

Draft Subject to the Approval of the Committee

Minutes of the Parks and Recreation Committee Meeting

May 26th, 2021

Attendees

Committee Members Present: Rosemary Ginty (Chair), Courtney Dastis-Galvin, Bob Bender, David Gellman, Marvin Goodman, Robert Jacklosky, Debra Travis (Vice Chair)

Community Committee Member Absent: Herb Barret

Other CB8: Councilman Eric Dinowitz, Lorenzo Mazano (Councilmember Dinowitz Staff)

DPR + PD: PEP Captain Sanchez, PD Captain Charles Girvan, Christina Taylor (VCP Alliance), Stephanie Ehrlich (VCP Alliance), Michael Grattan (Parks Department) Joseph Mangeri (Parks Department)

Community: Belinda Hancock, Mark Edelman, Alena Edelman, Christopher Petitt, Christina Petitt, Karen Beatrice Porter, Alexandra Sawyer, Manal Abu Shaheen, Jessica Pinter, Janie Lerner, Stacey Dorcheiner, Luis Messon

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Agenda

The meeting was called to order at 7:02PM.

The minutes of the April 26th committee meeting were unanimously approved.

Chairperson's Report

- **Update: It's My Parks Day – 2 Saturdays ago**
Wonderful day and great event! Thanks to Committee members Robert Jacklosky, David Gellman and Sergio Villaverde for participating.
- **Update Report on Soccer Field Permit**
During April meeting, a local soccer group requested approval for a permit to play at the northwest corner of the park; Stephanie Ehrlich said that she was working on permit approval.
- **Update: Irving Ladimer Community Service Award**
In a previous meeting, nominating the Manhattan College Student Veterans Organization (SVO) was discussed. Upon further discussion with Sergio Villaverde, Chair of the Special Committee on Veterans Services, the SVO group has been jointly nominated by both committees.
- **Update: Certificate of Merit to Herb Barrett**
As part of the Bronx Week events, Borough President Diaz Jr. awarded a Certificate of Merit to Community Committee Member Herb Barret. Congratulations Herb!

- **Update: Ewen Park News**

Parks Department has mowed the park lawns and will weed-whack the edges soon. In addition, they will examine the condition of the steps at Johnson Avenue to see what can be done; a recent garbage and rat infestation complaint has been handled by the Parks Department; "Friends of Ewen Park" is a newly-formed group; they did their second or third cleanup on Saturday (all in collaboration with Partnership for Parks).

New Business

Juneteenth Event – Stephanie Ehrlich (VC Park Alliance)

On June 19th (Time TBD), there will be a celebration consecrating the African Burial Ground in VC Park; This event has been put on in partnership with the VC House Museum, community task force and an expert historian. Historical expert (Ms. George) will serve as mistress of ceremonies; clergy from the community will hold benediction at end of ceremony; Bronx Arts Ensemble will be sharing music. The event will be livestreamed. Information about livestream will be available and shared with public. The event will also be recorded and the recording will be available on vancortland.org.

Neighborhood Experience and Concern with Summer Activities

Chair reports that last summer, she, the District Manager, Public Safety Chair Ed Green, Parks Dept, 50th precinct staff, spent much of the summer pursuing issues associated with illegal BBQs in the CB 8 parks, including but not limited to loud music into late hours, public urination, double parking, trash, dumping of hot coals. CB is already receiving complaints from neighborhoods about these seasonal issues. Chair interested in getting ahead of these problems, as they present serious quality-of-life issues for the community. Stressed importance of hearing from neighbors and community members to understand what they are experiencing, to work together to prevent and solve these issues.

CB resident Belinda Hancock raised issues concerning BBQs near 261st in the park. She has been cleaning up balloons, garbage, etc. after the weekends' gatherings. This past weekend, people had opened a wired fence and dumped coals. Belinda called police, 911, 311 and the fire department. She has noticed catering vans parked near the park to support large parties. Another issue raised is the danger of illegal parking in bus stops and double-parked vehicles along the bike pathway. Buses including attenuated buses must maneuver around the double-parked cars causing drivers to pull into oncoming traffic to get around double-parked vehicles.

Mark Edelman, community member, raises issue regarding the same area, specifically around sound/loud music this past Sunday. Sent many messages to 311.

Alena Edelman, community member, walked through the park at 9PM this weekend and observed loud music, double parking, and marijuana consumption in a gathering of 30 people. Police did not come/respond.

Chair stated that we must work alongside city agencies to come up with plan to address these issues (i.e., ticketing cars, etc.).

Christopher Petitt, leader of the Friends of Van Courtland Park Tail (southwest corner) shared his experience, restating many of the same problems and emphasized the quality-of-life issues associated

with hearing loud, amplified music from within their apartment. He noted the sound issues have increased over the past 2 years, as people began to set up professional DJ speakers/booths with sounds louder than a traditional portable speaker. Sometimes the music continues past midnight. He noted many cars out of state cars (NJ, CT). He noted illegal parking and double parking on the turnoff that goes onto Broadway and noted large amounts of trash, and associated vermin, present Saturdays through Mondays. Has also noted an increase in alcohol and drug use and a concern about future gun violence following gatherings.

Christina Pettitt, community member, echoed concerns. Mentioned that the park areas that are open and facing apartment building on Broadway are of the most concern. Noted that people double park because they connect their sound system from their car into their gatherings at the park; 50th precinct can confiscate speakers but cannot confiscate cars. People set up early, unload their cars and park there for 12-13 hours; All open green space has been taken up. Noted environmental issue regarding balloons in the park; Suggested that open areas that face onto Broadway that face residential buildings be off limits.

Karen Beatrice Porter noted concern about (1) balloons and effect on young geese and wildlife, (2) people eating on the trails, and (3) people having a large party inside of Memorial Grove. Asked about the status of the volunteers (wearing orange shirts) who are trained, bilingual staff designated to deal with park issues.

Stephanie Ehrlich responded that volunteer events happen regularly, specifically on Monday morning. There have been 2000 volunteers over the past year, volunteers have included people who are part of the community board and members of the Van Cortlandt Track Club. Visit vancortlandt.org to volunteer. She clarified that it was not the case the volunteer staff dealt with enforcement issues. The Litter Ambassador Program (through the Parks Department) is a program where anyone can volunteer; The VC Park Alliance is working on way to sign up for this.

Deb Travis noted that that having PEP officer presence (often on horses!) made a difference at Washington's Walk and the reservoir; Getting more funding for PEP officers would help address some of the issues being described.

Chair noted that community board office is getting 311 calls from that area regarding noise/sound already.

Alexandra Sawyer, community member, noted problems with ATVs and dirt bikes, driving through park and on parade ground (near small children). Also noted noise complaints from neighbors about noise, including ATVs until very late in the evening.

Bob Bender, committee member, noted that the park has brought refuge during the pandemic, that the pandemic has also increased the issues. Historically, police have said that parks department is responsible and park issues are not the jurisdiction of PD. Noted that there are opportunities for PD to be involved (e.g., illegal parking). Need to have conversation with PD.

Chair noted that next step is to go to agencies to develop plan in mitigate issues over the summer.

Manal Abu-Shaheen, community member on VC Park South, reiterated the quality-of-life issue of constant noise, especially as a teacher working from home throughout the summer. Raised issue of the

ice cream truck that parks on the side of the park and plays the music nonstop. According to the 311 website, is not legal. They can only play music while moving.

Chair noted that another avenue to pursue is through the city agencies that issue permits.

Several other community members questioned the permit requirements for parties of 20 people or more; voiced concern over throwing confetti, which is a concern for wildlife; stressed ticketing illegally parked cars.

Chair noted that the ability for the PD to do ticketing should be part of plan moving forward. Chair noted that people are moving out of the city because of these quality-of-life issues.

Stephanie Ehrlich, VC Park Alliance, expresses dismay for experiences of community members; Mentioned very severe shortage of PEP officers and explained that is very difficult for them to monitor all of the park due to limited numbers. Further, their shifts end at 10-11PM. Acknowledges PEP captain Sanchez, present on call, and Captain Menendez, who have been responsive. She noted there are only 40 officers for the entire borough. Ideally, we need more than 100 officers for the borough. In terms of timing, there is an opportunity for community members to submit written testimony by tomorrow (5/27/21). <https://council.nyc.gov/testify/>

Councilmember Eric Dinowitz, spoke stating he is a member of the Parks Committee in the City Council. The Executive Budget has no additional funding for PEP officers; CC proposed budget with funding for PEP officers and Eric Dinowitz wants to make sure that PEP officers are allocated to the Bronx. Requests can be sent to Dinowitz@council.nyc.gov or LManzano@council.nyc.gov. Stressed the importance of notifying the Mayor's Office of these issues so that it reinforces this as a priority for people in the Bronx.

Chair again expressed desire to collaborate with city agencies to develop a plan for this summer. Suggested writing local officials requesting more funding for PEP officers is just one example.

Old Business

Seton Park Dog Run

Janie Lerner, has been involved in this issue before; Since there is no specific funding for the dog run, Borough Commissioner Rodriguez was going to look for possibility of funding some improvements within their existing budget. Grateful to have been able to keep the small dog run.

Jessica Pinter presented on behalf of Seton Park Dog Run Group.

- Safety issue - Front gates #1 & 2 need repair; both need hardware installed for locking mechanism. Currently, these are done via community bungee cords.
- Safety issue - Also raised issue of 'poison ivy tree', consumed with mature poison ivy vines; dangerous to people with poison ivy allergies; When tree was sprayed, only a small part of vine shriveled and died. Community members have put up makeshift fence. Janie shared that pesticides are harmful and also dangerous; Discusses chopping tree down as only option.
- Safety issue - Replace or repair cribs (which hold fence in place); currently filling in holes with rocks.

- Comfort Issue - Additional seating for people inside each section (small run has 2 benches, large dog run has 1)
- Comfort Issue - Thank you for cutting leaves and weeds from large dog run; Please cut weeds in small dog run and maintain through summer
- Comfort Issue - Water fountain attachment for dogs (in baseball field outside of area)

Michael Grattan, Parks Department

- Regarding the gates, department staff are working this week on the gates; We will take an inspection to see how far the crew has gotten.
- Regarding poison ivy, I will ask administrative horticulturalist to look; do not recommend cutting down the tree to try to resolve poison ivy first
- After working on gates, crew will work on fences (resolving holes)
- Regarding weeds, they are in the works
- Benches are on order; some are reserved for dog runs; probably wont be available until August.
- Water fountain attachment is still part of the plan; however, may take more time and research; would require purchasing of fountain attachment.

Stacey Dorcheiner, asks if there is anything they can do with the flooring of the park (dogs dig holes and ground is uneven)

Michael Grattan said there is no budget for a different medium for the floor. It is the responsibility of the dog owner to fill in holes that dog digs. Provided email: mike.grattan@parks.nyc.gov

Chair reiterated that the Borough Commissioner stated earlier last fall that there was no funding in their budget and that department would do what they can.

David Gellman, noted that we don't want to cut down the tree, we want to address the poison ivy.

Samantha, community member, notes that lock equipment quality is poor so they keep breaking; Cited that 1500 people in the neighborhood care about this issue.

Kim, community member, requested to meet Parks Department staff at the site to go through concerns together. Michael Grattan, says while a meeting would be possible, but this has already been done several times. Would like to see a volunteer crew working together on these issues (uneven ground and fence holes). It was suggested requesting an "It's My Park Day" for the dog run, which is run by "Partnerships for Parks", a Department of Parks division. Group said that this was underway and that an official group was being formed.

Putnum Trail & Motorized Vehicles Update

Stephanie Ehrlich thanks PEP and PD for their joint efforts, including confiscating bikes.

PD Captain Girven gave update on collaborative effort to stop illegal motorcycles, seize them and issue citations to motorists; PEP and PD led effort this last Saturday. Noted the difficulty in catching motorists due to safety concerns.

There is a new program where people who can help pinpoint where illegal dirt bikes and ATVs are being used, parked or stored, they are eligible for \$100 reward; Information should go to the Police Department

Luis Messon, community member, asks about penalizing people drinking alcohol and parking tickets / violation.

Karen Beatrice (on Mosholu park near horse stables) asks about which agency should be called; Recommended that she call local NCO or email them about general concerns, call police officer Planna Menta (who covers west side of Broadway) at the precinct. 911 can be called for recklessly-driven motorcycles; if vehicle is parked that is helpful due to issues with chasing vehicles.

Christina Taylor (VC Park Alliance) noted that dirt bikes likely go down Old Croton Aqueduct around 3PM.

Other Business

David Gellman noted that a sign near the baseball field in Ewen Park should have specific note about illegal metal cleats and that message should be more prominent on sign.

Joseph Mangeri, Parks Department, mentioned that signs were sent for changes and will follow up.

Adjournment

The next meeting is scheduled for June 23rd, 2021.

The meeting adjourned at 8:55 PM.

Prepared by Courtney Dastis-Galvin, Committee Member
Submitted by Rosemary Ginty, Committee Chair