

BRONX COMMUNITY BOARD NO. 8

MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE PARKS & RECREATION COMMITTEE HELD ON MAY 28, 2014, AT THE RIVERDALE MENTAL HEALTH ASSOCIATION

Attendees

CB8 committee members: Bob Bender (chair), Laura Spalter (vice chair), Robert Press, Rosemary Ginty, James Rather, Mercedes Zegarra-Soja, Maria Khury, Sylvia Alexander, Marvin Goodman

Community committee members: Thomas Durham, Herb Barret, Christina Taylor, David Gellman

DPR: Patricia Ferguson, Margot Perron, Dennis Burton, Rakeem Taylor

Others: Andrew Sandler (rep. Councilman Andrew Cohen), Councilman Andrew Cohen, Matt Turov, Catherine O'Brien, Debbi Dolan, Elizabeth Weiss, Maryann Monte (?), Deirdre Burke, Julia Gran

Agenda:

The meeting began at 7:05 pm. Minutes of the April meeting were unanimously approved.

Budget priorities

Discussion of the committee's budget priorities began with a review of the previous year's priorities. Beginning with the capital priorities, there was agreement that Marble Hill Playground is in good condition and does not need renovation. At the urging of local residents, erosion control measures in Ewen Park were added to capital priorities, and at the suggestion of the Chair, seconded by Mr. Sandler, the North Riverdale playground proposed for the Broadway perimeter of Van Cortlandt Park was added.

Capital budget priorities are as follows:

1. Construction of a new restroom and related plumbing repairs in Fort Four Park, plus required maintenance.
2. Redesign and reconstruction of Bailey Avenue playground.
3. Repair of Henry Hudson Park basketball and handball courts
4. Construction of a restroom at Broadway and W. 251st St adjacent to the Van Cortlandt Park Parade Grounds.
5. Installation of a pedestrian bridge over the Major Deegan Expressway in Van Cortlandt Park
6. Reconstruction of the pond wall at Spuyten Duyvil Park to prevent water runoff on the roadway of the parking lot at the adjacent Metro-North station.
7. Resurfacing of the Seton Park tennis courts and basketball courts plus related repairs

8. Renovation of Van Cortlandt Park stadium
9. Erosion control measures in Ewen Park to prevent runoff downhill toward Riverdale Avenue
10. A tot lot playground to serve North Riverdale near the Broadway perimeter of Van Cortlandt Park
11. Renovation of the Strong St. playground

Discussion of expense budget priorities followed. With the assistance of DPR personnel attending the meeting, the following expense priorities were agreed on:

1. Personnel sufficient for maintenance and enforcement in CB8 parks, especially on weekends and times of high use.
2. Personnel sufficient to maintain and preserve the integrity and health of Forever Wild and natural areas in Van Cortlandt Park and neighborhood parks to replace maintenance personnel who will be lost in 2015 because of the expiration of Croton mitigation funding.
3. One stump grinder and one replacement tractor for Van Cortlandt Park.
4. Purchase of an additional wood chipper to aid in removing tree debris from CB8 parks

Councilman Cohen addressed the meeting regarding budget negotiations between the City Council and the Mayor's office with regard to parks. He noted that the Council proposed a \$27 million increase in parks funding in the next fiscal year. The mayor's office has proposed a \$10 million increase.

It was noted that funding for improving the Van Cortlandt Park golf course has been proposed but it was unclear at the meeting whether this funding is part of Croton mitigation funds or a separate allocation. This issue will be investigated.

Councilman Cohen again expressed his support for the proposed pedestrian bridge in VCP (see capital priority #5) and said that there seemed to be some movement on the subject by DEP, which all parties other than the DEP believe should pay for this bridge.

Other Business

Bob Bender thanked those members of the committee who helped with "It's My Park" Day at Marble Hill playground and noted the lack of response from the community. It was agreed that these events require a partner, not just local outreach, to be successful. In that regard, Bob recommended identifying all the neighborhood parks in CB8 and trying to identify possible partners for those parks that do not already have associated "Friends of" groups. This will be an ongoing effort by the committee over the coming months.

Bob Bender noted that on May 29 Councilman Cohen, along with Council members Mark Levine and Ydanis Rodriguez, will introduce into the City Council a resolution calling on Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey, to require the proposed LG building there adhere to the previously agreed height of 35 feet. *(Bob and CB8 chair Robert Fanuzzi attended a press conference at the College of Mount St. Vincent on May 29 where Councilman Cohen introduced this resolution.)* Councilman Cohen briefly discussed the resolution and in answer to a question

about what the committee might be able to do to help, said that the City Council Parks & Recreation committee might be looking for people to testify on this issue. He indicated that he will stay in touch with the committee on this matter. Councilman Cohen also said that he expressed his concern to Mr. Levine, who chairs this committee in the City Council, about the high price and slow pace of Parks projects.

The Chair discussed the stalemate at Jerome Park Reservoir/Ft. Independence Park over the number of replacement trees that DEP is obligated to pay for. He proposed an idea for a two-track process in which the trees agreed not to be in dispute could be planted soon while discussions continue on those trees in dispute between DEP and DPR. The proposal was well received and will be presented to the Croton Filtration Monitoring Committee.

The Chair then discussed the recent Memorial Day weekend tragedy in which an ATV driver was killed on Broadway near the Mosholu entrance into Van Cortlandt Park. There are indications that the driver was spotted in Van Cortlandt Park and then fled onto Broadway, where he was accidentally struck and killed by another vehicle. There were also reports that a large group of ATV drivers was seen on the perimeter of the park over Memorial Day weekend.

Discussion of the ATV problem in VCP ensued. DPR representatives recommend that park users try to photograph ATVs in the park, and to note or photograph license plates whenever possible (and without placing the observer in jeopardy). There was discussion about whether the fines for ATV use in the park are adequate and whether the City Council might want to consider increased penalties for this illegal activity. It was noted by DPR personnel that it is difficult to apprehend ATV's in the park.

There was a lengthy discussion of two issues relating to Riverdale Park. The first concerned a request by DPR to remove parking spaces at the W. 254th Street and Spaulding Lane entrances to the park to permit access for DPR vehicles. Patricia Ferguson explained that because of illegal dumping in the park, it is sometimes necessary to bring equipment into the park and this can be difficult to do, especially at the W. 254th Street entrance, because of cars that are parked near the entrance. Occasionally DPR needs to bring equipment into the park for other reasons as well.

The Chair recommended that no action be taken until the matter can be brought to the attention of the Traffic & Transportation Committee. Committee members generally agreed on this point.

The second item concerned the recent decision by DPR to dismantle a fireplace in Riverdale Park. DPR did this after several complaints about illegal fires at this location were received from residents near the park and were forwarded to DPR by the committee chair and the community board office. Some members of the community in attendance felt that there should have been discussion of the decision to dismantle the fireplace before action was taken because they believe that the fireplace has historic value. Information was presented to the committee regarding surveys of the park that were made some years ago identifying remnants of historic structures in the park. The Chair observed that there are no signs designating anything of historic value in the park and the fireplace was accessible to anyone. The fireplace bricks were dumped into the adjacent building foundation pit, which is currently closed off by temporary

fencing. The Chair has asked the relevant DPR office to investigate the matter of historic artifacts in Riverdale Park. Meanwhile, the building foundation pit will not be filled unless it poses an imminent hazard, and if the bricks are determined to be of historic value, it may be possible to rebuild the fireplace (which has also been called an oven) elsewhere, this time with proper precautions. A more complete evaluation of historic elements in Riverdale Park has been requested from DPR and will be brought before the committee when this information has been received.

Rakeem Taylor, manager of Van Cortlandt Park, is leaving for four months of military duty. The committee wished him well and looks forward to seeing him this fall.

Dennis Burton of VCP spoke about classes and training that are being offered to those with an interest in parks by the Central Park Conservancy. The CPC will soon be in Van Cortlandt Park to observe and discuss the park's athletic fields.

Robert Press urged that the committee find out whether the operator of the Van Cortlandt ice rink plans to return this fall. The Chair will contact the operator and follow up.

The Chair is inquiring into the status of the VCP stables concession to see when the new concessionaire might appear before the committee.

Christina Taylor of the Friends of Van Cortlandt Park updated the committee on FVCP's Seven Wonders of Van Cortlandt Park event on June 12, the June 14th hike to the Seven Wonders, and the youth market, which will again operate this summer.

A local resident complained about persistent barbecuing and attendant noise in the area of the park adjacent to the stables, just off Broadway south of Mosholu Avenue. He said that numerous complaints have brought no response. Margot Perron mentioned that on the other side of the park the 52nd Precinct had recently cracked down on barbecuing with positive results. The Chair said he would bring the matter to the attention of the community board and work with the 50th Precinct to try to solve the problem.

The meeting adjourned at 9:25 pm.

Bob Bender
Chairman
Parks & Recreation Committee