

BRONX COMMUNITY BOARD NO. 8

MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE PARKS & RECREATION COMMITTEE HELD ON APRIL 22, 2015 AT ST. STEPHEN'S CHURCH

Attendees:

Committee members: Bob Bender (chair), Laura Spalter (vice chair), Sylvia Alexander, Rosemary Ginty, Marvin Goodman, Michael Heller, Maria Khury (CB8); David Gellman, Christina Taylor (community committee members)

DPR: Margot Perron, Dennis Burton

Guests: Andrew Sandler (Councilman Cohen's office); Catherine O'Brien, John Young (Nature Group of VCP); Suzanne Corber (Save the Putnam Trail); Caroline Bergonzi, Ken Shih (Model to Monument); Olivia George (Mary Miss/City as Living Laboratory); IC Levenberg-Engel, Diane Sargent (BCEQ); Benigno Veraz

Agenda:

The meeting began at 7:10 pm.

The minutes of the March meeting were unanimously approved.

Presentation of Art Students League Public Art Project in Van Cortlandt Park

The chair introduced the speakers from the Art Students League of New York Model-to-Monument fellowship, Caroline Bergonzi and Ken Shih.

Mr. Shih spoke about this year's public art project for Van Cortlandt Park, a sculpture entitled "Water". It will be placed in the location where the previous art projects have been placed, south of the Van Cortlandt Mansion in a wetland area. A model of the sculpture was displayed as Mr. Shih described it. 16 feet tall on a 3-foot-tall pedestal and made of stainless steel, the sculpture takes the shape of a fish and is the product of a collaboration of seven artists. The installation will take place in June and the sculpture will remain in place for one year.

Committee members praised the sculpture for its beauty and appropriate setting. The MtoM presenters asked for an endorsement from the committee, which was given unanimously.

Mary Miss/CALL "Broadway Steps" Walk in Van Cortlandt Park

Olivia George from City as Living Laboratory described an ongoing project being done in collaboration with artist Mary Miss whose goal is to help people see their everyday world in different ways. This collaboration brings together artists and scientists as well as artists and communities. The overall project is called "Broadway steps" and involves walks along Broadway in different neighborhoods in Manhattan and the Bronx.

CALL plans two walks in Van Cortlandt Park around the theme of water, starting at the Broadway/Van Cortlandt South entrance. One will take place at 11 am on Sunday, May 17; the other will follow at 12:30 pm. These walks are interactive with the community although the details of that interactivity are still being worked out. The first walk will focus on “reconnecting and rejuvenating the fragmented waterways around Van Cortlandt Park,” while the second will discuss “native and non-native flora as metaphors for immigration, and community gardening as a form of participatory democracy.” CALL hopes to conduct a workshop in CB8 to follow up on these walks, probably in the fall. “Sustainability” will probably be a theme, but the details are to come.

Ms. George asked for the community board’s help in publicizing the walks. Committee members suggested that she send information via email to the board office so that it can be included in the May board e-newsletter.

Old Business

Legislative Update

Committee member Rosemary Ginty provided an update on parks-related legislation introduced into the City Council.

Of particular interest is a bill that would require DPR to establish a notification system by email or text where parks users can register to receive advance notifications whenever an area under DPR jurisdiction will be sprayed with pesticides. Council members Cohen and Cabrera are co-sponsors of this legislation.

Bills that would establish a task force to study shadows cast on parks by large buildings and one to extend the season for city beaches and pools were also noted.

VCP Bioblitz Preparations

Committee members and guests discussed the April 13 organizational meeting held to review the preparations for the bioblitz as well as subsequent developments. Most notable was the news from Ms. Alexander that approximately 85 RKA students will participate in the bioblitz. Although some experts have now said they cannot participate, others have heard about the bioblitz and have signed up. Further preparations will take place via email and phone communication. The Van Cortlandt Mansion will be the headquarters for the bioblitz. The 6-9 pm session of the bioblitz has been canceled for lack of participation.

The chair thanked all those who have volunteered to help with the bioblitz.

Kingsbridge-Riverdale Replacement Tree Planting

The chair mentioned that 184 street trees are scheduled to be planted by mid-June in the Kingsbridge and Kingsbridge Heights neighborhoods. This is approximately one-third of the replacement trees to be planted in compensation for trees cut down at the order of the DEP at Jerome Park Reservoir/Fort Independence Park. The community board has a list of possible locations for additional tree planting that will be forwarded to DPR for the fall planting cycle.

Budget Priorities

In the interest of time, budget priorities were not discussed in detail but the chair referred committee members to the April 2014 committee minutes, where the most recent budget priorities can be identified. The budget priorities will be discussed at the May meeting.

New Business

North Riverdale/VCP playground scoping meeting

Committee members Bob Bender, Laura Spalter, and Rosemary Ginty attended a scoping meeting on April 21 for the proposed new playground in VCP at the intersection of Broadway and Mosholu Ave. A design will be produced and presented to the committee, most likely in the fall.

Tree Removal in Lower Henry Hudson Park

Diane Sargent complained about the removal of a large old tree from lower Henry Hudson Park. She felt that there should have been notice to the community and an opportunity to see whether the tree could have been saved by pruning. She complained that DPR has done insufficient pruning of trees in recent years.

The chair said that he understood that the tree was diseased and posed a hazard to park users, but he said he would contact the forestry division of DPR for an official response. He observed that only in the past year has the tree-pruning budget of DPR been significantly increased, largely in response to expensive judgments and settlements with the city for injuries caused by falling trees and tree limbs. Lack of pruning of city trees is a perennial problem.

Maria Khury asked whether there is someplace where members of the community can find information about tree pruning in their neighborhood. The chair will investigate and report back.

Ms. Sargent also complained about the condition of the basketball courts in this park. This has been a capital budget request of the committee. Andrew Cohen reported that Councilman Cohen will be allocating money to help repair these courts.

Suzanne Corber asked who will be mapping the wetlands in VCP, which DEC has requested. Margot Perron will follow up.

Dennis Burton reported that boulders are going to be placed at the Yonkers entrances to VCP to minimize ATV access to the park.

The meeting adjourned at 9 pm.