce the chance of raw sewage going directly into the Harlem River during a major rain event. The next step in the acquisition from CSX is approval by the federal Surface Transportation Board of using the former train line as a trail. Construction on the greenway is expected to begin in 2025.

Presentation by Daniel Abram, Project Manager of Research and Policy, New Yorkers for Parks on Their 1% for Parks and Build Back Faster NYC Campaigns - New Yorkers for Parks is over 100 years old and champions equitable development and maintenance of parks. Their current focus is capital reform and advocating for 1% of the city's total operating budget for the Parks Department operating budget.

Build Back Faster is a program to advocate for a more efficient and faster capital process. A big part of this initiative is found in two laws which were recently introduced in the City Council, Intro 840 and 841.

Intro 840 a blueprint that requires the Parks Department to find a 25% reduction in the average duration of the capital process. It should include early completion benefits, standardization of process, forms alignment with other agencies, clear communication of timelines, and better agency coordination with utility companies. This bill passed in December 2022 and we should expect to see activity as a result soon.

Intro 841 is a reporting bill. It calls on the city to report on capital expenditures in a public online database that includes clear location names, documents changes to the funding allocation for all capital projects in the city and shows progress data on the Parks Dept website with a description of reasons for delays or cost overruns and outlines a timeline of project completion expectations.

1% for Parks is an initiative to advocate for funding the Parks Department to enable them to meet the basic maintenance needs of our parks. Due to the advocacy of New Yorkers for Parks, Mayor Adams promised 1% for parks during his campaign for mayor. However, this year Parks received only 0.6% of the city's budget for a total of \$624million. All five borough presidents signed a document urging him to come through with it full funding. Community Board 8 passed a resolution last year supporting this program. The other 4% would give the Parks Department \$1billion to reach a basic standard of care.

The largest parks have conservancies to fundraise for basic maintenance, but this is not the case for all parks and creates inequity where neighborhoods with residents that can afford large donations have better maintained parks. Additional funding for parks would also allow steward groups to not be burdened with basic maintenance of a park and would free them up to do programming or focus on enhancing park horticulture or amenities. New Yorkers for Parks is working on an impact report that will be published in mid-February which will provide examples of what specifically the additional 4% would change. They see the 1% work as helping reduce the need for some capital work because good maintenance extends the useful life of parks features. There is an online petition which they encourage everyone to sign.

New Yorkers for Parks also create Community Profiles. Community Board 8 is number one for tree canopy cover.

Play Fair campaign is another initiative where they advocate for the specific needs of the New York City's Parks system. They have a survey which they would like everyone to complete to help them identify urgent needs.

Questions:

Has there been a needs study to determine the level of funding that is needed? - 1% for Parks was started 22 years ago in 2001 when New Yorkers for Parks was known as the New York Council for Parks. It is believed at that time a needs survey was done, however, New Yorkers for Parks has gone from a staff of 12 to a staff of 4 since the start of COVID and some of that information has gotten difficult to access. They have brought in the New York Historical Society to go through their archive to access the NY Council for Parks 2001 data. Taking into consideration that Parks has continued to be underfunded since 2001 and that policies and specific needs may have changed, they believe that the current backlog of 20,000 work orders in the Parks Department is evidence that substantially increased funding is called for.

If the Parks Department had 1% of the budget, would you still advocate for parks to have private conservancies? - Conservancies, like the Central Park Conservancy or the Van Cortlandt Park Alliance, do great work and they do not want to take away from that. If the Parks Department were adequately funded those organizations could focus on programming and fun and not have to worry about cleaning the bathrooms and removing graffiti.

What is actually going to change at Parks to improve the Capital Process with Build Back Faster? - Transparency will help push along these projects. They would like to see a Parks Construction Authority so that they can manage their own projects. Once the budget season ends, this authority will be their next focus. A Parks Construction Authority would allow the Parks Department to avoid the Department of Design and Construction approvals and procurement process and would allow them to hire their own contractors.

Also the new Director of the Public Realm position, which will be announced by the Mayor soon, will assist with agency coordination which leads to many delays. This position will interpret the nuance between the agencies like Parks, the Department of Transportation, Department of Design and Construction, Con Ed, DEP, and other agencies to push along projects in the public realm and open space. They will be able to bring the timelines and processes together.

Jodie Colon advocated for park steward groups to continue to do work in Parks because it is important for neighborhood people to get their hands dirty and feel a sense of ownership. Programming doesn't build ownership in the same way. If the Parks Department was properly funded stewards could focus on adding value instead of filling gaps in maintenance.

Thank you to New Yorkers for Parks for the thousands of bulbs they provided to our Parks Stewardship groups last fall and every fall. We appreciate their offering it to the community.

Why an Authority?

To remove outside contractors and allow Parks to avoid the procurement process

This campaign has been going on for a very long time. What will make this year different? The Mayor has promised 1% and New Yorkers for Parks is interpreting it as 1% within his time in office and holding him to it. So far funding has gone the other direction with 60 existing vacant

positions cut from the Parks Dept in the fall. New Yorkers for Parks is putting out statements against these recent cuts. There is an awareness of how important parks and green space is following the height of the pandemic and now is the time to really advocate for what our parks and green spaces need.

Below are the links to support these efforts and learn more about parks in Community Board 8.

- [1% for Parks Petition](#)
- [Play Fair Parks Survey](#)
- [Bronx CB 8 Open Space Profile](#)

Saturday, February 25th is the Bronx Parks Speak-up and New Yorkers for Parks will be there

Old Business

New Parks Enforcement Patrol (PEP) Command in Van Cortlandt Park - In October, Council Member Dinowitz and Assembly Member Dinowitz requested a dedicated Parks Enforcement Patrol Command headquartered in Van Cortlandt Park. In November, we had the Bronx PEP Commanding Officers come discuss their needs and answer our questions regarding this proposal and we then sent a letter to Deputy Commissioner Margaret Nelson with the Urban Park Service supporting their request for a PEP Command in Van Cortlandt Park. In December, Edwin Rodriguez, with the Urban Park Service responded and said that the existing district resources are adequate citing Urban Park Rangers at the Nature Center and mounted PEP in Van Cortlandt Park. At our December committee meeting, Bronx Parks Commissioner Jessenia Aponte came and gave us more background on how the staff is assigned and clarified that the Urban Park Rangers are peace officers but are not charged with rules enforcement and that there are four total mounted PEP officers who also patrol outside of Van Cortlandt Park. Given that Van Cortlandt Park has experienced serious and escalating noise, vandalism, “car shows”, motorized vehicles on the trails and other violations of parks rules, the committee unanimously passed a resolution in support of the command in order to allow the full board to vote on the issue and to send the resolution to Community Board 7 and Community Board 12, so that we can speak as one voice. Resolution is below.

Review of Budget Priorities for FY24

The committee reviewed the list of capital and expense budget priorities for FY24 along with the agency responses. This list is where the committee will start from as they formulate FY25 budget priorities. The list is attached. The priorities with a number are in the top ten for the whole Community Board.

Herb Barrett asked to have added to the expense priority list shrubbery in Memorial Grove replaced and to add additional shrubbery along the front fence. Stephanie Ehrlich said that Woodlawn has interns learning about monument restoration and there is a horticultural cohort as well that will assist with shrubs.

Kadijah Caban from Kingsbridge Heights Community Center advocated for funding to replace and repair the KHCC roof. This nonprofit is housed in the former police precinct building on Kingsbridge Terrace which is owned by the Parks Department. They have raised \$3m towards the repairs, but need \$5m total. They also need Parks to recognize their responsibility to maintain their property so that ongoing work outside of the immediate emergency work will be done to get the building back to a state of good repair. Their request was added to the budget priorities list. There is

an urgent need now to address the roof and Community Board 8 and city and state elected officials are working together to assist however they can.

A request was made to address the current condition of the track adjacent to the Van Cortlandt Stadium. The Van Cortlandt Track is slated to have work start in FY24 as an internal Parks project

For a future meeting, how does the Natural Resources unit prioritize their resources particularly their wetland management? How do they plan or budget for it?

The priorities list and agency responses is attached.

New Business

Upcoming Events in Our Parks

February 10 - Friends of Spuyten Duyvil has recruited a new Super Steward who is working in Spuyten Duyvil Shorefront Park on trail maintenance and clearing with the Natural Areas Conservancy. If you are interested in learning more about what Super Stewards do or how to become one, email spuytenduyvilny@gmail.com for information. Interested people can also attend the February 10th training in Wallenberg Forest to watch a Super Steward complete his plant ID training to become a Super Steward of the Seton Park / Wallenberg Forest and learn what it is like.

Saturday, February 11 - Natural Resources Group will be in Riverdale Park doing invasives removal.

Sunday, February 19 - In the Park After Dark at Henry Hudson Park. 3:30pm cleanup of leaves and 5-6pm social time to enjoy the sunset

Thursday, February 23 - Build On will be in Henry Hudson Park to learn what they can do to steward parks in their own neighborhoods.

Saturday, February 25 - Bronx Park Speak-up at Lehman College. 11am – 5pm. The theme is Greenways and advocacy for parks in general. www.bronxpeakup.org to register and for more information

Van Cortlandt Park Alliance Events – visit vancortlandt.org to register and for more information

Friday, February 10 - Forest Fridays, Northwest Woods

Saturday, March 4 - Ultimate Trail Running Series 8k fundraiser, you can run it or walk it. Everyone is welcome.

Saturday, March 12 – Community Volunteer Event: Wet Meadow Maintenance with NYC Audobon in Van Cortlandt Park

The meeting adjourned at 9:33pm

Minutes submitted by Deb Travis

Recording Link:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RRQ1_YGVyds

**Parks and Recreation Committee
Bronx Community Board No. 8
Request for Park Enforcement Patrol Command in Van Cortlandt Park
from January 25, 2023 Meeting**

WHEREAS, effective enforcement of New York City Parks Department park rules is a deterrent to negative park uses, increases safety in often isolated locations, encourages the positive physical and mental health outcomes consistent with the use of public green space and reduces damage to city property;

WHEREAS, the New York City Mayor's Office of Climate & Environmental Justice defines Environmental Justice as "the principle that all people, regardless of race, disability status, age or socioeconomic background, have a right to live, work and play in communities that are safe, healthy, and free of harmful environmental conditions" and according to the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation, Van Cortlandt Park is bordered by Environmental Justice Zones on all four sides;

WHEREAS, the three community boards surrounding Van Cortlandt Park, Community Boards 7, 8 and 12, represent a population of 417,226 people which is equivalent to 28 percent of the total Bronx population and encompass 2,000 acres collectively of park land;

WHEREAS, the three community boards surrounding Van Cortlandt Park, Community Boards 7, 8 and 12, represent 37 percent of the 728 Violations of Parks Rules 311 complaints in 2022 and have experienced a 55 percent increase in complaints over 2019 levels with chronic and escalating drinking, unpermitted large gatherings, homeless encampments, after-hours noise, motorized vehicles in parks, illegal bbqing, unleashed dogs, double-parking, car burn-outs and "car shows" and other violations of parks rules;

WHEREAS, the entire borough of the Bronx currently has four mobile Parks Enforcement Patrol (PEP) Commands consisting of forty-nine total PEP officers to cover all shifts seven days a week and one mounted PEP command of four officers which can be complemented by volunteer mounted auxiliary officers who patrol five days a week from 9:30am to 3:30pm;

WHEREAS, the closest PEP command to Community Boards 7, 8 and 12 is the North Bronx Command in Pelham Bay Park, approximately four miles and twenty minutes away by car;

WHEREAS, Van Cortlandt Park is the third largest park in New York City with nearly 1,200 acres of public space that is used by nearly three million visitors each year including twenty miles of trails through 600 acres of forest, the Putnam and East Coast Greenways, dozens of pitches, fields, courts and playgrounds, two public golf courses, two gas stations, a skate park, and three public parking lots;

WHEREAS, in addition to Van Cortlandt Park and other parks in Community Boards, 7, 8 and 12, the North Bronx PEP Command must patrol Community Boards 5, 6, 10, and 11 which represents 5,734 acres of park land including New York City's largest park, Pelham Bay Park / Orchard Beach,

Seton Falls Park, St James Park, Williamsbridge Oval and many other smaller parks with a PEP staff of three supervisors and seven officers over two shifts;

WHEREAS, a dedicated PEP command stationed in Van Cortlandt Park would create effective deterrence by having officers consistently in Van Cortlandt Park , provide officers more time to de-escalate sensitive situations and educate the public on parks rules, create a PEP presence on the cross country running trail, nature hiking trails and Putnam Greenway to deter motorized vehicle use, and allow for additional coverage of smaller parks nearby;

WHEREAS, PEP officers stationed in the Bronx have stated that an additional command located in Van Cortlandt Park would substantially improve responsiveness to high priority 311 reports, would allow PEP to coordinate with NYPD and the City of Yonkers Police Department on criminal activity in and near Van Cortlandt Park more effectively, and would enable them to focus existing officers on parks in Community Boards 5, 6, 10 and 11 which are closer to the North Bronx Command station;

WHEREAS, on October 17, 2022, City Council Member Eric Dinowitz and Assembly Member Jeffrey Dinowitz called on Margaret Nelson the Deputy Commissioner of the Urban Park Service to create a PEP Command stationed in Van Cortlandt Park;

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED THAT, Community Board 8 calls on Mayor Adams and the New York City Parks and Recreation Commissioner and Urban Park Service to formally recognize the need for a new Parks Enforcement Patrol (PEP) Command stationed in Van Cortlandt Park and to develop a plan which includes officers sufficient to patrol the park and its immediate vicinity seven days a week, including overnight hours as appropriate;

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED THAT, Community Board 8 calls on the New York City Parks and Recreation Urban Park Service to review the compensation of the Parks Enforcement Patrol to reduce substantial and chronic levels of attrition;

Committee Vote:

Favor: Bob Bender, Rob Jacklosky, Ramdat Singh, Deb Travis, Leona Teten, Robert Fanuzzi

Oppose: None