

Minutes of the Parks & Recreation Committee Meeting
Sept. 28, 2022 at Van Cortlandt Golf House
(pending committee approval)

Attendees

Committee: Bob Bender, David Gellman, Rob Jacklosky, Ramdat Singh, Leona Teten, Debra Travis

Absent: Scott Krompinger

Other CB: Laura Spalter

DPR: Stephanie Ehrlich, Christina Taylor (both Van Cortlandt Park Alliance); Katerine Borrome, Samir Roy, Doug Nash; Mary Rice, ABB NYC.

Community: Frederic Klein (AM Dinowitz's office), Alex Rosenblum, Bette Clark, Hannah Lipman, Shaina Rodriguez (Kingsbridge Heights Community Center)

Agenda

The meeting commenced at 7:05 pm.

A quorum being present, June committee meeting minutes were unanimously approved.

Chair's Report

Interim committee chair Bob Bender mentioned that there would be a discussion of a location for a pickleball court at the meeting. Bob also mentioned that he and Budget Committee chair David Gellman attended (virtually) the Borough Consultation Meeting. There was little to report from that meeting except that both Bob and David brought up the issue of safety in the parks, particularly Van Cortlandt. Last, Bob mentioned the Environmental Bond Act proposal that will be on the ballot in November and urged all at the meeting to familiarize themselves with the proposal.

DPR presentation of Ewen Park stairway renovation

Mary Rice and representatives from DPR presented plans to renovate the Johnson Avenue staircase in Ewen Park. A copy of the presentation had been sent to committee members and others in the community prior to the meeting.

The staircase is not in good repair. Among other problems, because of a 20-foot change in grade and the way the staircase is currently configured, it is too steep. The handrails do not comply with code because of the steep grade. (They are too low.) The staircase also encroaches on the sidewalk right of way.

Four trees will be removed to accommodate the expanded landing area on the reconfigured staircase. The critical root zone of a fifth tree will be affected, and that tree may also have to be removed. The trees will be replaced; there is a \$246,000 restitution budget. There was some question whether all the replacement trees could be planted in Ewen Park. Committee members urged that every effort be made to plant the trees there. DPR said it hopes to do so,

but that decision rests with DPR Forestry. Tree replanting will take place within one year of the completion of the project.

DOT will be repairing the sidewalk adjacent to the stairs. New lighting will be installed near the staircase to illuminate the landing areas. There is a problem with overgrowth that interferes with the lighting at present. New native plantings will be used in the project to avoid this problem.

The pathways in the park are not part of the project, nor should they be affected by it. Wherever stairs remain that are not replaced, handrails will be replaced because they do not comply with code regulations.

The stone selected for the work will match the current stone at the staircase.

The construction work will take approximately one year. The project has to go through the regular DPR design and procurement process before construction begins.

A request was made for access to water to ensure that the new plantings are properly watered. DPR said that this access would depend on the location of the nearest water source. Further investigation will take place.

DPR will present its plan to the Public Design Commission on October 14.

Committee members and community attendees approved of the proposed work. The resolution below reflects the committee's approval made at the meeting.

Whereas representatives from the Department of Parks and Recreation (DPR) met with the Parks & Recreation Committee of Community Board 8 on September 28, 2022, and presented plans for repairing the Johnson Avenue stairs in Ewen Park; and

Whereas DPR representatives answered questions from committee members and from members of the public who attended the meeting to the general satisfaction of the committee members;

Therefore, Be It Resolved, that the Parks & Recreation Committee approves the plan for repairing the stairs in Ewen Park as presented to the committee, with the understanding that DPR will return to the committee for further discussion if there are any substantive alterations to the plan that was presented.

In favor, 6: Bender, Gellman, Jacklosky, Singh, Teten, Travis

Opposed, 0

Abstain, 0

Neighborhood Parks

Bronx DPR has been looking for a location for a pickleball court in a neighborhood park. It is proposing to locate a court in the rear of a paved area in Spuyten Duyvil Playground on W. 235th St. The area is adjacent to several basketball half courts. A fence would be constructed between the basketball courts and the pickleball court.

Mr. Rosenblum, who has been a leading advocate for pickleball, was satisfied with the location, which is directly across W. 235th St. from Seton Park.

A question was raised whether PS 24 uses this area for recess, and also whether teachers park in this location. That question will be investigated and reported on prior to the October meeting.

It is unclear why one or more of the tennis courts in Seton Park cannot be converted to a pickleball court. This question too will be investigated and reported on. (*Note: subsequent to the meeting Michael Ortiz, Bronx DPR capital projects liaison, reported that the tennis courts in Seton Park are in constant use, which is why that is not a good location for pickleball.*)

Van Cortlandt Park

There are serious safety concerns in VCP. Motorcycles have been reported on the Putnam Greenway and on the track around the Parade Grounds. More recently a motorcycle was spotted on the equestrian trail after someone cut the fence at the Saratoga Ave. entrance to the park.

Bronx Parks Commissioner Aponte has communicated with the 50th Precinct about the problem. The precinct says that it does not have the resources to station a patrol car at the Golf House parking lot, which is the entryway for most of the motorcycles in the park. There are plans to hold a joint 50th Precinct and PEP (Parks Enforcement Patrol) meeting on the subject with the VCP Alliance. Frederic Klein reported that both Assemblyman Dinowitz and Councilman Dinowitz are recommending that the number of PEP officers be increased. It was pointed out that patrol cars could visit the area periodically without being stationed there in the hope of deterring motorcycle riders.

There was also concern expressed about cyclists who ride too fast and too close to runners and pedestrians on the Putnam Greenway. It was agreed that cyclists need to be educated about riding slowly and carefully on the Greenway. DOT will be holding a bike education program on the Greenway. It was also recommended that bicycle groups help to monitor the Greenway.

Stephanie Ehrlich, VCP Administrator, reported that plans are in place for the fall cross-country season, including the Manhattan College Invitational meet on October 8.

According to the City Record, the City and CSX have reached agreement on purchasing the former CSX property immediately south of the park, enabling the extension of the park and the

daylighting of Tibbetts Brook to W. 230th Street. The purchase price is \$11.2 million. There will be a public hearing on the matter, currently scheduled for November 9. The next TAG (Tibbetts Advisory Group) meeting will take place on a date to be determined in October. Over the summer, DEP and DPR presented a conceptual design to the Public Design Commission, which recommended substantial changes to the design. The agencies have since hired a landscape architect to help revise the design for the park and daylighting.

City Council Speaker Adams visited VCP over the summer to learn about the Enslaved Peoples Project. She was impressed by what she saw. VCP Alliance has applied for an education grant for the EPP, with support from CB8.

New Business

Shaina Rodriguez spoke about the dire condition of the Kingsbridge Heights Community Center (KHCC). The roof and parapet need repair. The project was initially estimated at \$2 million but may cost \$4 million. KHCC is a DPR property. Committee members support the planned renovation in principle and have asked for additional information, which Ms. Rodriguez said that she will supply. Once we have that information, we will confer with board leadership about a letter of support for KHCC. *(Note: Subsequent to the meeting Ms. Rodriguez provided detailed information to the Community Board about a state of disrepair at KHCC's building.)*

Committee member Deb Travis reported that there will be daffodil planting at Washingtons Walk on Oct. 22.

A resident said that people have been attacked on Palisade Avenue by Riverdale Park. Committee members were unfamiliar with these incidents and will inquire further. The resident was advised to communicate with the Public Safety Committee and/or the 50th Precinct.

The meeting adjourned at 8:50 pm.

Minutes submitted by Bob Bender.