

Minutes of the May 3, 2022 meeting of the
Special Committee on the Hudson River Greenway, via Zoom
(pending committee approval)

Attendees:

Committee: Bob Bender (chair), Dan Padernacht, Laura Spalter

Other CB8 Members: David Gellman, Omar Murray, Camelia Tepelus, Debra Travis

Community: Alina Dowe, Mayor's Community Affairs Unit; Cliff Stanton, Friends of the Hudson River Greenway; Robert Morrow, Dale Wolff, Farrah Kule Rubin, Jodie Colon, Leona Teten, Robert Fass, Sue Dodell, Mike Heller, Linda Hirlehy, Bradford McCormick, Sam (Camilo for Senate)

Agenda:

The meeting was called to order at 7:08 pm.

Minutes of the April, 2021 committee meeting were approved unanimously.

Discussion of Outreach Efforts Since 2021

Chair Bob Bender reported on outreach in the past year, noting that efforts were made to contact and meet with other greenway groups and advocates, most notably in Yonkers, but also the Harlem River Working Group and the NYC Greenways Coalition. Bob mentioned that the three committee members, along with Cliff Stanton, participated in a phone conversation set up and joined by Dr. Robert Morrow of Yonkers with New York Senate Majority Leader Andrew Stewart-Cousins and members of her staff. Leader Stewart-Cousins expressed her support for the HRG, but also said that she does not have access to funding for studies, only for capital construction.

Bob said that over the past year, he has learned from conversations with greenways advocates that resiliency will have to be an essential component of the HRG because resiliency has become a critical issue for water bodies everywhere. Robert Fass helped to set up a conversation with an environmental engineering firm, Mott MacDonald, which has provided this advice and has taken an interest in the HRG.

Bob also noted that committee member Dan Padernacht reported that the W. 254th St. bridge over the Metro-North tracks is rated in "poor repair." The committee wrote to Assemblyman Dinowitz and State Senator Biaggi to urge that no repair work be done on the bridge that would in any way inhibit access over the bridge to a future HRG.

The meeting was opened to questions and comments. Committee member Laura Spalter noted that over the past year the committee has contacted elected officials to request money from infrastructure funding for the engineering study that we need.

Deb Travis noted that the NYC Greenways coalition map shows the HRG as “unbuilt, planning underway.” Bob confirmed that the committee has communicated with the coalition.

Jodie Colon raised the question of whether shadows cast on the river by the greenway might inhibit construction of the HRG. Bob replied that DCP’s waterfront plan requires environmental remediation efforts in return for the shadows that piers in the river will inevitably cast.

David Gellman asked whether Metro-North plans to fortify the riverfront. Bob noted that Metro-North has no plans for fortification because it has chosen instead to harden its infrastructure, i.e., power lines, power substations, and track switches. Nonetheless, increased resiliency in the river would benefit Metro-North.

In response to a question from Robert Fass about outreach to DEP, Bob mentioned that he has contacted a DEP official about how the HRG might benefit the Hudson River. That outreach is as yet inconclusive. Bob also noted that the question of who will operate the HRG is actually a matter that must be addressed sooner rather than later, something learned in the past year.

Cliff Stanton of the Friends of the HRG (FHRG) reminded the meeting that FHRG applied to an NYC foundation for funding for the engineering study but was denied. Funding will have to come from government sources. Bob said that he has been advised that to access government money, we have to present government agencies, specifically NYS DOT and DEC with proposals that meet their objectives. With the help of greenway advocates and environmentalists we are learning how to speak the language that these government agencies speak.

Suggestions for Moving Forward on the Greenway

Some of the preceding discussion addressed this topic, e.g., the need for a resiliency component to the engineering study and the HRG itself, and the need to identify an operating authority now, not later.

Dr. Robert Morrow spoke about how health equity is an important consideration in building the HRG because access to the waterfront is a component of health equity. He urged us to keep this consideration in the forefront of our funding requests.

Bob Bender mentioned that there will be a New York City Greenways conference on May 5 & 6. Cliff Stanton volunteered to attend, virtually, the May 5 conference. Bob will attend the May 6 event.

Bob spoke about the Environmental Bond Act that was passed by the state legislature and signed by Gov. Hochul. That act authorizes placing a bond proposal on the ballot in November.

The bonds, if approved by voters, will allocate \$4.2 billion for climate mitigation, restoration and flood reduction, conservation and recreation, all of which the HRG can help to address. The process will be for organizations to propose projects to the NYS DEC, which will administer the funds. DEC will decide whether the projects merit funding. This may be a great opportunity for the HRG if voters approve this proposition on the ballot in November because the HRG will address some of these requirements for funding.

Finally, Bob noted that we have to increase our contact with Sen. Schumer's staff, and we have to reach out to Bronx BP Vanessa Gibson, with whom we have not yet spoken about the HRG.

The meeting adjourned at 8:21 pm.

Minutes submitted by Bob Bender