

**Minutes of the Parks & Recreation Committee Meeting
Bronx Community Board 8
Monday, June 23, 2026 at 7:00pm**

Attendees

Committee:

Present: Bob Bender, Carol Blake, Debra Travis (Chair)

Absent: Miriam Filer

NYC Department of Parks and Recreation: Alberto Milan (Chief of Staff, Borough Commissioner); Stephanie Ehrlich (Van Cortlandt Park Administrator); Christina Taylor (Deputy Director, Van Cortlandt Park Alliance); Marlisa Wise (Director of Architecture); Giulietta Fiore (Executive Director, Historic House Trust)

Van Cortlandt House Museum: Margaret Holmes (Executive Director, Van Cortlandt House Museum)

Community Board Members: Julie Reyes (Chair, Bronx Community Board 8)

The meeting commenced at 7:05pm

Approval of the April 22, 2026 Minutes

The meeting minutes were approved unanimously. There was no May meeting.

Chair's Report

- **Tibbetts Brook Daylighting Project:** Chair Travis attended the June 16, 2026 meeting of the Tibbetts Brook Advisory Group (TAG). The \$150 million Tibbetts Brook Daylighting Project will divert water from the lake in Van Cortlandt Park to the Harlem River, bypassing the sewer system. The project runs from Van Cortlandt Park to the Harlem River with the greenway ending at West 230th Street. The construction contract has been awarded to Railroad Construction Company. Mobilization is expected in August–October 2026, with construction continuing through August 2030. Once complete, the project will divert approximately 2.1 billion gallons annually from the sewer system, significantly reducing the estimated 215 million gallons of combined sewer overflow that enter the Harlem River untreated during heavy rain events. Phase 1 work within Van Cortlandt Lake to address invasive species was completed last year. FloodNet sensors have been

installed near the dam. NYC DEP is switching to mechanical harvesting for water chestnuts; invasive removal which will continue through fall 2028.

- **Marble Hill Playground – Synthetic Turf Replacement:** The synthetic turf replacement project is complete. This project went into design in April 2024 and cost of \$421,000 which was funded by the Mayor's Office.
- **Henry Hudson Park – Volunteer Days:** Stewards of Henry Hudson Park will host tree and garden care volunteer days throughout the summer. Upcoming dates: Wednesday, June 24 (6:00–7:30 PM); Sunday, June 28 (9:00–11:30 AM); Tuesday, June 30 (6:00–7:30 PM).

Van Cortlandt Park Stadium Demolition and Master Plan

Marisa Wise (NYC Parks, Director of Architecture) presented a recap of the Van Cortlandt Park Stadium master planning study, following the April 2026 initial presentation to this committee. The recap was requested to ensure community members who were not present in April had the opportunity to receive this information and ask questions.

Background:

The stadium building was constructed in the 1930s as a WPA project, opened by Robert Moses and Mayor LaGuardia in September 1939. The master planning study was a five-stage process: site assessment; investigative studies (structural, stormwater, soils); laboratory analysis for contaminants; community engagement; and building options analysis. Community engagement yielded over 1,000 responses through virtual meetings, a month-long online survey, and on-site popup events. Most popular activities identified: walking/jogging, handball, and outdoor sports.

Structural Findings:

The existing building is deteriorated beyond repair. The site was originally a swamp filled with trash; the building was constructed on a shallow foundation inappropriate for these soil conditions. Concrete on exterior facades, columns, and structural beams is severely compromised due to poor original concrete mix ratios, water infiltration, and freeze-thaw cycles. Mechanical, electrical, and plumbing systems are largely original to the 1930s and are non-functional. Testing found asbestos, lead-based paint, PCBs, mold, and rats throughout the interior. The building has been closed to the public for some time.

The exterior was tested separately and does not have asbestos or lead contamination. The bleachers and surrounding areas, including the handball courts, are currently safe to use and open. Wire netting has been installed above the handball courts as a precautionary measure. A structural engineering team will conduct another evaluation within the next two months of the stadium and annual inspections will occur going forward.

Keeping the building in its current location would also prevent future enlargement of sports fields to NCAA regulation size.

Options Studied: The master planning study evaluated three scenarios:

- Option 1 – Keep existing building: Not possible due to deteriorated building. Additionally, would accommodate less than 25% of community-desired programming and prevent NCAA-size fields.
- Option 2 – New non-membership building (~22,000 sq ft): New code-compliant building shifted closer to Broadway, allowing future NCAA-size fields. Would include multi-purpose rooms, restrooms, classrooms, media room, lobby, and offices (~50% of desired community spaces, ~75% of sports support spaces). No gymnasium or fitness rooms.
- Option 3 – New recreation center (membership model) (~44,000 sq ft): Larger facility pulled toward the center of the site. Would include all amenities of Option 2 plus gymnasium, indoor track, cardio/fitness rooms and locker rooms. Would require relocation of the spray shower area and reconfiguration of the track and fields. Membership pricing would follow NYC Parks standard structure for recreation centers: free for ages 24 and under; \$25/year for seniors (62+), people with disabilities, and veterans; \$100/year for adults ages 25–61 at facilities without a pool.

Funding Status:

No funding has been secured. The agency submitted a request for demolition and Option 3-scale replacement in the most recent mayoral budget cycle and did not receive it. The agency is actively communicating with local elected officials and anticipates submitting another funding request in the fall.

Discussion:

The committee raised concerns about: preserving existing facilities (basketball courts, skate park, spray shower, playground) through any redevelopment; the need to see the full 20-acre site master plan drawings before decisions are made; ensuring youth community sports programs are not displaced by expanded NCAA-level facilities; and the timeline and staging of demolition and construction. Parks clarified that demolition alone would take approximately 6 months, that no staging drawings exist yet (as no design scope has been selected), and that cost estimates for demolition will be provided in future communications.

A community member asked about the turf field replacement project for the soccer fields. Parks confirmed the turf project is separate from the stadium project and remains scheduled for 2027.

Chair Travis requested that Parks share the full 20-acre site master plan drawings with CB8 and proposed scheduling a September committee meeting with additional community input sessions on the full site plan, analogous to the two-round engagement process used for the Harlem River Greenway.

Follow-up items: Alberto Milan to confirm by the following day whether full 20-acre master plan drawings can be shared and to provide the exact month for the turf replacement schedule. CB8 Parks Committee to follow-up presentation of full site master plan at September or October Parks Committee meeting.

Van Cortlandt House Museum – Programming and Capital Update

Museum attendance has increased 38% over the past two years. Public programs offered have grown from 17 (June–December 2024) to 31 (full year 2025) to 25 already offered through June 2026, with 11 or more additional programs scheduled. The museum is on track for approximately 36 programs in 2026.

The centerpiece of Summer 2026 programming is “Overlapping Empires: The Bronx at 250,” a site-wide contemporary art exhibition by Bronx-based artist Samantha Box, on view through August 30, 2026. The exhibition examines the history of the Van Cortlandt plantation estate, the enslaved people who lived and labored there, and ideas of freedom and empire in the context of the nation’s 250th anniversary. The exhibition is funded by a multi-year NYC Department of Cultural Affairs (DCLA) Cultural Development Fund (CDF) grant awarded to the museum in Fiscal Year 2026.

Upcoming programs include: artist-led walkthroughs (June 25 at 1 PM, July 1 at 7 PM); Caribbean Connections music/history collaboration (August, exact date TBD), Revolutionary War camp cooking demonstration with living historian John Elliot (July 12), Dutch Raree puppet show for families (August 12) and ongoing Sunday pop-up crafts for families.

Admission to Van Cortlandt House is always free for Bronx residents; free for all visitors on Thursdays, during Black History Month, Women’s History Month and through August 30th during the exhibition of “Overlapping Empires”.

The design phase is underway for a comprehensive capital project to address the building envelope and ADA accessibility needs at the Van Cortlandt House Museum. The project is currently in a design lull while additional structural investigation funds are being registered. ADA-compliant interventions—including a lift—require site investigations to ensure they do not disturb historic rubble foundations or structural elements. All design alterations require Landmarks Preservation Commission (LPC) approval (the building is

both an exterior and interior landmark). The design team is exploring construction of a lift on a non-historic facade (the side of the building that already had additions in the 1916–17 era). Design is targeted for completion by end of 2027 or early 2028, followed by a ~9-month procurement phase, with construction approximately two years out. When the museum closes for construction, options for virtual programming, mobile initiatives, and in-school offerings will be explored. The staff will be retained during construction. Fence reconstruction capital work is complete.

The Community Advisory Group has met quarterly since it was established at the request of the Parks Committee in October 2024 and is currently on hiatus until fall 2026. The primary deliverable being developed is a community-informed strategic plan. Chair Travis offered CB8's support for any funding needed for facilitation of the strategic planning process, including through the board's expense budget request cycle in January–March.

The committee raised the deteriorating historic red steps at the Van Cortlandt House Museum entrance as a preservation concern. Parks has obtained cost estimates for repair but the project has not advanced due to competing capital priorities. The steps were originally constructed by the National Society of Colonial Dames in 1902 but is not considered part of the museum grounds currently. The committee asked whether the steps could be brought under the Historic House Trust's purview to access historic preservation funding streams. Giulietta Fiore and Stephanie Ehrlich agreed to explore this question and discuss advocacy options. The committee also raised the possibility of the adjacent Nature Center as a programming space during museum construction closure. Parks noted this would require consultation with the Borough Commissioner's office.

Old Business

The CB8 Parks Resource Guide has been finalized and is now in distribution.

New Business

Shorefront Park Trail Restoration – Jodie Colon, Friends of Spuyten Duyvil:

In 2026, Friends of Spuyten Duyvil and Henry Hudson Park volunteers logged 18 volunteer days in Henry Hudson Park (288 volunteers, 755 stewardship hours) and 21 days in Shorefront Park (100+ volunteers averaging 3 hours per day) to restore trails damaged by water runoff. After five years of effort, all eroded trails in Shorefront Park have been repaired and the trails were officially reopened on National Trails Day, June 6, 2026, with a ribbon-cutting ceremony attended by more than 60 people. NYC Urban Park Rangers led their first-ever program in Shorefront Park at this event. Shorefront Park is a designated Forever Wild Park. The Natural Areas Conservancy (NAC) and Student

Conservation Association will complete trail erosion work this summer, installing check steps to prevent washout during heavy rain.

Vandalism in Henry Hudson Park – Jodie Colon, Stewards of Henry Hudson Park:

Jodie reports that their signs are being taken down and encouraged the committee to continue including PEP officer staffing in budget requests.

Fort Independence Park – Abba Leffler:

- Six of 27 oak trees in the park's historic promenade have died or been removed and need replacement. Some tree pits have already been cleared and at least one is already sprouting a volunteer oak. Chair Travis committed to following up with Parks on tree replacement
- The children spray shower in the playground is not draining correctly and is causing water to overflow onto the sidewalk adjacent to Sedgwick Avenue and pool around a street tree, creating boggy conditions and a potential mosquito concern. Chair Travis noted Fort Independence Playground is scheduled for major reconstruction beginning spring 2027 (which will include full drainage redesign), but committed to arranging a site visit by Parks District Manager Joe Magneri to assess interim solutions in the meantime.

The meeting adjourned at 9:16pm

Minutes submitted by Deb Travis

[Recording Link:](#)