

Minutes of the Parks & Recreation Committee Meeting
November 29, 2023
[YouTube Video Here](#)

Attendees

Committee:

Present: Bob Bender, Robert Fanuzzi, David Gellman, Rob Jacklosky, Ramdat Singh, Debra Travis (Chair)

Absent: Margaret Della, Rashida Hilliard

Other Board:

Common Names: Laura Spalter

City Agencies and Invited Guests:

Jessenia Aponte (Borough Commissioner, DPR); Joe Magneri (District Parks Manager, DPR); Stephanie Ehrlich (Van Cortlandt Park Administrator, DPR); Meredith Horsford (Executive Director, Historic House Trust, DPR); Adam Ganser (Executive Director, New Yorkers for Parks); Christina Taylor (Deputy Director, Van Cortlandt Park Alliance)

The meeting commenced at 7:05pm

1. Welcome and Introduction of Committee Members and Guests

2. Approval of the Minutes of September 27, 2023 which were tabled at the last meeting due to a lack of quorum and the Minutes of October 25, 2023

The meeting minutes were approved unanimously with changes

3. Chair's Report

Budget Cuts Proposed by Mayor

Mayor Adams has initiated drastic cuts to the Parks Department including the discontinuation of:

- Parks Opportunity Program which will result in the loss 1,450 jobs and 60% of the mobile parks cleaning crews
- 350 Parks Jobs will be lost through a hiring freeze
- Community Composting will be eliminated
- DSNY will no longer collect trash from bins near parks
- And Tree Risk Management, Trail Formalization, Community Garden Anti-Gun Violence Programs and Swim Safety Expansion will all be put on hold for at least a year.

The Mayor has also proposed ADDITIONAL cuts to the seasonal staff which is currently being considered for adoption by the City Council. These cuts will have a dramatic effect on litter pickup, mowing, repairing damaged equipment and the removal of graffiti.

Encampments in Van Cortlandt Park

As the leaves have come off of the trees, encampments have become more apparent. If anyone sees something that looks like an unsafe condition or where a person may need help to get inside and out of the elements, they should drop a pin and send the information to the Van Cortlandt Park Alliance. They will work with the Parks Department and Social Services to get the person the help they need if they want it.

Captain Domingo Santos

Captain Domingo Santos, one of the commanders in the Northwest Bronx of the Parks Enforcement Patrol, who has attended our meeting several times to keep us informed on PEP, suffered a heart attack recently. Our prayers go out to him and his family for a speedy and full recovery. There is a GoFundMe online if anyone would like to assist the family with medical expenses.

4. Discussion of Renewal of the License to Operate Van Cortlandt House

Meredith Horsford made a brief presentation on the Historic House Trust and the history of the Van Cortlandt House. Presentation [link here](#).

Chair Travis then raised several concerns regarding the restricted membership policies of the National Society of Colonial Dames of New York, who are the historical license holder for the Van Cortlandt House. In order to be a member of The National Society of Colonial Dames of New York a person must be a direct descendent of a person of “prominence” prior to July, 1775. The Chair of the committee raised concerns that because this restricts most people, particularly in the Bronx, from actively participating in the National Society of Colonial Dames it also prevents Bronxites from choosing to participate in directing the activities, programming and staff of the Van Cortlandt House. The Chair also raised concerns that the restrictive membership would have a negative impact on the quality of the education and programming offerings and impact their effectiveness at raising funds to support the house and programming given their dual mission of colonial education and as a lineage-based social club.

Members of the public and committee raised concerns regarding disrepair at the house and agreed that the house was an underutilized resource that was not frequented enough by the community. The public also expressed shock that the Colonial Dames had not evolved their membership policies to be more inclusive or acknowledged their ancestors’ role in slavery since the death of George Floyd. Horsford said she could not speak for the Colonial Dames and Chair Travis said that Lee Potter, the Executive Director of the organization has agreed to attend a future committee meeting to answer questions.

Committee members asked the Historic House Trust if they had guidelines for licensees regarding programming, budgets, grant seeking and community outreach and if the Colonial Dames were meeting these expectations. Horsford stated that a new, more modern, license agreement was being developed that would make these expectations more clear although did not provide further detail.

The license for operating Van Cortlandt House is currently lapsed, however, Horsford stated the Parks Department considers it ongoing. The Committee noted that while Parks can consider it

ongoing, this means there is no binding agreement with the Colonial Dames at this time. There will be further discussion in the new year on finances, maintenance and alternatives.

5. Presentation from New Yorkers for Parks on Proposed Budget Cuts and 1% for Parks Campaign

Adam Ganser made a presentation on the state of current Parks funding and answered committee questions regarding the cuts. Presentation is attached. New Yorkers for Parks requested a letter supporting the 1% for Parks Campaign from the committee. The chair reminded Ganser that Community Board 8 passed a resolution almost two years ago supporting this campaign. The Board will send Ganser a copy of that resolution. Chair Travis had also received an email with links encouraging community members to sign a petition opposing the budget cuts and to sign a letter. Ganser recommended that everyone do these activities. Chair Travis will also draft a letter to the editor to send to The Riverdale Press and distribute it to the committee for comment and edits.

Ganser noted two alternatives being considered for additional funding for Parks is concession revenue from concession agreements, such as for golf courses and riding stables, going to the Parks Department instead of the city general fund and a stadium surcharge that would be added to every ticket at athletic events in New York City.

6. Old Business

Broadway Double Parking During Track Meets – Stephanie Ehrlich reported that Commissioner Aponte coordinated with NYPD to advocate for the necessary resources to address double parking primarily during the weekday meets. This led to an effective response in November which mitigated the issue for residents. The track season is winding down and we do not expect this to continue into the winter. Sports permits issued by the central office for soccer matches and other parade ground athletic resources not affiliated with cross country may also be contributing to this issue. The committee recommended that the same parking resources and rules should apply to those users as well.

Update on the Site Visit on Alternatives to the Pedestrian Bridge Project in Van Cortlandt Park - David Gellman attended for the committee and reported that paths around the East 233rd Street overpass at Jerome Avenue were reviewed along with the underpass further north near the nursery road and John Muir Trail. Committee agrees that the underpass is in disrepair and feels unsafe. Committee affirmed that it accepts the East 233rd Street overpass as a viable alternative and that its priorities continue to be that all funds allocated by the Parks Department and DEP for alienation are spent on improvements within Van Cortlandt Park. Commissioner Aponte says Parks is working on the plan and should be able to present an update in early 2024. The NYC Department of Transportation is currently studying three intersections for improvements and Parks is waiting for those results: the intersections are East 233rd Street and Jerome Avenue, West Gun Hill Road and Mosholu Parkway, West Gun Hill Road and Mosholu Parkway North

Putnam Greenway Extension

DEP is in the process of acquiring an easement from the MTA for a pipe to deliver the water to the Harlem River that will be daylighted via the Tibbetts Brook Daylighting & Putnam Greenway Project. This easement would not provide access for pedestrians and bicyclists below West 230th Street, which means that connections to the Harlem River Greenway would be via surface streets.

The committee is interested in learning more about optimizing the connections between the Harlem River and Putnam Greenways and will invite a speaker from the Harlem River Working Group to a future meeting.

Lower Brust Park Fence

Chair asked Parks for an update on the park border fence of Lower Brust Park adjacent to the West 254th paper street. The fence is in poor condition and construction fencing which had been there for a couple of years has recently been removed. There has been discussion of removing the fence as the most cost effective way to soften the border and improve the overall look. Joe Magneri recommended that we wait until all of the rest of the work adjacent to the fence is complete and the charter school in 55 Dash Place is active and then check back in with the community stakeholders on whether removing the fence is still the best option or will bring new problems.

Riverdale Stables RFP Comments

Committee reviewed a letter which was previously sent to the Parks Concessions Unit with feedback on the Riverdale Stables concession for small changes. Chair will make the changes and send to the committee for comment with the goal of sending the new version to the Concessions Unit prior to their selection of the concession holder for the stables in Van Cortlandt Park

7. New Business

None

The meeting adjourned at 9:21pm

Minutes submitted by Deb Travis

Recording Link: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UKk40AWWUKU>

Approved Resolutions or Presentations Attached