

Minutes of the Parks & Recreation Committee Meeting February 28, 2024

Attendees

Committee:

Present: David Gellman, Rashida Hilliard, Ramdat Singh, Debra Travis (Chair) – No quorum

Absent: Bob Bender, Margaret Della, Robert Fanuzzi, Rob Jacklosky

Department of Parks and Recreation:

Stephanie Ehrlich (Van Cortlandt Park Administrator), Christina Taylor (Van Cortlandt Park Alliance), Valerie Davis O’Neal (Bronx Borough Commissioner’s Office), Noel Hefele (Van Cortlandt Park Alliance)

Park Stewards:

Deirdre O’Boy (Henry Hudson Parkway at West 231st Street), Melissa Jackson (Ft Independence Park Playground), Jodie Colon (Stewards of Shorefront Park), Shakir Seagers / Theory9 (Fort Four Playground)

The meeting commenced at 7:05pm

1. Welcome and Introduction of Committee Members and Guests

2. Approval of the January 24, 2024 Minutes

Due to the lack of quorum, the approval of the minutes was tabled until the next meeting

3. Chairs Report

Parks Funding – The Parks Department is facing draconian reductions to its budget that starts in June. As of February 22nd, Mayor Adams has proposed a 12% cut to the Parks Department budget, or almost \$100 million over two years, in his executive budget proposal for FY25. This would mean that Parks which is already under resourced would be unable to complete basic functions like mowing, tree pruning and litter pickup on a regular basis. Anyone who is interested in contesting these cuts should reach out to New Yorkers for Parks who is fighting for 1% of the NYC budget to be allocated for park maintenance and programming.

Two members of the city council are also exploring alternative funding mechanisms to direct more money to parks. Shekar Krishnan of Queens, who is the Parks Committee Chair for the NYC Council, has announced the development of legislation that would allow Parks to keep 80% of the concession and events money brought in by their own park with the other 20% going to smaller parks that serve communities of color. Additionally, NYS Assemblymember Jessica Gonzalez-Rojas of Queens is developing legislation which would add a surcharge to tickets for stadiums located in parkland like Citi Field and Yankee Stadium with the proceeds going to the Parks Department.

4. Presentation by Stephanie Ehrlich of Van Cortlandt Park on Let’s Green NYC

The Parks Department has rolled out an initiative to encourage volunteerism and connect members of the community with standing parks stewards groups in their area. Visit nycgovparks.org/opportunities/volunteer to see filterable volunteer opportunities. Chair Travis pointed out that we only have her group, Jerome Park Friends & Neighbors, on the map in our district and there are several active stewardship groups. These groups can be added to the map by completing a Volunteer Group Update Form which is also available on the same webpage. The Parks Department encourages all community groups to activate their local parks this summer by hosting a volunteer day in their favorite local park.

5. Parks Committee Budget Priorities for FY26

The committee is tasked each spring with assembling a list of district budget priorities related to the Parks Department. The committee kicked off creating a list of the top ten capital priorities and the top ten expense priorities. After much discussion and suggestions from parks stewards in attendance the following draft list was put together with questions for follow-up highlight in yellow. The chair will do the follow-up for the March committee meeting, where the committee will make a preliminary priority order.

CAPITAL – Proposed FY26 priorities –

1. Redesign and reconstruction of Bailey Playground Repair deteriorated drains and reconstruct play equipment, safety surfacing, fencing along the Deegan. Reduce asphalt and add green space. Incorporate adjacent Tibbett's Tail area into an expanded Bailey Playground. (Follow-Up: Has any funding been designated?)
2. Marble Hill Playground Lighting Install park lighting within the interior of Marble Hill Playground (Follow-Up: Confirming if focus should be pathways or activity area)
3. Establish a Parks Enforcement Patrol Command in Van Cortlandt Park Vehicles and other equipment needed to support a new PEP command in Van Cortlandt Park (Follow-Up: Are CB 7 and CB 12 also including this in their priorities?)
4. Reconstruction of Old Fort Four Park Reconstruction of Old Fort Four Park including playground equipment, benches, greenspace, stone walls and fencing (current capital improvement include construction of restroom and resurfacing basketball courts), including improved lighting for the basketball courts
5. Conversion of the Nature Center into a Concession and Upgrading the Restrooms (New) (Follow-Up: Finalize language. New item)
6. Equipment for Litter Collection Within Van Cortlandt Park Additional mini-packer vehicle to reach remote areas for litter collection
7. Equipment for Litter Collection Within the District One large garbage truck to be assigned to the district (Follow-Up: Does the District still need this?)

8. Jerome Park Reservoir Pedestrian Safety Lighting Install World's Fair park lighting along the walkway within the parkland surrounding Jerome Park Reservoir to improve safety, encourage usage after dusk and discourage dumping

6. Old Business

Van Cortlandt House Museum - The committee sent a letter to the National Society of Colonial Dames of New York as a follow-up from the January meeting outlining expectations for their May presentation to the committee to improve their programming and make their operation of the Van Cortlandt House Museum more equitable and accessible. A copy of the letter is below. David Gellman expressed concern that the tone of the letter was inappropriate because the Dames are not a city agency. This opinion was not shared by the rest of the committee.

Brust Park – NYC Department of Transportation (DOT) has informed the community board office that they will be adding curbing along Dash Place near Greystone Avenue extending out from 55 Dash Place to the corner so that pedestrians can safely access the intersection between Upper Brust Park and Lower Brust Park. This will address the drainage into the park which resulted from the shifting soil during construction.

DOT also noted that there were illegal signs being put up by the paper street near Waldo Avenue at the base of Lower Brust Park. The signs state to keep the driveway clear. They are not DOT signs and they will be removing them. DOT is currently working with the NYC Fire Department (FDNY) to confirm if they require access to the back of the school in the ground floor of 55 Dash Place. If they do not, then a pedestrian plaza is possible.

We received reports from residents about garbage from the school being piled beside the park at the end of the paper street. The office has reached out to Sanitation to confirm that is the correct location for their trash.

7. New Business

Intro 130 - Jodie Colon wanted to call attention to Intro 130 which is being considered by the New York City Council. It would mandate on-site composting of leaves and plant material at major parks like Van Cortlandt Park. Intro 130 is being sponsored by Gail Brewer and was discussed during the February 2024 City Council meeting.

The meeting adjourned at 9:06pm

Minutes submitted by Deb Travis

YouTube Link: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GTx5a7PAOUI>

Addendum – Full List

All Proposed Capital Priorities Under Consideration for FY26

Local Parks

Redesign and reconstruction of Bailey Playground Repair deteriorated drains and reconstruct play equipment, safety surfacing, fencing along the Deegan. Reduce asphalt and add green space. Incorporate adjacent Tibbett's Tail area into an expanded Bailey Playground.

Restoration of Lower Brust Park Staircase Restoration of flagstone, pavers, steps and handrails

Reconstruct Washington's Walk Reconstruct Washington's Walk to make the pathway ADA accessible, update and add benches and replace temporary chain link fencing with a wrought-iron fence

Marble Hill Playground Lighting Install park lighting within the interior of Marble Hill Playground

Reconstruction of Old Fort Four Park Reconstruction of Old Fort Four Park including playground equipment, benches, greenspace, stone walls and fencing (current capital improvement include construction of restroom and resurfacing basketball courts)

Jerome Park Reservoir Pedestrian Safety Lighting Install World's Fair park lighting along the walkway within the parkland surrounding Jerome Park Reservoir to improve safety, encourage usage after dusk and discourage dumping

Reconstruct Riverdale Playground Basketball Courts Reconstruct the basketball courts at Riverdale Playground to replace the nets, rims, backboards and re-surface the court

Reconstruct Hackett Park Dog Run Reconstruction of Hackett Park dog run

Ewen Park – Rehabilitation of Lawn (New) – Language TBD. May be expense item

Van Cortlandt Park

Conversion of the Nature Center into a Concession and Upgrading the Restrooms (New)

ADA Access to the Northwest Forest in Van Cortlandt Park Establish an ADA accessible point of entry to the Northwest Forest near Kelly Field

Establish a Parks Enforcement Patrol Command in Van Cortlandt Park Vehicles and other equipment needed to support a new PEP command in Van Cortlandt Park

Convert Mosholu Temporary Golf House to Permanent Parks Administration Building Complete sewer connection, update building layout and provide furnishings/equipment to convert temporary structure for use by Mosholu Golf House during Filtration Plant construction to permanent Parks Administration Building and PEP Command. Connect sewer line with adjacent comfort station

Van Cortlandt Park Mansion Stairway Restoration Restoration of the red brick stairway which historically connected Van Cortlandt House with its former garden. The fence has been funded.

Reconstruct Van Cortlandt Park Fencing and Entrances Along Yonkers Border Replace chain link fences and open edges with wrought iron fence along the Yonkers border of Van Cortlandt Park from Broadway to Kimball Avenue. Establish entrances that prevent motorized vehicle access to trails but allow for pedestrian and greenway usage

Equipment

Equipment for Litter Collection Within the District One large garbage truck to be assigned to the district

Equipment for Litter Collection Within Van Cortlandt Park Additional mini-packer vehicle to reach remote areas for litter collection

Parks District Equipment Crew Cab Pickup to transport staff & equipment within the district

Natural Areas

Upstream Stormwater Management of Alder Brook Stream Bed in Riverdale Park Remove sedimentation and invasives and restore native plantings along Alder Brook stream in Riverdale Park

Spuyten Duyvil Shorefront Park Restoration Green Infrastructure; to divert, absorb, and clean stormwater runoff from catch basins, streets, and the Henry Hudson Bridge outfalls that drain into the Park and create erosion. Rehabilitation and restoration of natural areas, trails, wetlands and aquatic features. (Follow up with Jodie in March 2024)

Greenways

Tibbetts Brook Greenway Harlem River Connection In anticipation of permitted access, construction of pedestrian and bicycle connection between West 230th Street public access terminus of Tibbetts Brook Greenway and off street connection to Harlem River Greenway

Cultural Institutions

Reconstruct Wave Hill Swale Reconstruct the swale adjacent to Wave Hill along Independence Avenue between West 249th Street and Spaulding Lane

Funded (Priorities from Previous Years)

Update Play Equipment at Fort Independence Playground Replace 20 year old playground equipment and safety mats at Fort Independence Playground

Van Cortlandt Park Bailey Pedestrian Plaza Construct an entrance to Van Cortlandt Park at Bailey Avenue and Van Cortlandt Avenue West to provide safe pedestrian and bicycle access to the Van Cortlandt Golf House and lake area

Restoration of Historic Kingsbridge Heights Community Center Building Complete funding of the roof repairs, re-point the façade, and restore interior walls back to a state of good repair from water damage. Update heat and windows to meet energy efficiency best practices

Engineering Study of Van Cortlandt Park Stadium Funding for engineering study to assess and to develop a restoration plan for Van Cortlandt Park Stadium

All Proposed Expense Items Under Consideration for FY26

Replacement Gator-Type Utility Vehicles for Landscape Management, Maintenance and Operations Staff Within Van Cortlandt Park Replace three existing utility gator-type vehicles due to age and maintenance issues

Repair Bruckner Box Connection in Upper Henry Hudson Park

Crushed Stone and Boulders for Maintenance Crushed stone and boulders to enable repairs of tracks and walkways within District 8 and Van Cortlandt Park

Parks Enforcement Patrol Command Within Van Cortlandt Park PEP Personnel, stationed in Van Cortlandt Park, sufficient to properly enforce DPR rules and regulations in Van Cortlandt Park and other CD08 district parks

Funding to Support Free Swimming Lessons Within the Bronx to All Youth Under 16

Upper Henry Hudson Park – Rehabilitation of Lawn (new) – see Ewen Park questions



BRONX COMMUNITY BOARD 8



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February 20, 2024

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National Society of Colonial Dames of New York
215 East 71st Street
New York, NY 10021
Attn: Marguerite Morrison, President; Lee Potter, President (former)

Dear Marguerite and Lee,

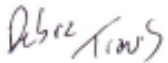
Thank you for attending our January Parks Committee meeting. We appreciate the 100-year partnership that the Colonial Dames have had with the New York City Parks Department and the services the Van Cortlandt House Museum has offered to date.

We also appreciate your candor and openness to discussing our concerns. During our discussion we raised areas where we believe your leadership and oversight of the Van Cortlandt House Museum have been lacking for many years. Any organization that utilizes a New York City publicly owned property, as you know, must contribute substantially to the community through programming and services, limit fees imposed on the community, and do so without discrimination of any kind. Below are the areas in which we believe the Colonial Dames have fallen short in its license and as a community partner:

- Strategic vision for this educational destination on colonial history in a predominantly Black, brown, multicultural, -lingual, -country of origin community
- Diverse organizational leadership with representation thoroughly grounded in an understanding of the needs, wants and perspectives of all residents of the Bronx
- An active presence within the community
- A plan for advocacy for investment in the capital needs of the house
- Original, culturally-relevant programming that expands the community's understanding of history from a multi-faceted experience, contribution, and curiosity funded by the museum
- Proactive outreach to local public, parochial and charter schools and nonprofits serving school-aged populations
- Engaging multi-generational programming including adults, and speakers of other languages with varying offerings, and communication and materials in Spanish and other emerging common languages in the community
- A plan for growth in capacity, funding and staff to carry out relevant educational programs, community-wide engagement and material investment to the level expected of an historically significant New York City cultural institution.

As discussed in our January committee meeting, we invite you to our May committee meeting for a presentation of your strategic vision to address these concerns and your plan to execute it. We would like your presentation to detail exact activities, programs or investments that you have completed or intend to complete and outline the concrete steps you will take. Our meeting is tentatively scheduled for May 22nd. We request that you hold the date and we will be in touch with specifics when it is closer.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Deb Travis". The signature is written in a cursive, slightly slanted style.

Deb Travis
Chair Bronx Community Board 8 Parks & Recreation Committee

CC: Meredith Horsford *Executive Director, Historic House Trust of NYC Director of Historic Houses, NYC Parks*
Julie Reyes, Chairperson Bronx Community Board 8