

## Bronx Community Board No. 8

Minutes of the Parks & Recreation Committee Meeting of January 27, 2016 at Vladeck Hall

### **Attendees:**

Committee: Bob Bender (chair), Robert Fanuzzi, David Gellman, Marvin Goodman, Amy Joy Robateau, Laura Spalter (CB8); Herb Barret, Christina Taylor (Community Committee members)

Other CB8: Dan Padernacht, Rosemary Ginty, Michael Heller, David Kornbluh

**Absent:** Sylvia Alexander, Arturo Guzman

DPR: Iris Rodriguez-Rosa (Bronx Commissioner), Ilan Kutok, Jennifer Greenfeld, Mike Ortiz, Margot Perron, Patricia Ferguson, Dennis Burton, K. Cholewka, Chris Noel

*In addition, more than 70 others attended. The full list of attendees is available at the CB8 office.*

### **Agenda:**

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

Minutes of the December, 2015 meeting were unanimously approved.

The chair advised that the topic for the evening was the presentation by representatives of the Department of Parks & Recreation of a revised design for the Putnam Trail. This design was sent two weeks in advance of the meeting to all committee members and all CB8 members.

The chair then introduced Commissioner Rodriguez-Rosa, who introduced the presenters from DPR, Ilan Kutok and Jennifer Greenfeld.

#### Presentation of the Putnam Trail Design

Ilan Kutok, Director of Green Infrastructure at DPR, presented a revised Putnam Trail design. Major changes from earlier designs are a reduced width – now ten feet – and elimination of the jogging path; curvature to the path where it previously followed the railroad roadbed; bioswales in the wetland buffer area to treat water runoff from the trail and avoid erosion; and the use of a raised precast concrete boardwalk in a small section of the trail to protect surface tree roots. In addition the trail will be reduced to eight feet in certain places to protect significant native trees. As previously, the surface will be asphalt, except for the concrete boardwalk.

The purpose of the plan is to address the continuing deterioration of the Putnam Trail, which retains water and is often muddy for an extended period following rain. It will also continue into the park a multi-use corridor to the north that currently ends at Van Cortlandt Park, where it can connect with an east-west multi-use corridor.

Mr. Kutok explained the review process for the plan. After meeting with CB8 and CB7 (scheduled for February), DPR will take the plan to the Public Design Commission (PDC) as required, then will draw up contractor-ready plans, which must be submitted to the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC) for review, along with a Stormwater Pollution Prevention Plan (SWPPP), which DEC must approve before granting DPR a required wetland permit. The trail is located in a wetland area and DEC has jurisdiction over wetlands. Parks hopes to be able to go to the DEC this summer.

At this point the floor was opened to questions. Questioners were asked to limit their comments or questions to three minutes in order to allow as many people as possible to ask questions. In addition, index cards were made available for anyone who wanted to submit a written question.

Twenty-seven people made statements or asked questions. All but two expressed an opinion about the plan. Those who did offer an opinion were split almost evenly pro and con. What follows is a summary of these comments.

Concerns expressed included these: that the wetlands would be damaged by the construction; that asphalt is harder to walk/run on than a natural surface; that the area is Forever Wild and should be left alone; that while ADA compliance is required because the money for renovation comes from a federal transportation grant, asphalt is not required for ADA compliance; that DPR did not survey park users about what they want; that the area is a wildlife area, not a transportation corridor; that too many trees will be cut down; that increased bicycle traffic will pose a danger to walkers and runners on the trail; that birds will be displaced and will not return; that asphalt is toxic and doesn't belong in a nature area; that the park is beautiful as is and should be left undisturbed.

Advocates and the Parks Department made these observations: that the path is not currently ADA accessible and this plan will make it accessible; that there are plenty of trails for those who don't want asphalt; that surface material other than asphalt will require a great deal of maintenance that is impractical and that such surfaces will be damaged by rainstorms and heavy use; that the trail offers a safe bicycling corridor and connects to a 50-mile multi-use pathway to the north; that 22 trees of 6-inch caliper (and an un-quantified number of smaller caliper) will be cut down and 468 native trees will be planted; that there will be greater use of the park; that there will be no long-term adverse impact on bird life and that disabled children will now have access to the natural area bordering the Putnam Trail; that the area already contains a golf course and lies in close proximity to two highways and so Forever Wild is a misnomer; that asphalt meets allowable health requirements and that the bioswale will filter asphalt in the wetland buffer area.

One questioner asked whether there is excess asphalt in Van Cortlandt Park and the parks representatives said that this was probably the case and that an effort would be made to identify unnecessary asphalt and to remove it.

Parks was asked about the creosote-treated railroad ties that line the trail. Mr. Kutok responded that they will be removed as required to construct the trail but not otherwise. They do not pose a health hazard at present because there is little leaching from them into the surrounding soil.

In response to a question about how long construction will take place, Mr. Kutok said that he anticipates that it will take one year and that the trail will be closed to the public during this time.

Eight people submitted index cards with comments. They included concerns about whether the safety of runners and walkers would be compromised by an increase in bicycle traffic; how the bioswales would be maintained; how quickly asphalt might deteriorate; and whether too many trees are being removed, on one hand, and on the other, praise for completing the multi-use trailway.

In addition more than twenty emails were sent to the CB8 office opposing the trail (some senders sent multiple emails) and three were sent in support.

Following the public questions, members of the committee asked questions.

Christina Taylor asked why DPR decided not to use semi-permeable asphalt. Mr. Kutok explained that semi-permeable asphalt requires cleaning to remain porous and that because heavy vegetation in the area would inevitably clog the porous surfaces, such cleaning would not be effective. Furthermore, the base under the surface material must be impermeable and therefore the permeable surface would be rendered ineffective by the subsurface base. The bioswale is a better solution for channeling water runoff.

Ms. Taylor asked whether the committee can see the SWPPP plan. Mr. Kutok said that it will be subject to a DEC public hearing and that the document will be made available.

Laura Spalter asked about the extent of the bioswale and how much water it would capture. Mr. Kutok said that the bioswale would extend for more than 50% of the length of the trail and 100% of the trail that is located in the wetland buffer area and that water retention is calculated to accommodate a once-a-year rain storm.

In response to additional questions from Ms. Spalter, Mr. Kutok said that DEC must review and approve the plan, including the SWPPP, before it will grant a required wetland permit. He said that the staging area will be at the south end of the trail, where the parking lot is located, and also under the Mosholu overpass near the north end of the trail.

When asked what other materials were considered for the trail besides asphalt and what they cost, Mr. Kutok showed a slide with this information. In response to a subsequent question from Dan Padernacht he said that he would provide this information to the committee.

David Gellman asked whether ATV's would damage a non-asphalt surface and Mr. Kutok and VCP Administrator Margot Perron said that they could destroy a non-asphalt surface.

Bob Fanuzzi expressed concern about water quality in Tibbetts Brook and in the wetlands and asked for assurances that the trail would not damage either. Jennifer Greenfeld, Chief of Forestry, Horticulture, and the Natural Resources Group of DPR, said that water quality must be maintained; this is a DEC requirement, and water protection provisions in the plan will be reviewed by DEC.

Bob said that he would like to maximize the permeable surfaces wherever possible.

Dan Padernacht asked how often repaving of the asphalt would be required. Mr. Kutok said that the estimated lifespan was 15-20 years but that if any resurfacing was required in the year following construction, the contractor would do this as needed.

Herb Barret said that he was concerned about the size of the trail and wanted it to be no bigger than necessary but that the trail in its present form is deteriorating and something must be done about it.

Bob Bender expressed concern that the plan might be altered in the review process and wanted assurance that in the event it is altered, the committee will see those alterations for review. In addition, he said that contractors sometimes try to save money by insisting on alterations to the plan that may not be necessary. Would DPR appoint a monitor or liaison to ensure that the contractor followed the plan and that any necessary alterations would be brought to the committee for review? Mr. Kutok said that DPR would agree to this.

With the questioning concluded, the following resolution was moved:

The Parks & Recreation Committee of Bronx Community Board 8 approves the design for the Putnam Trail in Van Cortlandt Park as presented to the committee at its meeting of January 27, 2016, by the Department of Parks & Recreation (DPR) with the following conditions:

DPR agrees to consult with knowledgeable members of the community as identified by the committee, such as the Bronx Council on Environmental Quality (BCEQ), in drawing up its Stormwater Pollution Prevention Plan (SWPPP), which is required by the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC), and further agrees to provide the committee with a draft copy of the SWPPP plan before submission to NYSDEC and to answer questions that the committee may have about the plan; and

DPR further agrees to extend the bioswales and the precast concrete planking proposed in the plan to the maximum extent possible within budgetary constraints; and

If substantive alterations to the design for the Putnam Trail are made in response to review by the Public Design Commission (PDC) or the DEC or any other governmental or regulatory agency, DPR will submit those changes to the committee for review; and

DPR agrees to appoint a liaison with the contractor chosen for the project to ensure that the contractor follows the approved design and to consult with the committee or any group it may designate in the event that substantive changes to the design are proposed in the course of construction.

The resolution was passed by a vote of 7 in favor, 1 opposed, 0 abstained.

In favor: Bender, Fanuzzi, Gellman, Goodman, Robateau (CB8), Barret, Taylor (Community Committee Members)

Opposed: Spalter

Ms. Taylor stated that she was voting as an individual and not as a representative of the Friends of Van Cortlandt Park (where she is executive director), which has not taken a position on the Putnam Trail proposal.

The meeting adjourned at 10:40. The next committee meeting will be held on February 24.