

Bronx Community Board No. 8

Minutes of the Parks & Recreation Committee Meeting of May 27, 2015 at the Frances Schervier Apartments

Attendees:

Committee: Bob Bender (chair), Sylvia Alexander, Rosemary Ginty, Marvin Goodman, Michael Heller, Maria Khury, David Kornbluh, Robert Press, James Rather (CB8); Herb Barret, David Gellman, Christina Taylor (community committee members)

DPR: Margot Perron, Rakeem Taylor, Patricia Ferguson

Guests: Suzanne Corber, Save the Putnam Trail; I-C L-Engel, BCEQ; Catherine O'Brien, John Young, VCP Nature Group; Andrew Sandler, Councilman Cohen's office

Agenda:

The meeting was called to order at approximately 7:10 pm.

The minutes of the April committee meeting were unanimously approved.

Discussion of Capital and Expense Budget Priorities

The committee reviewed last year's capital budget priorities, noting with gratitude that several items have been funded in the past year and therefore were dropped from this year's requests. At the request of Margot Perron, one item was added to the budget priorities.

Capital Budget Priorities are as follows:

1. Construction of a new restroom and related plumbing repairs in Fort four Park, plus required maintenance. It was noted that Borough President Diaz has provided \$500,000 toward the estimated \$3 million cost of this item.
2. Redesign and reconstruction of Bailey Avenue playground.
3. Construction of a restroom at Broadway and W. 251st in Van Cortlandt Park, adjacent to the Parade Grounds.
4. Construction of a pond wall at Spuyten Duyvil Park to prevent water runoff from the pond onto the roadway of the parking lot at the adjacent Metro-North station.
5. Resurfacing of the basketball courts in Seton Park.
6. Renovation of Van Cortlandt Park stadium.
7. Erosion control measures in Ewen Park to prevent runoff downhill toward Riverdale Avenue

8. Renovation of the Strong Street playground.
9. Reconstruction of the steps on the historic south side entrance to the Van Cortlandt House Museum.

Expense Budget Priorities are as follows:

1. Personnel sufficient for maintenance and enforcement in CB8 parks, especially on weekends and times of high use.
2. One stump grinder and one replacement tractor for Van Cortlandt Park.
3. Purchase of a wood chipper and mowing tractor to aid in regular maintenance of CB8 parks.

The priorities were approved unanimously.

In the course of discussing those priorities from 2014 that have been funded, the committee noted the recent agreement to fund the construction of the pedestrian bridge over the Major Deegan Expressway in Van Cortlandt Park. The chair proposed formally thanking those responsible for securing the funding as well as those who campaigned for the construction of the bridge, particularly because in June 2010 the community board passed a resolution that originated in the committee urging the construction of the bridge. There was unanimous agreement among committee members to do this. The chair promised to circulate a resolution to this effect for committee members to see in advance of the June community board meeting.

Robert Press said that the Croton Filtration Monitoring Committee was not notified about the funding of the pedestrian bridge although the matter had originated there.

Follow-Up on Outstanding Issues from Recent Committee Meetings

The chair noted that the discussion of Riverdale Park last fall mentioned the historic value of the park, although little of the park's history remains above ground. Would it be possible to erect a sign to explain the history of the park? And if so, where – the Spaulding parking lot, perhaps? After some discussion, it was recommended that the Riverdale Nature Preservancy and the Bronx County Historical Society be consulted, but at the same time, concern was expressed that such a sign would be vandalized and might not be worth the cost involved in designing and erecting it. Margot Perron noted that DPR has a program for historic signs. The chair will follow up with DPR.

The chair noted that boulders have been placed at some entrances to Van Cortlandt Park to reduce access points for ATV's, a subject of a previous committee meeting. Challenges remain, however, especially for motor bikes, which can evade the boulders. There was discussion with Andrew Sandler concerning legal means to confiscate ATV's that operate in the park. This is an ongoing problem.

There was discussion of the recent bioblitz, with thanks to Sylvia Alexander for the participation of RKA students. It was unanimously agreed that a formal thank-you be sent to the principal of RKA. A report on the bioblitz will be written and circulated to committee members before it is sent to DPR, as required by the research permit granted by DPR for the bioblitz.

Topics for Future Committee Meetings

The subject of Tibbetts Brook and the VCP wetlands will be discussed at a future meeting. A study is underway by DPR and results are expected by the end of this year.

Regulations concerning the use of pesticides and herbicides in the parks will be discussed at an upcoming meeting. Dennis Burton of DPR, assigned to VCP, is on a DPR committee that is studying the use of pesticides and herbicides in the parks. He will be a valuable resource for this meeting. John Young reported seeing spraying taking place in VCP with no visible signs warning anyone about the activity. He expressed his concern that the spraying seemed to be indiscriminate and unregulated. Margot Perron and Rakeem Taylor said that they would investigate.

The chair proposed that over the course of the coming year, committee members should assess all CB8 parks to determine their condition. This will help to guide next year's budget priorities. Committee members endorsed the idea. Andrew Sandler suggested that committee members compare their observations with the report cards that DPR issues on the parks to evaluate the accuracy of DPR's assessments. David Kornbluh suggested that we might also survey park users about their satisfaction or lack thereof with their neighborhood parks. These ideas will be discussed at the September meeting and plans will be made then for inspection of the parks by the committee.

Rosemary Ginty encouraged the continued expansion of the "Friends of" concept to additional parks. Marvin Goodman urged that local schools and senior centers be recruited for this purpose.

New Business

David Kornbluh expressed his appreciation for the Bronx Arts Ensemble concert at the VCP Nature Center over Memorial Day weekend.

Christina Taylor asked the committee for a letter of support for a grant to study how to filter storm sewer water flowing into Tibbetts Brook in VCP and to beautify the nearby John Kieran trail. Committee members agreed to support the request. A letter will be drafted by Ms. Taylor and the chair and circulated to committee members.

Suzanne Corber asked whether the Old Croton Aqueduct trail can be reopened during reconstruction of the I-87 (Major Deegan Expressway) bridge over Mosholu Parkway. This is a three-year project and there are still 2 ½ years to go. After some discussion, it was concluded that there is no alternative route and the OCA will remain partially closed until the work is finished.

Robert Press asked about plans for the former ice rink site. Andrew Sandler said that there are exploratory discussions about trying to return an ice rink to the site.

Christina Taylor mentioned a problem with barbecuing in the Sackerah Woods area of VCP, where barbecuing is not permitted. She asked whether the committee could help to bring this

matter to the attention of the 50th Precinct, which is responsible for patrolling all of VCP. The chair said he would discuss the problem with the chair of the Public Safety Committee.

David Gellman noted problems with dirt bikes in Seton Park. This matter will be reported to local parks manager Patricia Ferguson.

The chair mentioned recent complaints about noise in Ft. Independence Park. The noise seems to be centered on the basketball court. Patricia Ferguson proposed installing a gate and lock at the basketball court. The court would be locked at night (around 10 pm) and opened the next morning. Andrew Sandler said that something similar was done at Riverdale Playground, located behind MS 141/RKA and that it seems to have cut down the noise significantly. (*Two days after the meeting the gate and lock were installed.*)

The meeting adjourned at approximately 8:55 pm.

Bob Bender, Chair
Parks & Recreation Committee