

Minutes of the Parks and Recreation Committee Meeting, September 28, 2016

Riverdale Mental Health Association, 5676 Riverdale Avenue

Attendees:

Committee: Bob Bender (chair), Sylvia Alexander, Robert Fanuzzi, David Gellman, Marvin Goodman, Tao Moran, Laura Spalter, (CB8); Christina Taylor (Community committee member)

Absent: Eric Bell, David Kornbluh, Amy Joy Robateau, Herb Barret

DPR: Margot Perron, Dennis Burton, Tony Rosa, Leenda Bonilla

Community: Suzanne Corber, Toni Butler, Barbara Velez, Tom Durham

Agenda:

The meeting began at 7:10 pm. Minutes of the June committee meeting were unanimously approved.

The chair invited Ms. Butler and Ms. Velez to address the committee about their concerns. They described their frustration at continued double- and triple-parking on Broadway during events at the Parade Grounds. The problem exists on weekdays as well as weekends, they said. They also reported that they had witnessed observers at the events relieving themselves in the alleyway of the buildings on Broadway rather than walk to the porta sans at the south end of the Parade Grounds. They said that there is often barbecuing and drinking on the Parade Grounds into the evening and even beyond the closing time of the park (10 pm).

Margot Perron replied that she has tried to eliminate the double parking of buses by providing information to the bus drivers about where they can legally park, mostly in the parking lot south of the golf course. Some bus drivers have refused to move. She said that when the 50th Precinct is called, they are slow to respond. Ms. Butler and Ms. Velez said that when they call, there is usually a response in twenty minutes. On occasion summonses have been issued.

Ms. Perron said that she requires race organizers to participate in a conference call with DPR and 50th Precinct representatives so that they are aware of the regulations regarding parking. The 50th Precinct is on these calls. The precinct has a list of events taking place in Van Cortlandt Park and should be aware of major events ahead of time.

Ms. Perron said that the number of PEP officers in the Bronx this year has been increased to 45 and that five of these officers are assigned to VCP. They can ticket double-parked vehicles but only on the park side. Only the Five-O can ticket illegally parked vehicles elsewhere. These PEP officers are

not usually in the park after dark and cannot respond to barbecuing and drinking after they go off duty. Ms. Perron said she was unaware of the alleged barbecuing and drinking and would investigate.

Committee members asked whether race organizers can be held responsible for bus drivers who park illegally and if so, whether the race organizers could lose their permits for repeated or egregious disregard of the law by bus drivers. Ms. Perron responded that the DPR legal department would have to investigate this question.

Bob Bender said that solving this problem will require consultation with the 50th Precinct. He proposed to bring up the matter at the October executive committee meeting and also ask about addressing it at the monthly district service cabinet meeting. All agreed that the situation must be remedied.

Discussion of Parks Inspections by Committee Members

The chair noted that this past year committee members and others inspected a dozen local parks. Information about conditions of these parks was sent to district manager Tony Rosa, who responded to the inspection reports. The chair thanked him for his response.

There are about ten parks that were not inspected last year and committee members will each take one park and inspect them over the next year.

Mr. Rosa explained that this was a difficult summer in our area. Several people retired from DPR and one mower broke down for the summer, leaving the area north of W. 183rd St and Webster Avenue with only one mower, an impossible situation. The chair noted that this same situation happened last year. Mr. Rosa thanked the committee for making additional equipment an expense budget priority and observed that this summer demonstrated the urgency of the situation.

Mr. Rosa said that a program of stump removal throughout CB8 will begin in January.

Report on SWPPP Working Group in Van Cortlandt Park

The chair gave a brief interim report on a meeting held by DPR with the SWPPP Working Group (Karen Argenti, Bob Bender, Robert Fanuzzi, Laura Spalter, and Christina Taylor). This meeting was one of the conditions established by CB8 when we passed our resolution on the renovation of the Putnam Trail in VCP. At the meeting DPR agreed to provide a site-management plan for the area following construction in addition to the SWPPP that is required for DEC approval of the project. The Working Group commended this proposal. There will be at least one additional meeting of DPR and the Working Group prior to submission of the SWPPP to the DEC. The Working Group is urging DPR to propose a robust SWPPP plan that will offer maximum protection to the wetlands and the entire Putnam Trail corridor during construction.

Discussion of Parks Resource Guide

Committee members and DPR representatives discussed the need for a parks resource guide. Several suggestions were made. One was to include a brief description of the facilities in individual parks. Another was to include contact information for local parks groups, such as “Friends of” groups or even individual stewards of local parks, subject to their approval. It was also suggested that information about various DPR resources be included, such as contact information for the Partnership for Parks, which sponsors the “It’s My Park” events and other support departments in DPR.

Leenda Bonilla pointed out that DPR offers “capacity grants” of up to \$5,000 to groups that will use this money to improve their local parks. DPR employees will even help applicants through the application process. All this is required is a plan of action and evidence that there is a group capable of carrying out the proposed improvements. These grants are awarded three times a year. She also volunteered to provide contact information for local “friends of” groups to the committee. Another DPR volunteer program, Tree Stewards, could also provide valuable information for the resource guide.

Committee members agreed to assemble information for a parks resource guide to be discussed at a future executive committee meeting. Bob Fanuzzi and Christina Taylor volunteered to lead this effort.

Legislative Update

The chair highlighted new laws affecting parks that were noted on the legislative update provided to CB8 members by board vice-chair Rosemary Ginty. He will send information about these laws to committee members in a follow-up email.

The committee then discussed a resolution to support the legislation recently proposed by Councilman Andrew Cohen that would increase the penalties for operating an ATV. ATVs cannot be legally operated in New York City, and they have been a particular problem in city parks, especially Van Cortlandt.

The following resolution was proposed:

Whereas Councilman Andrew Cohen has introduced into the City Council a bill, 0834-2015, that would: prohibit the use of all-terrain vehicles (ATVs) in New York City. Those found to be illegally operating an ATV would be liable for a civil penalty of \$500 for a first offense and a civil penalty of \$1,000 for subsequent offenses. ATVs used illegally would be subject to forfeiture; and

Whereas illegally operated ATV’s have been a persistent problem in Van Cortlandt park, where they damage trails, plants, wildlife, and endanger other park users; and

Whereas in 2014 the operator of an ATV fled the park after being spotted by police officers and was subsequently struck and killed on Broadway near W. 259th Street; and

Whereas the NYPD has repeatedly called ATVs, which cannot legally be operated anywhere in New York City, a danger to the public; and

Whereas the proposed legislation will make it less likely that operators of ATV's will use their vehicles in Van Cortlandt Park and elsewhere in New York City; therefore

Be It Resolved that the Parks & Recreation Committee of Bronx Community Board 8 supports the proposed legislation and urges members of the City Council to pass the legislation.

In favor: 8 (Alexander, Bender, Fanuzzi, Gellman, Goodman, Moran, Spalter, Taylor)

Opposed: 0

Abstain: 0

Old Business

The Ewen Park construction project is scheduled for completion on Oct. 28.

A contractor for the VCP skate park project has been selected, and the project should get underway in approximately two weeks.

A scoping meeting for the VCP "Parks without Borders" project should take place this fall.

New Business

There will be a volunteer day sponsored by DPR in Riverdale Park on Thursday, October 20.

The vice chair of the committee will be Bob Fanuzzi.

There will be a joint meeting of this committee and the E&S committee sometime during the year to consider Tibbetts Brook daylighting and other water-related projects in and in the vicinity of VCP.

The chair expressed his desire to make the realization of the restroom in Fort Four Park a priority for the committee in the coming year. This has been the #1 capital budget priority of the committee for many years. Some money has been allocated by Borough President Diaz. There are unconfirmed reports that Councilman Cabrera has allocated money to the project. We should explore every possible source of funding to make this desperately needed restroom a reality.

The meeting adjourned at 9 pm.

Bob Bender, Chair
Parks & Recreation