

BRONX COMMUNITY BOARD NO. 8

MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE PARKS & RECREATION COMMITTEE HELD ON DECEMBER 29, 2014

Attendees:

Committee: Bob Bender (chair), Laura Spalter (vice chair), Steve Balicer, Rosemary Ginty, Marvin Goodman, Mike Heller, David Kornbluh, Robert Press, all CB8; Herb Barret, David Gellman, Christina Taylor, community committee members

Other CB8: Robert Fanuzzi

DPR: Trevor Lepucki, Adam Cohen, Patricia Ferguson, Dennis Burton, Rakeem Taylor

Community: Assemblyman Jeffrey Dinowitz, Nathan Arnosti (Assemblyman Dinowitz's office); Andrew Sandler (Councilman Cohen's office); Margaret Groarke (FIPNA); Catherine O'Brien, John Young, Debbi Dolan (VCP Nature Group); I-C L'Engel (BCEQ); Jordan Moss, Matthew Turov, Suzanne Corber

Agenda:

The meeting was called to order at approximately 7:05 pm. Minutes of the November meeting were unanimously approved by a quorum of committee members with one abstention (Robert Press).

DPR Presentation on Spring 2015 tree planting in CB8

Trevor Lepucki and Adam Cohen of DPR's central forestry division discussed the planned replacement tree planting in CB8. Approximately 100 trees will be planted during the Spring cycle (mid-March through mid-May) as the first installment of 553 trees replacing those removed from JPR/Ft. Independence Park by order of the DEP.

Messrs. Lepucki and Cohen produced a map showing the areas where the tree planting will occur, almost entirely in Kingsbridge Heights. Before sites can be certified for planting, they must be inspected to determine that they don't compromise any utility connections.

The newly planted trees will be guaranteed for two years. Although planting is done by the central forestry office, care and maintenance is handled by the Bronx DPR. Trees can be planted where there are empty tree pits or where there are no tree pits. Types of trees planted will depend on what is in stock in the nurseries at the time.

The remaining allocation of trees will be planted in Fall 2015. CB8 will send additional site suggestions, if any, by May.

The chair thanked Assemblyman Dinowitz and committee member Rosemary Ginty for their many suggestions of locations for tree planning.

“It’s My Park Day” Project in Van Cortlandt Park

Chair Bob Bender proposed a bioblitz in Van Cortlandt Park as this year’s “It’s My Park Day” project. He explained the concept of a bioblitz and how it would be modified for VCP. He mentioned other examples of bioblitzes, for example in Central Park. The idea would be to choose two or three sites close to one another in VCP as well as to public transportation and to study them intensively over a few periods during one day – early (6 to 9 am), midday (noon to 3 pm), late (6 to 9 pm). Experts from local colleges plus other experts from places such as the Wildlife Conservation Society (Bronx Zoo), New York Botanical Garden, Wave Hill would be asked to provide expertise. Students from area colleges and high schools would be recruited as volunteers. Studying plants and animals – vertebrate and invertebrate – during these time periods would provide a baseline of information about the chosen locations in the park at the time of year selected. Proposed dates were the first weekend of May. Suggestions were made for late April or later in May, but the academic calendar will most likely determine when the bioblitz can take place. Without expert advisors, the bioblitz isn’t possible.

If done properly, the bioblitz will provide information about the natural life of the park for DPR, will educate students about the significance of a major urban park, and will help the larger community understand what a valuable resource VCP is.

Christina Taylor urged that guided tours be offered to the general public during the bioblitz so that they could be informed about what the volunteers were discovering.

The reaction was generally positive and in some cases enthusiastic. There was discussion of the purpose of the bioblitz and the product of the research. Bob Fanuzzi suggested maintaining a digital objective. Others recommended a publicly accessible website.

A sub-committee is in formation to conduct outreach and carry the idea forward.

Old Business

Work at Ft. Independence park is finished and the park reopened just before Christmas. Small details will need attention but otherwise the park is once again available to the community.

Margaret Groarke asked whether a new skate rink might open in VCP. The chair explained that the rink closed because it was unprofitable, so it seems unlikely that the rink could reopen on the same terms as before. Andrew Sandler said that Councilman Cohen is discussing with DPR whether that agency might operate the rink directly, without a concessionaire. Robert Press said that the failure of the rink was the fault of the concessionaire, who didn’t properly maintain the equipment.

The chair discussed the fact that the VCP Natural Areas Group will lose its funding under the Croton Mitigation Fund in June, 2015. Dennis Burton explained that the group does routine maintenance in VCP in addition to pruning and planting and so forth. He has proposed to OMB that the city continue funding the group after Croton money runs out. Rosemary Ginty observed that the committee already identified this as an expense priority in the next fiscal year.

The chair proposed that the committee pass a resolution urging the continued funding of the VCP Natural Areas Group, as follows:

Whereas the VCP Forestry Restoration Group will lose its Croton Mitigation Funding in June 2015, and

Whereas the VCP Forestry Restoration Group performs necessary daily maintenance and inspection in the park and assists in maintaining the Parade Grounds in addition to fulfilling its core mission of forestry restoration, and

Whereas the Parks & Recreation Committee has already urged continued funding of this group after its current funding expires in June 2015, therefore

Be It Resolved that the Parks & Recreation Committee urges our elected officials and DPR to continue to fund the Van Cortlandt Park Forestry Restoration Group beyond June 2015.

In favor, 10: S. Balicer, B. Bender, R. Ginty, M. Goodman, D. Kornbluh, R. Press, L. Spalter (CB8), H. Barret, D. Gellman, C. Taylor (community committee members)

Opposed, 0, Abstained, 0

New Business

Laura Spalter asked about tree removals at the south end of the Putnam Trail. Dennis Burton and Rakeem Taylor responded that the area was heavily damaged in recent storms. The area has been cleaned up and replanting is already underway.

Herb Barret reported on the passing of Don Tannen, who along with Herb helped make the restoration of the VCP Memorial Grove possible. The committee expressed its condolences. Herb reported that two new volunteers are helping to maintain the Memorial Grove.

The next meeting will take place January 28 and will be a joint meeting with Environment & Sanitation. The focus will be on storm water management in VCP and the larger issue of CSO. E&S chair Bob Fanuzzi offered to send materials to committee members in advance of the meeting.

The meeting adjourned at approximately 8:55 pm.

Bob Bender

Chair, Parks &
Recreation Committee