

Minutes of the Parks & Recreation Committee Meeting
April 26, 2023
Via Zoom

Attendees

Committee:

Present: Bob Bender, David Gellman, Rob Jacklosky, Debra Travis (Chair)

Absent: Robert Fanuzzi, Ramdat Singh, Leona Teten

Other Board:

Laura Spalter (Community Board 8 Chair), Steve Froot

Elected Officials:

Tanbir Chowdhury (Council Member Eric Dinowitz's Office), Jesse Lerer (Assembly Member Jeffrey Dinowitz's Office)

Department of Parks and Recreation:

Mike Ortiz (Chief of Staff, Bronx Borough Commissioner's Office), Stephanie Ehrlich (Van Cortlandt Park Administrator), Christina Taylor (Deputy Director, Van Cortlandt Park Alliance), David Cerron (Assistant Commissioner for Business and Special Events), Melissa Goldberg (Director of Compliance), Alexander Han (Chief of Concessions), Karl Vetter (Outreach Coordinator, Partnership for Parks)

Community:

Mike Tafet (Concessionaire, Van Cortlandt Golf Course), Matt Rawitzer (Executive Director, First Tee/Mosholu Golf Course), Anthony Rodriguez (Senior Program Director, First Tee/Mosholu Golf Course), Lizzy Blomgren (Program Director, First Tee/Mosholu Golf Course), Raye Barbieri (Executive Director, Kingsbridge Heights Community Center), Jodie Colon (Sewards of Henry Hudson Park)

The meeting commenced at 7:04pm

Approval of the March 29, 2023 Minutes

The meeting minutes were approved unanimously

Chair's Report

Putnam Greenway

The Tibbett's Advisory Group held a virtual meeting on Monday to review the preliminary design for the Putnam Greenway. There will be a walk through tomorrow morning for those members of the public who are interested starting at Verveelen Place at 9am.

Separately, Mayor Adams announced last month that the Harlem River Greenway will extend from Randall's Island to Van Cortlandt Park with a route which will include the Putnam Greenway. DOT is holding community input calls to get feedback on connecting routes for this greenway. An important note is that currently the Putnam Greenway only goes as far south as West 230th with the property between West 230th and the Harlem River belonging to Metro North. Metro North is currently using the tracks below West 225th for sorting trash. This was previously done at Grand

Central Station but moved to the Bronx with the East Side Access project. The Community Board 8 Environment and Sanitation Committee is taking the lead on advocating that the tracks between 230th and 225th be added to the Putnam Greenway and that the trash storage and sorting be moved to another area. Sign up for their agendas to keep updated on that work.

Discussion with the NYC Concessions Unit Regarding Van Cortlandt Golf Course

The current concessionaire, Forest Park Golf, owned by Mike Tafet, entered into a concession agreement with the Parks Department for renovation, operation and maintenance of the 18-hole Van Cortlandt Golf Course in July of 2007 and have a concession agreement which runs through June 30, 2027. At the March Community Board 8 Parks Committee meeting, the chair presented the current conditions of the Van Cortlandt Golf Course and the committee decided to send notification to the Parks Department Concessions Unit for follow-up.

Mike Tafet operates several municipal golf courses including Forest Park Golf in Queens and Silver Lake in Staten Island. He was originally born and raised in Riverdale and his father, Norman Tafet, was the operator of the Mosholu Golf Course concession when he was young. He expressed a strong attachment to the Van Cortlandt Golf Course and wants the public to know that he cares about it being in good condition. He agreed with many of the issues which were highlighted by the committee and is committed to addressing what he can with the understanding that he only has four years on his concession agreement and that he spent \$5 million at the beginning of the agreement to renovate the interior of the golf house. This was a requirement of the agreement and including substantial capital improvement in the RFP for a concession is standard.

The issues raised by the committee and the concessionaire and concession unit responses:

Golf House Condition

- The boarded up window is a result of multiple break-ins via access from the fire escape. He agrees that there are other ways to secure the window and will be removing the plywood.
- Windows coated with dirt – they power washed the exterior and re-stained the wood trim after receiving the committee's feedback. They also planted annuals in the planting bed. They will be replacing the plexiglass windows.
- Damaged soffits – they have been struggling with a raccoon who continues to damage the building. They will repair the soffit to prevent critters from moving into the eaves.
- Terrace – they have replaced boards on the terrace as part of their normal preparation for summer
- No Hours Posted - The interior is in great condition and is historic, but he has had trouble staffing due to low demand. This may be at least partially explained by the hours not being posted. Generally, the restaurant is open sunrise to sunset.

Poor Bridge Condition Between Holes 9 & 10 With No Public Ability to Cross Since the Removal of the Attached Wooden Birding Bridge Structure

- It was stated by Mr. Cerron that the concrete portion of the bridge has always been open to the public and that Mr. Tafet was responsible for cuts in the fence that resembled sneak holes to allow access for pedestrian. The chair noted that if this was the case, the openings in the fence were only a few feet high and were quickly closed by the Parks Department, so they did not look like Mr. Tafet intended for there to be public access. It was agreed that the

fence would be opened completely and that signage would be installed to guide hikers away from the golf course.

- In 2017, this bridge did fail its inspection and was deemed unsafe. Mr. Tafet spent \$47,000 to repair it to ensure continued safe use.

East Coast Greenway Poor Pavement Condition

- The portion of the greenway adjacent to the golf house is agreed to be the concession's responsibility
- Mr. Tafet will and patch or re-seal the asphalt.

Golf Fencing in Poor Condition

- It is the position of the Concession Unit that a holistic review of the fencing is needed and they intend to include improvements to the fencing in the next concession agreement
- The concessionaire agreed to address small areas that may be unsafe or in very poor condition
- The concessionaire has had difficulty with kids harassing golfers, taking golf flags and driving atv's and scooters on the course, which is very similar to issues seen throughout the park.

Junior Golf Programs as Required by the Concession Agreement

- Van Cortlandt Golf Course hosts junior golf events but does not have a junior golf program due to the skill required to play on an 18-hole golf course. They have not collaborated with First Tee Metropolitan New York, however, both groups expressed interest in discussing opportunities for youth together.

Committee asked the Concession Unit about the restaurant becoming a separate concession so that it can be operated by someone with that specific expertise. The Concession Unit is open to considering that if it appears that there is a good chance a location will be profitable for an operator and that they can find a restaurateur who is willing to work within the Parks rules which can be substantial for a concession. Mr. Tafet is also able to sublet the space to someone else to operate if he would like. If there is a true business interest from an operator, they should speak to Mr. Tafet directly.

The committee also asked about adding green certification, like the Audubon Cooperative Sanctuary Program, to the future RFP since the Van Cortlandt Golf Course has a state protected wetland in the middle of it. Mr. Tafet stated that they are already in the process of getting their Audubon Cooperative Sanctuary Program certification at their new golf concession, Silver Lake Golf Course. He does not see the certification as being a barrier and would be willing to pursue it for the Van Cortlandt Golf Course, however, not until after the next concession agreement begins due to the time it takes to become certified.

The committee asked how the process works for approving a concession. The Concession Unit sends the community board a letter in advance requesting feedback about 40 days before the RFP is issued. They maintain a mailing list of possible candidates and also advertise the RFPs and post them to social media. They have made a commitment that future RFPs have a requirement for all electric golf carts and use sustainable design for capital improvements.

The concession unit stated they had already contacted Community Board 8 in January regarding the upcoming Mosholu Golf Course RFP. The committee chair had not received it and they said they would resend it. The deadline for comments from the community board is May 30th. After the Mosholu Golf Course RFP is released, they will be requesting comments for the Van Cortlandt Stables.

The chair thanked the concession unit and Mr Tafet for their prompt response to the committee's concerns.

Discussion with First Tee on Their Programming and Transition to New Mosholu Golf Facilities

Matt Rawitzer, the Executive Director since June 2021 of First Tee, the nonprofit concessionaire for the Mosholu Golf Course, discussed their current program offerings: the Path to College program and their youth golf program. The Path to College program provides no cost tutoring and homework assistance to underserved communities. Their youth program enables local students to learn how to play golf and have access to job, educational and scholarship opportunities. Last year they played 17,000 holes of golf. They find their participants primarily through word of mouth and work closely with Montefiore to identify youth who might be interested. They also do adult outreach especially with parents of their youth participants through parent clinics. They partner with PGA Hope which is a nonprofit which teaches veterans and active duty military golf. Visit <https://firsttee.org> to learn more and sign up for their programs.

Their concession agreement to operate the Mosholu Golf Course will end in June, 2024. The Concessions Unit is currently requesting feedback from the Community Board on the Request for Proposals. The deadline for the feedback is May 30th and the RFP will be released soon thereafter. The construction of the new golf house is expected to be completed by the fall and First Tee will have a better idea then of what their plan will be for utilizing the new driving range, securing the facility and maintaining the wet cells that are part of the design of the driving range once they know if they will be selected for a new concession contract. There will be some work this summer to extend hole 2 to the new golf house where it will become the new first hole.

Parks has been requesting a sewer connection for the golf house that First Tee will be surrendering when it moves into the new golf house. First Tee currently spends between \$3,500 and \$7,000 a month to pump the septic tank of their temporary golf house, depending on how much usage the golf house sees seasonally. First Tee would have advocated at the beginning for a sewer line if they had known how long the construction was going to last. The filtration plant construction began in 2004. Jodie Colon suggested that Parks explore composting toilets. She sent the following links as follow-up:

<https://www.nps.gov/articles/composting-toilets.htm>

<https://www.dnainfo.com/new-york/20170619/windsor-terrace/composting-toilet-prospect-park-wellhouse-public-restroom/>

The committee thanks First Tee for all of the work they do in the community and for offering to work with Van Cortlandt Golf Course to establish ongoing youth opportunities on their 18-hole course.

Finalization of FY25 Budget Priorities

After a brief review, the committee deemed the budget priorities to be approved for FY25. In the number 5 position for expense is a request for the repair of a Bruckner box in Henry Hudson Park. The Stewards of Henry Hudson Park and the board office have been working together to get this piece of equipment fixed. Jodie Colon will contact the chair if the repair is no longer needed, so that it can be removed from the committee budget priorities.

Raye Barbieri, the new Executive Director of Kingsbridge Heights Community Center, noted that the roof work which they have been seeking emergency funding for will cost over \$5 million and they have only raised \$2.8 of the needed funds. The committee agreed that the second spot was still the best spot to emphasize the importance of finding funding for this institution that does such vital work.

<u>FY25</u>	<u>Bronx CB8 Parks Committee FY2025 Capital Budget Requests</u>	<u>FY24</u>
1	Parks - DPR: <u>Redesign and reconstruction of Bailey Playground</u> Repair deteriorated drains and reconstruct play equipment, safety surfacing, fencing along the Deegan. Reduce asphalt and add green space. Incorporate adjacent Tibbett's Tail area into an expanded Bailey Playground.	1
2	Parks - DPR: <u>Restoration of Historic Kingsbridge Heights Community Center Building</u> Complete funding of the roof repairs, re-point the façade, and restore interior walls back to a state of good repair from water damage. Update heat and windows to meet energy efficiency best practices.	New
3	Parks - DPR: <u>Marble Hill Playground Lighting</u> Install park lighting within the interior of Marble Hill Playground	New
4	Parks - DPR: <u>Restoration of Lower Brust Park Staircase</u> Restoration of flagstone, pavers, steps and handrails	New
5	Parks - DPR: <u>Equipment for Litter Collection Within the District</u> One large garbage truck to be assigned to the district	4 on Expense
6	Parks - DPR: <u>Equipment for Litter Collection Within Van Cortlandt Park</u> Additional mini-packer vehicle to reach remote areas for litter collection	3 on Expense
7	Parks - DPR: <u>Reconstruction of Old Fort Four Park</u> Reconstruction of Old Fort Four Park including playground equipment, basketball courts, benches, greenspace, stone walls and fencing	2
8	Parks - DPR: <u>Update Play Equipment at Fort Independence Playground</u> Replace 20 year old playground equipment and safety mats at Fort Independence Playground	New
9	Parks - DPR: <u>Engineering Study of Van Cortlandt Park Stadium</u> Funding for engineering study to assess and to develop a restoration plan for Van Cortlandt Park Stadium	4
10	Parks - DPR: <u>Upstream Stormwater Management of Alder Brook Stream Bed in Riverdale Park</u> Remove sedimentation and invasives and restore native plantings along Alder Brook stream in Riverdale Park	New

FY25	Bronx CB8 Parks Committee FY2025 Expense Budget Requests	FY24
1	Parks - DPR: <u>Replacement Gator-Type Utility Vehicles for Landscape Management, Maintenance and Operations Staff Within Van Cortlandt Park</u> Replace existing utility gator-type vehicles due to age and maintenance issues	New
2	Parks - DPR: <u>Crushed Stone and Boulders for Maintenance</u> Crushed stone and boulders to enable repairs of tracks and walkways within District 8 and Van Cortlandt Park	New
3	Parks - DPR: <u>Parks Enforcement Patrol Command Within Van Cortlandt Park</u> PEP Personnel, stationed in Van Cortlandt Park, sufficient to properly enforce DPR rules and regulations in Van Cortlandt Park and other CD08 district parks	2
4	Parks - DPR: <u>Repair Bruckner Box Connection in Upper Henry Hudson Park</u>	New

Capital Budget Priorities Outside of Top Ten (Unranked) for FY25 (Parks Committee)	
	<u>Van Cortlandt Park Bailey Pedestrian Plaza</u> Construct an entrance to Van Cortlandt Park at Bailey Avenue and Van Cortlandt Avenue West to provide safe pedestrian and bicycle access to the Van Cortlandt Golf House and lake area
	<u>Reconstruct Wave Hill Swale</u> Reconstruct the swale adjacent to Wave Hill along Independence Avenue between West 249th Street and Spaulding Lane
	<u>Jerome Park Reservoir Pedestrian Safety Lighting</u> Install World's Fair park lighting along the walkway within the parkland surrounding Jerome Park Reservoir to improve safety, encourage usage after dusk and discourage dumping
	<u>Establish a Parks Enforcement Patrol Command in Van Cortlandt Park</u> Vehicles and other equipment needed to support a new PEP command in Van Cortlandt Park
	<u>Reconstruct Washington's Walk</u> Reconstruct Washington's Walk to make the pathway ADA accessible, update and add benches and replace temporary chain link fencing with a wrought-iron fence
	<u>Reconstruct Riverdale Playground Basketball Courts</u> Reconstruct the basketball courts at Riverdale Playground to replace the nets, rims, backboards and re-surface the court
	<u>Reconstruct Hackett Park</u> Reconstruction of Hackett Park dog run
	<u>Convert Mosholu Temporary Golf House to Permanent Parks Administration Building</u> Complete sewer connection, update building layout and provide furnishings/equipment to convert temporary structure for use by Mosholu Golf House during Filtration Plant construction to permanent Parks Administration Building and PEP Command. Connect sewer line with adjacent comfort station
	<u>Parks District Equipment</u> Crew Cab Pickup to transport staff & equipment within the district
	<u>Spuyten Duyvil Shorefront Park Pond Restoration</u> Green Infrastructure; to divert, absorb, and clean stormwater runoff from catch basins, streets, and the Henry Hudson Bridge outfalls that drain into the stream bed that feeds the 2 ponds in the Park before discharging overflow into the sewer system and Harlem River. Rehabilitation and restoration of natural areas, trails, wetlands and aquatic features.
	<u>Van Cortlandt Park Mansion Stairway Restoration</u> Restoration of the red brick stairway which historically connected Van Cortlandt House with its former garden. The fence has been funded.
	<u>Reconstruct Van Cortlandt Park Fencing and Entrances Along Yonkers Border</u> Replace chain link fences and open edges with wrought iron fence along the Yonkers border of Van Cortlandt Park from Broadway to Kimball Avenue. Establish entrances that prevent motorized vehicle access to trails but allow for pedestrian and greenway usage
	<u>ADA Access to the Northwest Forest in Van Cortlandt Park</u> Establish an ADA accessible point of entry to the Northwest Forest near Kelly Field

Old Business

Mosholu Golf House Sewer Connection

Chair Spalter spoke to Deputy Commissioner for Intergovernmental Affairs, DEP, Mario Bruno. He said that DEP did not receive a request from Parks during the design phase for the project when Parks had input back in the 1990's. DEP can't do service line hookups for other agencies, however, he recommends Parks bring their request for a service line to DDC. They will sort out how it gets done and paid for.

New Business

City Naturefest will be taking place in Henry Hudson Park on Saturday and Ewen Park on Sunday. Both events are 9am to noon. Urban Park Rangers will be demonstrating iNaturalist along with crafts and opportunities to weed and rake. Meet at the statue of Henry Hudson on Saturday or near the dog run on Sunday.

May – Trail work Wednesdays and Forest Restoration Fridays will continue in Van Cortlandt Park. Forest restoration will be shifting to the Northeast Forest.

May 6 - Van Cortlandt Park Alliance will be hosting a Pinkster celebration at Van Cortlandt House from 12pm – 4pm on the lawn. It is free and open to the public.

May 11 – Van Cortlandt Alliance will be hosting their annual gala. This year it is called Shindig. See vancortlandtpark.org for more information on this and all other volunteer activities in the park.

Next Meeting

The next meeting is at 7pm on May 24th and it is a joint meeting with our Environment and Sanitation Committee to see the preliminary design for the Putnam Greenway that will be submitted to the Public Design Commission for approval.

The meeting adjourned at 9:41pm

Minutes submitted by Deb Travis