

**(Pending Committee Approval)**

Minutes of the Parks & Recreation Committee Meeting  
September 30, 2021 via Zoom

Attendees

*Committee:* Bob Bender, David Gellman, Rob Jacklosky, Debra Travis, Marvin Goodman  
*Absent:* Courtney Dastis-Galvin, Herb Barrett (community committee member)

*Other CB8:* Laura Spalter, Dan Padernacht, Margaret Della, Lisa Daub, Camelia Tepelus, Ramdat Singh

*Community:* Eric Dinowitz and Lorenzo Manzano (Councilman Dinowitz's office); Stephanie Ehrlich, Christina Taylor (Van Cortlandt Park Alliance); Kristyn King, Marit Larson, Joseph Magneri, Jennifer Greenfield (DPR); Kathryn Heintz (NYC Audubon Society); Mark K. Morrison, Anne Vlaterhaus, Oded Holzinger (MKM/GHV); Jodie Colon, Pam Judd, Bette Clark, Brian Horowitz, Brigitte's iPhone, Catherine O'Brien, Christopher Steffens, Deirdre Burke, Deborah Dolan and Matt Turov, Francheska Alcantara, George Febles, IC Levenberg, Jillian Baez, Joe Pilla, Joshua Bertie, Kathy Riecks, Kelli B, Kerri Gallagher, Kerei Wyatt, Kevin Pigott, Ray Bromley, Robert Baron, Shelley's iPad, Stephanie Coggins, Stephanie Irwin, Thomas Henning

Agenda

Bob Bender began the meeting at 7:05 PM. Bob introduced himself as interim chair of the committee for this meeting pending the election of a new committee chair at the October CB8 board meeting. Thank you to Rosemary Ginty for her service as chair this past year.

Bob gave a chair's report in which he mentioned damage to Van Cortlandt Park (VCP) from the September 1 record rainfall. Parks manager Joseph Magneri said that there was no significant damage to neighborhood parks from the storm other than downed trees. The Sedgwick Avenue tree study promised by the Forestry Division has been delayed because of work required by damage caused by summer storms. The study is now planned for the next two to three weeks, according to chief forester Zev Reuter. Noise complaints from known problem locations in parks declined this summer. Thanks goes to the VCP Alliance and VCP staff, the 50<sup>th</sup> Precinct, former committee chair Rosemary Ginty, PEP officers, Bronx Parks commissioner Iris Rodriguez-Rosa, and the residents who persisted in making these problems known.

David Gellman asked about enforcement of the prohibition on metal cleats at the Seton Park ballfields. Mr. Magneri replied that anyone who sees players violating the prohibition should make note of the date and time and report the infraction so that the permit holder for the field at that time can be warned.

Councilman Dinowitz spoke about legislation he has introduced into the City Council that would enable more attention to city trees, i.e., providing a census and evaluation of the health of the

trees, as well as more funding for street-tree stump removal. DPR would work with other city agencies to achieve these goals. He also spoke about the composting program that is to begin this fall, noting that no Bronx communities have qualified for composting. In response to a comment that the process has been opaque, he said that he and others are seeking data from DSNY to clarify the threshold of sign-ups that neighborhoods must reach to qualify.

A quorum being present, the minutes of the June committee meeting were approved, 4-0 (Bender, Gellman, Jacklosky, Travis).

#### *Presentation by Groundworks Hudson Valley*

Bob Bender introduced representatives of Groundworks Hudson Valley (GHV), which is working with MKM Associates on a new Yonkers Greenway that would terminate at its south end at the Caryl Avenue entrances to VCP. Oded Holzinger of GHV introduced a visual presentation of a feasibility study for proposed improved entrances to VCP from Caryl Avenue. He also discussed a survey by GHV of how the Northwest Forest is being used, the natural conditions in the forest, and what changes might be made to the forest. Mr. Holzinger said that the new entrances would be intended only for pedestrians and that motorized vehicles and bicycles will not be encouraged.

The presentation was followed by a number of questions, beginning with the role of DPR and the VCP Alliance in the feasibility study. Stephanie Ehrlich, administrator of VCP, said that the only goal of the Parks Department is to carry out the recommendations in the 2014 Master Plan for VCP, which called for improving the Yonkers pedestrian access points and for rationalizing redundant trails in the Northwest Forest. She emphasized that she does not want to allow motorized vehicles into the park. It was noted that the forest is designated as “forever wild.”

There were a number of questions from committee members and the community about the feasibility study. Would different material be brought in to be used on the trails? *No determination has been made; this will be studied.* How will bicycles be kept out of the park when they are permitted elsewhere on the Yonkers Greenway? *Yonkers residents don't want bicycles in the park, either.* The survey is flawed because it seems skewed toward those who don't use the Northwest Woods. *There were discrepancies in the report that have been fixed. The survey is intended for everyone who lives near the area, whether in the Bronx or Yonkers.* What will be the response if people who answer the survey want activities that are incompatible with the Forever Wild status of the Northwest Woods? *Only the City of New York will determine how the forest is used because it owns this property.* Will lights be added to the trail if responses to the survey recommend doing that? *DPR opposes lighting in Forever Wild areas.* Popular recommendations for how to use the forest, such as those in the survey, don't necessarily yield the best use of the park, observed one community member.

There will be further discussion of this issue in a future meeting.

#### *Discussion of Logistical Plans for the Cross-Country Season*

Stephanie Ehrlich provided an overview of plans for the fall cross-country season. She noted that most races will be limited to 500 participants, except for the Manhattan College and Footlocker invitational races, and that there will be additional time between races to avoid overcrowding. Stephanie said that buses have been instructed to park on Jerome Avenue as in years past prior to the cancellation of last year's season due to the pandemic. The 50<sup>th</sup> Precinct will be present for the larger and mid-size races. PEP officers will be onsite for the smaller meets. Coach George Febles spoke about the importance of the cross-country season and the opportunity it provides to student athletes, as well as the effect of the pandemic on limiting the number of runners who can participate.

Stephanie asked for volunteers to help with the Oct. 9 Manhattan College meet.

#### *Natural Resources Group Discussion of "Forever Wild" Parks*

Kristi King from DPR's Forestry, Horticulture, and Natural Resources Group (NRG) provided an overview of "forever wild." In CB8, Van Cortlandt, Riverdale Park, and Raoul Wallenberg Forest are all forever wild. Forever Wild parks provide protected natural areas to the benefit of wildlife and plants, as well as for the enjoyment of the public. Biking is not allowed in forever wild areas. Kristi said that the boundaries of forever wild areas can be found at the NYC Open Data portal. In response to a question, she said that DPR does not do general public education around the topic of forever wild other than when meeting with stewardship groups. She also noted that no one is allowed to remove any plants from parks without authorization from DPR nor are volunteers allowed to do their own gardening in public parks without authorization. The committee thanked Kristi for her presentation and for answering questions.

The next committee meeting will take place as scheduled on October 27.

The meeting adjourned at 9:35 PM.

Minutes submitted by Bob Bender.