

BRONX COMMUNITY BOARD NO. 8

MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE PARKS & RECREATION COMMITTEE HELD ON SEPTEMBER 23RD, 2014

Attendees:

Committee members: Bob Bender (chair), Sylvia Alexander, Steve Balicer, Rosemary Ginty, Marvin Goodman, Michael Heller, David Kornbluh, Robert Press, James Rather, Mercedes Zegarra-Soja, CB8; TC Durham, Herb Barret (community committee members)

Other CB8: Dan Padernacht, Robert Fanuzzi

DPR: Ray Acosta, Patricia Ferguson, Margot Perron, Dennis Burton, Eitan Adler, Kathleen O'Daly, Melissa Goldberg, Sabirah Abdus-Sebus

Others: Councilman Andrew Cohen, Andrew Sandler (Councilman Cohen's office); Justin Demko (Assemblyman Dinowitz's office); Michael Blaustein (Senator Klein's office); Laura Ringelheim, Reggie Thomas (office of the Mayor); Suzanne Corber, Debbi Dolan, Matt Turov (Save the Putnam Trail); Christina Taylor, Sara Kempton (Friends of Van Cortlandt Park); Filip Condeescu, Heidi Kolman, Arturo Guzman, Richard Tamko, (FIDO); Kristin Hart, Jack Marth (FIPNA); John Young, Catherine O'Brien (Nature Group); Scott Tarter, Elizabeth Tarter (Riverdale Stables); Thomas X. Casey (Kingsbridge Historical Society); Karen Argenti (BCEQ); Jessica Bal (CUNY News); Renee Ehle, Elizabeth Weiss, Ed Yaker, Angel Gonzalez, David Gellman, Jarvis Kresling A. Kligerman, Lora Frisch, Loretta Ryan, Luisa Padilla-Korber, Glenn Fleischman, Irene Fleming, Doris Spencer, Tanya Greene, Julia Gran

Agenda:

The meeting began at 7:05 pm. The Chair welcomed everyone and asked committee members to introduce themselves.

Minutes of the May meeting were unanimously approved.

The Chair asked Melissa Goldberg of DPR whether the ice rink would return to Van Cortlandt Park this year. She said that it would not because the financial terms made it impossible, in the judgment of the concessionaire. According to the concessionaire, revenue decreased in the second year, in part because of the harsh winter. In response to a question from Mr. Press about the containers that were adjacent to the rink, she said that they would be removed.

Councilman Cohen encouraged new ideas about how it might be possible for the ice rink to return. He said that DPR is open to creative ideas and that he would like to see the ice rink come back.

Van Cortlandt Park Stables

Kathleen O'Daly, director of franchises and concessions at DPR introduced the new concessionaires of the Riverdale Stables, Scott and Elizabeth Tarter.

Prior to discussing the stables concession, the Chair mentioned the objections that CB8 has had to the franchise and concessions review process, specifically the lack of time for community input, which occurred again with the stables concession.

Rosemary Ginty asked what DPR expected of the concessionaire based on the RFP. Eitan Adler, the project manager for the stables concession, replied that DPR encouraged more youth and therapeutic programs, among other things, as well as previous experience operating stables and financial capability. The Tarters operate a stable called Twin Lakes in Westchester, and Mr. Adler said that Westchester County rates this facility favorably.

Mr. Tarter spoke about his background and experience. He noted that currently 106 of his customers come from the Bronx and New York City more generally, and so he saw a business opportunity in the VCP concession. He currently operates school and therapeutic programs. He thinks the Riverdale stable ought to be more successful than it has been, and he wanted to ensure that he would not face competition from someone who might see the potential in the VCP concession as he does. He wants to expand after-school lessons, a Saturday riding academy, increased therapeutic riding programs, etc., all based on successful models at Twin Lakes. He operates a program for NYC children who live in public housing and would move this program from Twin Lakes to VCP.

The Tarters plan to offer open houses, perhaps pony rides, special events for Scouts (they currently conduct programs for free for Girl Scouts), all part of their outreach to the community. They provided detailed descriptions of various programs they currently offer at Twin Lakes and will offer at Riverdale.

Committee members asked questions about private vs. public programs (most riding programs are private), whether fees for privately boarded horses constitute gross income for purposes of concession fees payable to the city (they do), whether shows will be open to the public (they will), whether the Tarters are the only owners of their stable (they are), whether they will provide veterans therapy programs (they will consider this suggestion).

There was discussion of the riding trails in VCP, which are in need of rehabilitation. Mr. Adler said that trail rides are an option, not a requirement of the concession. Rehabilitating the bridle trails will be expensive and will require capital money; it is not the concessionaire's responsibility. Only the therapeutic riding programs are required under the concession contract.

Fort Independence Park Renovation

Filip Condeescu spoke about current conditions in Ft. Independence Park. He said that there are insufficient garbage cans and infrequent garbage pick-ups. He said that there is barbecuing in the summer months. Ray Acosta of DPR said that he would immediately arrange for more garbage cans and more frequent pick-ups, and that barbecuing in the park is illegal.

There were complaints that the restrooms close at 2:30 pm, just as children arrive in the park after school. The Chair observed that this problem exists in nearly all parks and that DPR must find a way to alter its schedules so that restrooms are open when the parks are heavily used in the afternoons.

Speakers mentioned several problems with the park, most of which concern the capital renovation project. Among the complaints: the water fountain doesn't work properly; there is puddling of water at the Giles Place entrance, which will pose a hazard during the winter; the basketball court retains water in one corner; there is room for a half-court adjacent to the new full court; the fences on Sedgwick Avenue make it impossible to cross the street except at intersections, which on the park/reservoir side are far apart; the newly planted trees on

Sedgwick Ave. are dying; the paving stones on the park walkway are already uneven and will surely become worse after the winter freeze-thaw cycle.

Mr. Acosta said that the contractor is responsible for trees and plants for two years after completion of the project and for one year for construction work. He said that the work would be inspected and the contractor held accountable.

Other neighbors observed that benches are needed along Sedgwick Avenue, that the safety mats in the playground have exposed screws and bolts that need to be covered, that the dog run has been greatly reduced in size, and that the surface DPR has chosen for the dog run is not a good one.

There was frustration with the repeated postponements of completion of the work and skepticism whether the latest date, October 31, will be met. There were additional complaints that the plans are not clear and it is difficult to compare the work being done with the plans. There were questions about whether the repairs that will have to be made to the park can be done without closing the park again. There were complaints about rats in the park. Mr. Acosta said that he will arrange for an exterminator to bait for rats.

There was a comment about whether the open space inside the reservoir fence could be made accessible to the public. The Chair addressed briefly DEP's refusal to open the reservoir space to the community.

Several people expressed their frustration with both DPR and the committee chair over the lack of regular updates about the renovation project and noted that the community was getting its information from the contractors' workers in the park. Michael Heller said that he felt the wrong people from DPR were at the meeting. Robert Fanuzzi said that he didn't see why DPR could not provide regular updates about progress as other agencies do on their projects. There was general agreement that this problem must be addressed immediately.

There was a brief discussion of pesticide use in parks, which was referred to the Environment & Sanitation committee.

The Chair observed that there are opportunities for community gardens along Sedgwick Avenue and referred this matter to the E&S committee.

Old Business

Ewen Park Reconstruction Project

Renee Ehle presented a petition that she said was signed by 200 people opposing the tot lot and basketball court reconstruction project in Ewen Park. She said that she wants the committee to be sure that the 20 trees recently removed from the park for safety reasons will be replaced with new trees, as required. Ray Acosta said he would provide the replanting information, including the schedule, to the community board.

The Chair observed that the tot lot/basketball court project is supported by Councilman Cohen and Assemblyman Dinowitz, and that it has been approved by the Public Design Commission. The committee approved this project in a unanimous vote last year. DPR is putting it out to bid and expects work to begin next spring.

Although Ms. Ehle said that other playgrounds are within walking distance of the park, some committee members disagreed.

There was consensus that this project is needed and that it will go forward.

Putnam Trail

The Chair noted that the DEC public hearing on the Putnam Trail at Lehman College took place exactly one year ago and that there has been no official response to the project from the DEC. He lamented the fact that in the absence of a response, rumors about DEC's position abound.

Andrew Sandler said that it is his understanding that DEC has asked DPR to provide a redesigned plan for the Putnam Trail renovation.

Committee members expressed opinions about the project but the Chair observed that the project will come back before the committee because PDC approval has expired. He asked committee members to defer further discussion until the revised plans are presented for discussion and review.

Karen Argenti of BCEQ spoke about the DEC review of the Putnam Trail. She said that the information DPR provided regarding the wetland and water runoff from its redesign is inadequate. She presented the committee with materials to support her evaluation (*these materials were subsequently scanned and emailed to committee members*) as well as a copy of a letter to DEC from Sen. Klein and Assemblyman Dinowitz that requested DEC to respond to procedural and environmental issues regarding the Putnam Trail that were raised by Ms. Argenti and others.

Representatives of elected officials at the meeting said that DEC should provide a response that addresses the stormwater runoff issue as well as concerns about brownfield capping.

Van Cortlandt Park ATV Problem

The Chair began this discussion by observing that a letter recently circulated in the community complaining about five new entrances to VCP from Yonkers proposed in the Master Plan and potential ATV hazards they might create. He observed that as with all projects in the Master Plan, this proposal must be funded and if funded, it will come before the committee for review prior to any action being taken.

Discussion then turned to the existing ATV problem, which was highlighted by the death of an ATV driver on Broadway near the Mosholu entrance to VCP last May. Margot Perron, VCP Administrator, said that she is in the process of blocking the entrances with large boulders that will permit cyclists and pedestrians to access the park but will not admit ATV's. However, motor bikes, which damage the trails, would still be able to enter the park. There were questions about whether ATV's can be confiscated by police (they can) and whether penalties for using ATV's – which are illegal everywhere in NYC – are sufficient. Andrew Sandler said that legislation may be necessary to increase penalties and address this problem.

New Business

Joseph Farkas of Riverdale Crossing came before the committee to request permission to do interior elevator construction work on the next two Sundays. He explained that he learned only

the day before the committee meeting that he could not get DOB approval for Sunday construction without first obtaining CB8 approval.

Dan Padernacht, CB8 Chair, said that the matter was referred to the committee because it was the only CB8 committee meeting before Sunday and that if the committee voted to permit the work, then a letter would be sent from the committee, but not from the full board, expressing support.

After discussion about whether the work would be visible or audible outside the site of the construction project, which Mr. Farkas said it would not, the committee voted unanimously to approve the work. (*The CB8 office sent a letter of approval over the signature of the committee chair to DOB the next day.*)

Thomas Casey spoke about the dog run proposed for the Woodlawn section of VCP, which he said is too close to an Indian memorial and should be relocated. Andrew Sandler said that the facts in Mr. Casey's presentation are disputed, but Mr. Casey vigorously disagreed. The Chair observed that this matter does not affect CB8 and that it should be left to CB12 to decide on the merits of Mr. Casey's argument. Mr. Casey insisted that CB8 review the matter. The Chair asked committee members whether they agreed to leave this matter to CB12, and they agreed.

The Chair reported on good news regarding the committee's capital budget priorities. There is partial funding for the Fort Four Park restroom from the Borough President's office; funding for the new VCP playground for North Riverdale residents from Councilman Cohen and Sen. Klein (via the Dormitory Authority of the State of NY); funding for the Henry Hudson basketball courts from Councilman Cohen and Sen. Klein (via DASNY); and funding for the renovations in Seton Park, also from Councilman Cohen and Sen. Klein (via DASNY).

The meeting adjourned at 10:30 pm. The Chair wishes to thank members of the committee and DPR representatives for their attention and endurance.

Bob Bender
Chair
Parks & Recreation Committee