

Minutes of the Parks & Recreation Committee Meeting
June 28, 2023
Bronx Community Board 8 Office and Via Zoom
Pending Committee Approval

Attendees

Committee:

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

Absent: Robert Fanuzzi,

Other Board:

Laura Spalter (Community Board 8 Chair), Ed Green

Bronx Borough Commissioner's Office: Mike Ortiz (Chief of Staff, Bronx Borough Commissioner's Office), Katerine Borrome (Director of Capital Projects)

Parks Enforcement Patrol: Captain Juan Bayron (Commanding Officer, North Bronx), Captain Domingo Sanchez (Commanding Officer, South Bronx)

50th Precinct: Captain Filastine Srouf (Commander), Lieutenant Baez, Cesar Sala (Community Affairs)

Van Cortlandt Park Alliance: Stephanie Ehrlich (Executive Director / Van Cortlandt Park Administrator), Christina Taylor (Deputy Director)

Partnership for Parks: Sabina Saragoussi (Executive Director), Vladmir Cruz (Outreach Director), Karl Vetter (Outreach Coordinator, Partnership for Parks)

The meeting commenced at 7:06 pm

Approval of the Minutes of the Joint Meeting with Environment & Sanitation Committee of May 24, 2023

The meeting minutes were approved unanimously

Chair's Report

Electric Vehicles & Parks: As part of Mayor Adams "Charge Safe, Ride Safe: Electric Micro-mobility Action Plan, e-bikes and electric scooters will be allowed to ride on park drives and greenways through May 31, 2024. This has been controversial due to the mix of pedestrians and bikes on the Putnam Trail in particular and the committee will continue to monitor issues over the summer.

Outdoor Pools: Outdoor pools in parks are now open daily from 11am to 7pm with a break for cleaning from 3-4pm. Mini pools will close on Labor Day. Olympic and intermediate size pools will remain open through Sunday, September 10th

Van Cortlandt Golf Course: It has been two months since the committee met with the Concessions Unit and the concessionaire at the Van Cortlandt Golf Course. They have addressed three of the concerns the committee raised: opened the fencing at the birding bridge so that it is much easier for hikers to use the remaining span to cross over the wetland; they have posted their hours; they have removed the plywood that was covering a window on the golf house. This is wonderful progress and we will continue to check in with them over the summer regarding re-paving of the adjacent greenway.

Summer Park Safety – Discussion with the 50th Precinct, Parks Enforcement Patrol, Van Cortlandt Park Alliance, Council Member Dinowitz’s Office and the Bronx Borough Commissioner’s Office on efforts to ensure our parks are safe clean and orderly

PEP is still understaffed but there has been better coordination and the commanders are seeing improvement over last year. The number of Parks Enforcement Patrol officers is down to 38 total for the Bronx. They continue to hire and a new class will be graduating in mid-July. Captain Srour stated that incidents have dropped in Van Cortlandt Park since the 50th Precinct officers began working more closely with the Parks Enforcement Patrol (PEP). PEP, the 50th Precinct, the 52nd Precinct and the 47th Precinct are now coordinating very closely, so that there is ongoing coverage at multiple locations throughout the park. They have also been conducting programs to confiscate illegal motorcycles, e-bikes and sound equipment. They have confiscated over 40 dirt bikes so far. Overtime has also been approved for the officers if it is needed. Community Board 8 has previously sent a letter to recommend overtime and Board Chair Laura Spalter said she would resend it.

One resident stated that the area around the playground equipment near the Riverdale Stables is frequented by loud music and large parties after 5pm on Fridays, Saturdays and Sunday. The board office has been receiving complaints about this area as well. Captain Srour said that she would have officers investigate.

Volunteering in Our Parks – Discussion with Partnership for Parks and Green Thumb on their programs and ways for people to engage in our green spaces this summer

Partnership for Parks is a public/private partnership between the City Park Foundation and the Parks Department to assist community members in becoming engaged with their park, such as by hosting a volunteer cleanup or bench painting event. They also offer classes for individuals who are leading these events in how to market themselves, apply for grants and advocate for capital projects.

Partnership for Parks has upcoming horticultural training for volunteers and is planning a boroughwide get together for volunteers to encourage information sharing and support. More details to come which will be communicated directly to the volunteer groups.

In the last few years, they have eliminated their People Make Parks Program which specifically engaged volunteer groups in leading community feedback sessions and building a case for capital improvements in their parks. The process is now driven more directly by the Parks Capital Division, the choices of City Council members and participatory budgeting. The Parks Department does not have its own capital funding and must rely on allocations from the local elected officials. Chair Travis reminded everyone that the committee takes new capital and expense suggestions for the community board’s budget priorities list in January and February and encouraged everyone to attend those meetings. It is a vital way for the community board, stewards and other local residents to align on community priorities.

Stewards of Ewen Park had questions regarding changes to the Ewen Park Staircase. They believe changes in materials have been made since the Community Board 8 approval last October including the steps being changed from granite to concrete and boulders being changed to logs. The committee will follow-up to understand if this is true and the extent of the changes.

Water is often an issue for volunteers caring for planted perennial beds. Stewards of Ewen Park have received permission to have a drinking fountain with a hose connector installed near the exercise equipment which will give them water access. Stewards of Henry Hudson Park still have an issue with the bruckner valve there which prevents their access to water. Joe Magneri has investigated it and believes that this would be a capital project to fix as it seems as though the water connection was capped during a construction project. The stewards have been told that DEP will waive the fee for the hydrant connection if they are able to make the connection workable. They have decided to not put plantings in Henry Hudson Park until the water issues are resolved due to the very dry conditions.

Seton Park Dog Run Stewards – wood chips were requested for the dog run. Parks is in contact with the requestor and will place the chips using the district Tool Cat

Ewen Park Dog Run – Stewards of Ewen Park requested wood chips for this dog run. Joe will work with Alison to have wood chips delivered on the same day as Seton Park. They have been delayed due to repairs needed on the Tool Cat

Volunteering Opportunities:

- Van Cortlandt Park Alliance –
 - Water Chestnut Wednesdays, Forest Fridays are ongoing volunteer opportunities and perfect for new volunteers.
 - Vital Volunteers is a program of trash and trail maintainers where some experience in Van Cortlandt Park is needed.
 - See vancortlandt.org for more information
- Partnership for Parks – if you are interested in leading an activity in a specific park or dog run or inquiring about an active volunteer group contact Karl Vetter at karl.vetter@parks.nyc.gov at Partnership for Parks for more information
- Super Stewards – if you are interested in working solo in Forever Wild designated forested parks removing invasives and litter this is the program for you. Training and authorization is required. Karl can assist you with this as well.
- Brust Park – Contact Stewards of Brust Park, stewardsofbrustpark@gmail.com
- Ewen Park – Contact Stewards of Ewen Park, info@ewenparkbronx.nyc
- Fort Independence Park – Contact Jerome Park Friends & Neighbors, jeromeparkfans@gmail.com
- Henry Hudson Park and Shorefront Park – Contact Stewards of Henry Hudson Park, spuytenduyvilny@gmail.com

Update on Capital Items – Update from Parks Department on active capital projects in our district

Here are updates on active capital projects:

Note on timing: capital projects generally have three phases which each last 14 – 16 months: design, procurement and construction. For complex projects like restrooms, construction may take longer.

Pickleball Court in Riverdale Playground – was supposed to be open by Memorial Day. Delayed due emergency repairs at other locations and seasonal painting of the pools. Work should begin in July

Classic Playground in Van Cortlandt Park – Construction to begin in July.

Strong Street Playground – Just started procurement process

Van Cortlandt Greenhouse – In construction. Construction completed expected for January 2025

Ewen Park Adult Fitness – Completed. Contractors will be removing their equipment this week

Ewen Park Staircase – Completing design phase this summer

Seton Park Adult Fitness and Skate Park – Construction to begin in July

Van Cortlandt House Improvements Including ADA Access – Design phase

Some projects are being done by Citywide Administrative Services as general repair and maintenance: Bailey Playground Restroom Roof Repairs, Tibbett's Tail Fence and Renovation of Van Cortlandt Stadium Track Field. Katherine Borrome said she would follow-up on timeline and get back to the committee.

There was a request for an update about the Jerome Park Reservoir trees that were inspected and determined to be in need of removal. The Chair reports that her last understanding of the situation was that there was a decision to reduce the canopy on some trees to make them more resilient instead of removing them all together. Some trees have been removed, but just a handful. Chair will follow up with Forestry for an update.

Old Business

Mosholu Golf Course – The Request for Proposals for one two-year term has been issued. All RFP questions should be directed to Barbara Huang, the project manager at Barbara.huang@parks.nyc.gov. Proposals are due by Friday July 21st at 3pm.

Palisade Avenue/235th Street Pumping Station – The Parks Department will be restoring this to the as-new condition once the DEP project is over including adding \$300,000 in new trees. The landscaping plan was included in the bid documents. The current schedule to complete the work is mid-2024.

Palisade Avenue / Riverdale Park Walking Trail – The conditions are deteriorated on the west side of Palisade Avenue within Riverdale Park. Addressing them is not part of the work to be done to restore the conditions near the Palisade Avenue Pumping Station. A capital project would be required.

Wave Hill Swale – The Community Board has confirmed with Parks and Wave Hill that Wave Hill is responsible for swale adjacent to Independence Avenue from West 249th Street to Spaulding Lane and then adjacent to Spaulding Lane to Palisade Avenue. This swale is made of cobble and is in considerable decline. Wave Hill agrees that it is in poor shape and must be addressed but do not have the budget to do so at this time and are seeking funding. The committee will consider this project for their Expense Priorities.

New Business

June 6, noon – Memorial Grove in Van Cortlandt Park – Ceremony honoring the 80th Anniversary of the Invasion of Normandy

Movies in Van Cortlandt Park – Van Cortlandt Park Parade Ground. Tuesday nights, starting second Tuesday in July with Invasion of the Body Snatchers. The theme this year is outer space.

July 15th, 10am to 2pm - City of Water Day – Hosted by Stewards of Shorefront Park. Join them for a morning of volunteering and a tour of the work they have done to remove invasives and clear sightlines around the pond edge and then hop onto MetroNorth to Roberto Clemente State Park for refreshments and a presentation on resiliency efforts there. Free and open to the public.

Next Meeting

The next meeting of the Parks Committee will be in September. A date will be announced over the summer. We will discuss the Van Cortlandt Park stables concession to provide feedback to the concession unit ahead of that RFP, so the committee was encouraged to visit the stables in order to provide feedback. The public is also invited to submit feedback to the board office and attend the September meeting

The meeting adjourned at 9:38pm

Minutes submitted by Deb Travis