

Pending Committee Approval

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

Attendees

Committee:

Present (2): Bob Bender, Debra Travis (Chair)

Absent (2): Miriam Filer (Vice Chair), Daniel Nunez (present on Zoom. Does not count towards quorum)

NYC Department of Parks and Recreation: Joe Magneri (District Manager); Stephanie Ehrlich (Van Cortlandt Park Administrator); Valerie Davis-O'Neal (Special Assistant to the Bronx Borough Commissioner); Robert Madera (Community Engagement Coordinator, Partnership for Parks)

Park Partners and Stewardship Groups: Christina Taylor (Deputy Director, Van Cortlandt Park Alliance); Jacqueline Hosford (Stewards of Brust Park); Julie Jenkins (Stewards of Ewen Park); Jodie Colon (Friends of Spuyten Duyvil and Stewards of Henry Hudson Park); Andrea Arnold and Ian Christian (green street stewards - Riverdale Avenue bioswale); Camelia Tepelus (green street steward - Knolls Crescent); Jackie Davis (South Riverdale Little League and green street steward)

Bronx Council for Environmental Quality: Robert Fanuzzi, Karen Argenti

Press: Olivia Young (The Riverdale Press)

The meeting commenced at 7:04pm. With two committee members present, a quorum was not established. The recording began after the Chair's Report, which the Chair summarized again at the end of the meeting.

Approval of the Minutes

Approval of the minutes of the June 23, 2026 minutes committee meeting was tabled due to the lack of a quorum.

Chair's Report

- **New Vice Chair:** Miriam Filer has been named Vice Chair of the committee. The Chair thanked her for taking on the role in a year that is particularly important as the board begins to navigate term limits for community board members.
- **Volunteers Needed for Cleanups:** Two litter cleanup events are scheduled: a Marble Hill cleanup on Saturday, September 26 from 10:00am to noon, meeting at Jacobus Place and West 225th Street; and a Van Cortlandt Village cleanup on Saturday, October 3 from 1:00pm to 3:00pm, meeting at the Kingsbridge Heights Community Center. New board members are especially encouraged to attend the October 3 event.
- **Ewen Park Staircase Reconstruction:** Reconstruction of the staircase began over the summer and is expected to last approximately one year. During construction, Johnson Avenue between West 231st and West 232nd Streets will be narrowed to two travel lanes with no parking to accommodate construction equipment. The board office has been working with residents and the board of the Edmund Lee to improve vehicle access for loading and unloading.
- **Brust Park Mapping:** Parks steward Calder Orr flagged that a portion of Brust Park may not have been mapped to the City when West 242nd Street was de-mapped. The board office is working with the NYC Department of Finance to confirm next steps.
- **Brust Park:** A seating area in Brust Park was cordoned off over the summer due to unsafe conditions because the bluestone slabs are uneven and broken. Parks has added repair of this bluestone area to its maintenance schedule.

Discussion: Improving Coordination Between NYC Parks and Stewardship Groups on Grass and Perennial Care

NYC Parks increasingly relies on volunteer stewardship groups to maintain planted areas within district parks; however, some operational processes have not been updated to reflect this. The Chair opened the discussion by noting that this summer, cutting crews mowed shrubs within a planted area of Fort Independence Park and that a row of elderberry and wild flower bed was cut at Brust Park. The purpose of the discussion was to identify ways to prevent damage to steward-maintained plantings during mowing and maintenance.

Stewards in attendance introduced themselves and their areas of care. The Chair noted that Jerome Park Friends & Neighbors, which she founded, maintains the perennial beds along Sedgwick Avenue at Jerome Park Reservoir and in Fort Independence Park. Andrea Arnold and Ian Christian described a new volunteer effort to remove invasive plants from the bioswale beds at the end of the Fieldston Road at Riverdale Avenue. Ian also helps maintain Redbud Grove, two triangles at Greystone Avenue, Waldo Avenue and West 236th Street with native plantings and compost. There was uncertainty about which agency has jurisdiction over the bioswale: Joe Magneri and Robert Fanuzzi understood it to be NYC Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) property, while Robert Madera reported that Katerine Borrome, Director of Capital Projects, had confirmed it is Parks property, possibly under a memorandum of understanding. Joe Magneri will confirm.

Issues Raised by Stewards

- **Mowing of planted areas:** Jacqueline Hosford reported that Brust Park has experimented with several fencing approaches over the years. Sections of beds without a physical border, including a small area adjoining a circular garden planted in 2017, have been mowed, and the park's wildflower garden was mowed down; a sign installed with Parks' help has since been effective. Individual saplings planted in open areas are also vulnerable. The Chair reported that two beds in Fort Independence Park were mowed over the last couple of years. They did not have fencing but had mature yew and juniper shrubs and the beds seemed obvious. Jodie Colon noted that she relies on direct communication with the PS1 supervising the mow crew and uses shallow trenches and mulch to define unfenced beds, including beds around oak trees where fencing would damage shallow roots.
- **Inconsistent mowing practices:** Julie Jenkins reported that Parks staff conducted multiple walkthroughs of Ewen Park this year to map planted areas. Experienced mowers have generally worked around plantings, but a new mower this season was overly cautious, leaving some areas un-mowed for the summer.
- **Inspection standards and fences:** Based on her review of published inspection data, conditions such as plants protruding through fences or encroaching on paths are cited as violations, which may lead maintenance crews to cut plantings. The Chair added this is common in Fort Independence due to the mature hydrangea. It is unclear when the shrubs are in violation and there is no coordination with stewards who could cut them properly to avoid damage. The Chair requested a list of the horticultural features and conditions inspectors evaluate so stewards can help parks pass inspection.
- **Horticulture staff coordination:** Jodie Colon and Julie Jenkins reported that Parks horticulture staff worked inside steward-maintained beds this summer without notifying stewards, in one case at Henry Hudson Park removing plants that stewards had rescued and transplanted with prior Parks approval. Stewards noted that coordination was stronger when Amy Bortzfield served as the horticulture manager and conducted site visits with stewards. The stewards agreed Amy was awesome.
- **Unclear ownership of perennial maintenance:** The Chair noted that stewards are traditionally expected to care for perennials that they plant, but Park's plantings and stewards' plantings mix over time and grow to require care to maintain size and health. There is little clear guidance for stewards on receiving permission to cut shrubs or dig up and split perennials which can be a \$1,000 violation or more if Parks Enforcement sees them. Jodie Colon required several months of outreach to Parks to get guidance and permission to cut specific shrubs which she would need to

do all over again to cut other shrubs. She has also had issues with vandals cutting shrubs and saying they are stewards. A clear permitting process is needed.

NYC Parks Explanation and Proposal

Joe Magneri apologized for the damage and acknowledged the considerable effort stewards invest, noting that District 8 led the Bronx in volunteer hours. He stated that inspections did not trigger the incidents discussed. During the summer, many permanent staff with local knowledge are temporarily reassigned to pools or sanitation truck duty, and seasonal employees, many with limited experience, receive on-the-job training. On the days in question, a crew from the southern part of the borough was assigned to cut grass in the district and mowed the planted areas.

To address this, he proposed adopting a single, borough-wide standard edging for pollinator gardens and planted beds that would be presented at the start-of-season staff trainings with the instruction that this edging always means “do not cut.” The prototype is corrugated metal edging 12 inches in total height (8 inches above ground and 4 inches below), accompanied by a “Do Not Mow – Planted Area” sign measuring 12 by 18 inches. A consistent standard would also allow Parks to reassign staff from other districts without risk of damage. He emphasized the proposal is not final and that he was seeking feedback.

Feedback on the Proposal

- The Chair supported the flexibility of the edging, which could be placed inside existing low iron fencing or used where no fence exists, but noted the sign is too large for low fencing and that installing sign posts within beds would damage plantings, as occurred when signage was previously installed at dog runs in Fort Independence Park. She suggested a smaller sign or a sticker affixed to the edging. Joe Magneri will look into whether a smaller sign can be fabricated.
- Jacqueline Hosford expressed concern about the aesthetic impact of metal edging and prominent signage in naturalistic parks and suggested Parks consider two or three approved standards (for example, metal edging, rock borders, and log borders), documented with images for both staff and stewards. Joe Magneri noted that logs may be obscured by long grass, but agreed to consider options.
- Jodie Colon and Christina Taylor raised concerns that the metal edging could create a tripping or cutting hazard. Jodie Colon added that installing the edging around trees would damage roots and that many large beds cannot practically be enclosed.
- It was noted that edging placed in open areas could be removed in winter, when snow can obscure low borders, since the issue is primarily limited to the mowing season.
- Karen Argenti suggested simpler “No Mow” signage using a universal symbol, and noted that GIS mapping, similar to that used for stormwater assets, could identify planted areas.

Alternate Proposal - Mapping of Planted Areas

Julie Jenkins and Jodie Colon supported providing crews with maps of steward-maintained areas, which could be laminated and kept in vehicles. Christina Taylor stated that the Van Cortlandt Park Alliance experiences similar issues in Van Cortlandt Park, but that maps are unlikely to be effective given staff turnover and that crews do not always have a vehicle with them. Bob Bender noted that plantings change over time and maps would quickly become outdated. Robert Madera suggested that Partnership for Parks could collect maps from partner groups and share a dated, annually updated version with Maintenance & Operations and Horticulture each May, ahead of cutting crew training. Joe Magneri emphasized the need for a clear visual standard that allows him to hold staff accountable.

Proposed Next Steps

- Joe Magneri will incorporate the feedback into his proposal, including a smaller sign and alternative approved border types, with the goal of having a solution in place before the next mowing season.
- Robert Madera will work with Joe Magneri to obtain a summary of the criteria inspectors use to evaluate horticultural features and share it with partner groups.
- Joe Magneri will look into adding Robert Madera to the District 8 distribution list for 311 complaints so that stewards can be notified of complaints related to planted areas.

- Robert Madera proposed a standard Partnership for Parks sign at park entrances indicating that the park is cared for by a volunteer group, alerting crews to watch for planted areas. Jodie Colon suggested that, combined with such signage, any fence around a bed could be understood to mean “do not mow.”
- Joe Magneri will speak with Hector about ensuring Horticulture staff coordinate with stewardship groups.
- Robert Madera, who also supports Community Boards 4, 5 and 7, is available to visit stewardship sites with advance notice. Stewards not yet in contact with the board office are asked to email bx08@cb.nyc.gov to be added to the district's list of park stewards. The Chair suggested an informal gathering of district park stewards.
- The chair thanked Parks for taking their concerns seriously and helping to work through a viable solution and thanked the steward groups for all their work to keep our district green.

Old Business

- **Van Cortlandt Park Stadium Master Plan:** The committee requested a copy of the proposed master plan for the Van Cortlandt Park Stadium grounds over the summer and has not yet received it. The committee will continue to request it.
- **Henry Hudson Park Bruckner Box:** Over the summer, the board office, the Chair, Jodie Colon and Parks staff, including Parks plumbers, visited the site of the Bruckner box at the south end of the park. Parks plumbers have taken responsibility for the repair, prepared an estimate. Funding for the repair may be possible within the maintenance budget but is TBD. The work is estimated to take approximately eight months once funded. No funding update was available.
- **Henry Hudson Park Water Service:** Jodie Colon reported that the north end of Henry Hudson Park, including the drinking fountains, has had no water service this season. The Bruckner box near the shed at the north end, which was operational last year, was not turned on this year. 311 complaints were reportedly closed without resolution, with one response citing a problem with the supply pipe into the park. Without water, the stewards will forgo fall planting and transplanting. Joe Magneri will follow up.

New Business

Mosholu Golf Course Reopening – Bronx Council for Environmental Quality

Robert Fanuzzi and Karen Argenti of the Bronx Council for Environmental Quality (BCEQ) raised concerns regarding the pace of the reopening of the Mosholu Golf Course. Mr. Fanuzzi noted that the site, a portion of Van Cortlandt Park, was alienated in 1999 for construction of the Croton Water Filtration Plant, which came online in 2015, and that the public has been without access to the approximately 23 acres since then. BCEQ has been told the golf house will not open until 2028. BCEQ requested the committee's assistance in determining the reason for the delay.

The Chair reviewed the April 22, 2026 committee discussion of the Request for Proposals (RFP) for Mosholu Golf Course. At that time, the NYC Parks Concessions Unit requested committee comments by May 13, 2026 on a 20-year concession agreement expected to begin in July 2027, which would be the first post-construction agreement. The golf house was expected to open shortly thereafter once the winning concessionaire completed the build-out of the interior spaces and kitchen. Karen Argenti noted that the RFP was published in the City Record on July 10, 2026 and is now listed as archived, indicating it has closed.

Under the DEP–Parks memorandum of understanding (MOU), the concessionaire will maintain the wetland cells, which feed the golf course irrigation system, on behalf of Parks. BCEQ also raised concerns about who is currently maintaining the wetland cells and groundwater circulation. The Department of Design and Construction was expected to hand the site over to Parks fully by the end of summer 2026. It also does not appear that that has happened.

The committee noted that the perimeter fence along Jerome Avenue remains in poor condition with accumulated litter. In April, Parks indicated that the fence would not be removed until the golf house opens.

The committee will seek answers from NYC Parks to the following questions and report back at the next meeting:

- How many proposals were received for the RFP?
- Has a concessionaire been selected?
- Is it true that the golf house will not open until 2028? What is the cause of the delay?
- Has First Tee taken over operation of the wetland cells, and who is currently maintaining them?

Community Announcements

- Camelia Tepelus congratulated the Riverdale Main Street Alliance on a recent Saturday cleanup in North Riverdale in which more than 40 youth volunteered, with a group also working in Van Cortlandt Park. She also recognized Art for Aid for a pollinator tour in August, and noted ongoing tree pit plantings along the Spuyten Duyvil commercial corridor, two of which lack tree guards; a request has been submitted to Council Member Eric Dinowitz for the tree guards.
- Jackie Davis announced a civics crawl sponsored by the Riverdale-Yonkers Society for Ethical Culture on Sunday, beginning near Riverdale Avenue, to pick up litter and report neighborhood conditions to 311.
- Jodie Colon invited the committee to an Urban Park Rangers hike through all of the trails in Spuyten Duyvil Shorefront Park on Saturday, October 24 at approximately 10:30am. Over the summer, through arrangements made by the Natural Areas Conservancy, a Student Conservation Association AmeriCorps crew installed water bars to control erosion on the trails. She thanked the board office for posting stewardship event flyers on social media.

Adjournment

A motion to adjourn was made by Bob Bender and seconded by Deb Travis. The meeting adjourned at 8:47pm.

Minutes submitted by Deb Travis

[Recording Link:](#)