

Pending Committee Approval

**Bronx Community Board No. 8
Minutes of the Parks & Recreation Committee
Meeting Held on October 28, 2020 Via Zoom**

Attendees

Committee: Rosemary Ginty (Chair), Debra Travis (Vice Chair), Bob Bender, Courtney Dartis-Galvin, David Gellman, Marvin Goodman, Robert Jacklosky, Herb Barret (CCM)

Absent: Donell Leverett

Other CB8: Margaret Donato, Patrick Hill (Councilman Cohen's Office), Omar Murray

DPR: Deputy Commissioner Mark Focht, Bronx Borough Commissioner Iris Rodriguez-Rosa, Joseph Magneri, Stephanie Thayer, Stephanie Ehrlich (VCP Alliance)

Community: Janie Lerner, Kevin Johns, Ms Ritchie, Mary Ellen Gibbs

Agenda

The meeting was called to order at 7:06pm

New committee member Courtney Dartis-Galvin was introduced.

Debra Travis was announced as committee Vice Chair.

The minutes of the September 23rd committee meeting were unanimously approved.

New Park's Anti-Litter Campaign: Presentation by Parks Department

Deputy Commissioner Mark Focht discussed the efforts the Parks Department to address increased litter due to the heavy use of community parks over the summer because of COVID-19 and reduced staffing due to budget cuts. An anti-litter campaign trial was launched over Labor Day weekend to remind the public to place litter in receptacles and to make containers more visible including "Park Your Trash Here" banners wrapped around centralized trash container corrals. The pilot was considered a success and Parks hopes to bring it back in the spring in a more robust way.

The committee acknowledged that it has been receiving an overwhelming number of trash complaints since the spring and asked how it could be of assistance. Parks asks that community members continue to report poor conditions via 311 and that the committee continues to

amplify the needs it identifies to encourage additional funding for the litter campaign in the spring. The Parks Department does have additional cans on a limited basis if there are specific areas in a park that needs one and they will be emptying all cans as required.

Scoping Meetings Report

The Parks Department has two capital projects in development that they recently held scoping meetings for: the Van Cortlandt Park Classic Playground Exercise Equipment and Strong Street Playground Renovation. Both scoping sessions were well attended. Plans will be presented to the committee by Parks in January.

November 17th there will be a scoping meeting for the Seton Park Skate Park and Fitness Equipment. RSVP is required to receive the link. More information can be found on the Parks website.

New Project Ribbon Cuttings

The Parks Department recently celebrated four ribbon cuttings in our district:

- Putnam Greenway – Van Cortlandt Park
- Skate Park Construction – Van Cortlandt Park
- Parks Without Borders Van Cortlandt Park 242nd Street Entrance
- Mosholu Avenue Playground Construction – Van Cortlandt Park

Committee member suggestions for Community Board Year

The Chair has made a call to committee members to identify areas of focus for 2020-2021. Deb Travis will be working with the committee and the District Manager to identify street addresses for parks, triangles and step streets in order to facilitate community reporting via 311 and 911.

Old Business

The Chair updated the committee on the cleanup day, October 23rd, at Memorial Grove in Van Cortlandt Park in preparation for Veterans Day event for November 8th. The cleanup was well attended with volunteers from Van Cortlandt Park Alliance and Manhattan College.

New Business

David Gellman attended the Borough Budget Consultation meetings and presented Parks highlights:

- The FY21 budget cuts have not had an effect on the city's capital budget, however, procurement has been paused indefinitely. Projects that are currently under construction are continuing and new projects are being scoped.
- The expense budget lost over \$80 million, which led to cutting 1,700 seasonal employees, 250 from the Bronx alone. This had a direct impact on maintenance over the

summer. “Meaningful Monday’s” and the Parks Department’s extensive volunteer network has helped fill in gaps.

- The expense budget for forestry maintenance contracts was cut by \$18.5 million, from \$21 million to \$2.5 million. This includes cuts to scheduled block pruning, pests and disease management (specifically for the Emerald Ash Borer), stump removal and the Trees & Sidewalks Program. This has drastically reduced Parks ability to respond to any non-urgent tree pruning request. The best way to report forestry issues is using the NYC Street Tree Map, the Parks Website or by calling 3-1-1. Requests will be prioritized based on urgency. They do not impact the regular scheduled tree pruning. Due to these budget cuts, scheduled tree pruning has been temporarily changed from a cycle where all trees were pruned once every 7 years to one where it will take 25 years to have pruned every tree. The hope is that once the current economic crisis resides, forestry will be able to return to a 7 year cycle.
- The Parks Department was asked about frequency of cleaning and mowing. Playground locations are maintained five times a week. Large park zones and high trafficked areas and malls are maintained three times a week. Small Green Streets and sitting areas are maintained once a week. Grass mowing in our parks is on a two-week mowing schedule. All scheduled work is contingent on equipment being in working order.
- Generally, step-streets are not Parks responsibility except those that run through parks, like Ewen Park. DOT maintains the infrastructure of the step-streets and DSNY performs the cleaning. Trees on step-streets are maintained by Parks.
- The Parks Department was asked how friends groups are organized and funded. These groups are organized through Partnership for Parks and funded through a variety of fiscal streams including NYC Council discretionary funding and Partnership for Parks grant opportunities. City Parks Foundation is the largest private programmer in NYC’s public parks and programs more than 400 parks, recreation centers and schools each year, reaching 310,000 people. Partnership for Parks does not anticipate a cut in fall service opportunities despite a reduction in staff. Any concerns about unusual group activities in a park should be reported to 311 and communicated to the Parks Committee at monthly meetings and the Community Board office at bx08@cb.nyc.gov.
- NYC Parks also highlighted the following organizations for community members interested in volunteering to support our parks:
 - NYC Parks Stewardship: Natural Areas Group: <https://www.nycgovparks.org/reg/stewardship>
 - GreenThumb: <https://greenthumb.nycgovparks.org/>
 - Urban Park Rangers: <https://www.nycgovparks.org/programs/rangers/volunteer>

- For other green volunteer opportunities please visit:
<https://www.nycgovparks.org/opportunities/volunteer>
- The Parks Department was asked to provide guidance on programs it would like the community board to consider during the budgeting process. They suggested additional funds for:
 - Park Maintenance and Operations would allow for “fixed post” employees at some parks.
 - Horticulture Crew maintains large and small landscapes, CIP targeted improvement sites, traffic medians and the Bronx nursery which supplies 35,000 annuals and perennials each year for use in our parks. Additional funding would allow them to continue to meet these needs.
 - Park Enforcement Patrol Officers are responsible for patrolling all parks. Additional officers would allow them to cover more shifts, special assignments and more regular patrols.
 - Playground Associates provide structured play for children in our playgrounds
 - Recreation Specialists assist at Recreation Centers, the Mullaly Bike Park and the Poe Visitors Center
 - The Bronx Parks Fleet consists of packers, tractors, pickup trucks, cargo vans, aerial lift trucks and electric gators. As an aging fleet they require much maintenance. Parks is seeking replacement of key pieces of equipment to avoid delays in park maintenance.

Due to the Thanksgiving and Christmas Eve, the next committee meeting will be Tuesday, December 1st at 7pm

The meeting adjourned at 9 pm.

Prepared by Debra Travis, Committee Vice Chair
Submitted by Rosemary Ginty, Committee Chair