

Minutes of the Parks & Recreation Committee Meeting May 22, 2024

Attendees

Present: Bob Bender, Margaret Della, Rashida Hilliard, Ramdat Singh, Debra Travis (Chair)

Absent: None

Other Board: Julie Reyes (Board Chair)

Department of Parks and Recreation:

Stephanie Ehrlich (Van Cortlandt Park Administrator & Executive Director Van Cortlandt Park Alliance); Christina Taylor (Deputy Director, Van Cortlandt Park Alliance); Mike Ortiz (Chief of Staff to the First Deputy Commissioner); Meredith Sorin Horsford (Executive Director, Historic House Trust)

Ray Pultinas and Sung Kim (James Baldwin Outdoor Learning Center)

The meeting commenced at 7:06pm

Welcome and Introduction of Committee Members and Guests

Approval of the Minutes of April 24, 2024

The meeting minutes were approved unanimously

Chair's Report

The chair thanked Bob Bender for doing the Parks Committee report at the May Full Board meeting

Spuyten Duyvil Shorefront Park Trail and Habitat Restoration - Saturday, Jun 1, 1am -3pm (National Trails Day). Help them repair trails damaged by Hurricane Ida in 2021. They will be raking the trails, cutting up fallen trees, hauling materials, peeling bark off logs, digging trenches, removing invasive ivy, and more. Learn about building drainage dips, check steps, and water bars to reduce erosion caused by stormwater.

Henry Hudson Park Ornamental and Native Garden Maintenance - Friday, May 31 and Sunday June 2 from 10am to 12:30pm

NYBG Free All-Access Tickets for Bronx Residents – Free tickets for visits on Saturday, June 15. This includes children's activities and access to the newest exhibition Wonderland: Curious Nature. Tickets are first come, first serve. Visit nybg.or/event/Bronx-day for more information and to sign up

Van Cortlandt Park Alliance Update on Summer Events and Offerings

Stephanie Ehrlich presented on the achievements, advocacy and public programming of the Van Cortlandt Park Alliance which is marking its five year anniversary. Van Cortlandt Park Alliance was created by joining the Friends of Van Cortlandt Park and the Van Cortlandt Park Conservancy. Achievements of the Alliance include working with community partners to advocate for the daylighting of Tibbetts Brook, to oppose the cricket stadium construction and to lead the Enslaved People's Project which renamed Van Cortlandt Park Lake to Hester and Piro's Mill Pond and

established the Enslaved African American Burial Ground along with enhanced educational programming at the Van Cortlandt House Museum. The Alliance constructed and operate a community garden space near Mosholu Avenue and Broadway where they lead educational offerings. Recently they have commissioned a Capital Project Scoping Development (CPSD) study for the Van Cortlandt Stadium which will have a kickoff in the fall of 2024 where they will be seeking community input.

Van Cortlandt Park Alliance has been an advocate for parks funding by supporting New Yorkers for Parks 1% for Parks initiatives which are fighting for more city budget dollars to be spent on parks. The Alliance alone spends \$5,000 on garbage bags and \$2,000 in toilet paper to offset the lack of funding from the city.

Van Cortlandt Park Alliance provides programming in the park including Movies in the Park on Tuesdays at 8pm all summer starting July 9th. They provide volunteer opportunities such as Water Chestnut Wednesdays (through the end of July, 9-noon), Forrest Fridays and Tune-up Tuesdays and Garden to Market in Train Park (Wednesdays 2-7pm). See the attached deck or vancortlandt.org for more information.

National Society of Colonial Dames Update on Museum Director Search, Summer Offerings and Initiatives to Improve Outreach, Fundraising and Equity

Meredith Horsford provided an update on the Van Cortlandt House Museum. In January the committee raised concerns regarding the National Society of Colonial Dames of New York and their operation of Van Cortlandt House Museum. Primary concerns were lack of inclusion within leadership, lack of outreach, lack of programming and concerns that the organization did not have a fundraising capacity to improve and did not have a strategic plan to grow that capacity. In January, the “Dames” were seeking a new museum director and did not have an active license with the Parks Department / Historic House Trust who are responsible for the historic site.

In her update, Meredith Horsford said that Margaret Holmes, a former educator at the Bartow Pell Mansion Museum has been hired as museum director. She will have oversight of staffing, budget and fundraising. The National Society of Colonial Dames of New York has been issued a one-year license in order to allow for hiring and good operations. The Parks Department understands that review of their performance is ongoing and must improve. Holmes will reach out to the committee to introduce herself once she has completed onboarding.

A new Community Advisory Group has been created for the Van Cortlandt House Museum. The membership is still being developed, but members are:

- **Meredith Horsford**, Committee Chair - *Executive Director of the Historic House Trust*
- **Jessenia Aponte** - *NYC Parks Bronx Borough Commissioner*
- **Angel Hernandez** - *Bronx Borough Historian, President of Huntington Free Library*
- **Michael Goldblum** - *Riverdale Resident, Historic House Trust Board Member*
- **Laura Levine-Pinedo** - *Executive Director of the Kingsbridge Riverdale Van Cortlandt Development Corporation*
- **Gabrielle Perez-Herandez** - *Former Van Cortlandt Historic Museum Manager*
- **Nilka Martell** - *Community Leader, Director of Loving the Bronx*
- **Don Rice** - *Board Chair of the Dyckman Farmhouse Museum, Local Historian*

The Community Advisory Group has not met yet and so has not formalized goals, however, they will be meeting over the summer. Van Cortlandt Park Alliance expressed an interest in being included in the group.

Discussion was had regarding the programming since January. The committee chair raised concerns of the paucity of programming with very outreach, including little social media presence. The committee was supportive of the museum's free admission in February and March and would like to see that become permanent. The committee cited the lack of outreach to let people know of the free admission including not updating the sign on the front of the museum house as an example of actions that could be taken to improve. Horsford said that free admission is a topic that the new director will be reviewing and expects the museum to have more programming in July and August once the new director is in place.

The Historic House Trust has provided the museum with a \$3,000 grant for FY24 and will be providing a grant of \$4,000 in FY25 for programming. There are two capital projects that have been funded by the city. The fence around the museum will be restored, repaired and given new footings. This is scheduled to occur in early 2025 and will not affect museum operations. Money has also been allocated for major repairs to the building envelope of the house itself including the roof. This is currently planned for 2026. The Historic House Trust will provide updates as the planning progresses and the timeline firms up.

The committee requested more information about the number of visitors and the cost of admission compared to other historic houses. Historic House Trust provided this information in detail as a follow-up.

Attendance at Historic Sites (Fiscal Year: July 1 - June 30)

Data below represents the five city-owned historic house museums that are geographically closest to the Van Cortlandt House Museum. They all operate in partnership with the Historic House Trust.

- **FY 2024 Totals:**
 - Bartow-Pell Mansion Museum (*Pelham Bay Park, The Bronx*) - 8,736
 - **Van Cortlandt House Museum** (*Riverdale, The Bronx*) - **4,186**
 - Dyckman Farmhouse (*Inwood, Manhattan*) - 3,609
 - Edgar Allan Poe Cottage (*Fordham, The Bronx*) - 982
 - Valentine-Varian House/Museum of Bronx History (*Norwood, The Bronx*) - 627
- **FY 2023 Totals:**
 - Bartow-Pell Mansion Museum (*Pelham Bay Park, The Bronx*) - 6,143
 - **Van Cortlandt House Museum** (*Riverdale, The Bronx*) - **5,913**
 - Valentine-Varian House/Museum of Bronx History (*Norwood, The Bronx*) - 5,315
 - Dyckman Farmhouse (*Inwood, Manhattan*) - 5,243
 - Edgar Allan Poe Cottage (*Fordham, The Bronx*) - 925

Admission Rates

Rates reported below are for general adult admission. Many sites have variable admission rates.

- Bartow-Pell Mansion Museum (*Pelham Bay Park, The Bronx*) - \$15.00
- Edgar Allan Poe Cottage (*Fordham, The Bronx*) - \$5.00
- Valentine-Varian House/Museum of Bronx History (*Norwood, The Bronx*) - \$5.00

- **Van Cortlandt House Museum** (*Riverdale, The Bronx*) - **\$5.00**
 - Free for certain months (Black History Month, Women’s History Month, Pride Month)
- Dyckman Farmhouse (*Inwood, Manhattan*) - \$3.00

Historic House Trust provided a brief list of summer events during the meeting and a full list after.

The full list is:

VCHM Events

- **Current Discounted Entry**
 - Admission in June is free to honor Pride Month
 - VCHM is a part of Museums4All and the NYPL Culture Pass Program
- **Upcoming Events:**
 - July 13, 2024 – Van Cortlandt Park Alliance: Family Craft Day, *Free*
 - July 20, July 27, Aug. 3, 2024 – Van Cortlandt Park Alliance: Family Craft Day, *Free*
 - August 9, 2024 - Argentine Classical Guitarist, Carlos Pavan, Acoustic Performance
 - September 13, 2024 - “Blowin’ in the Wind” Program with Historian and Scholar Laini Farrare
- **Developing Events – More information coming soon**
 - Date To Be Determined - Underground Railroad & Abolition in NYS Presentation
 - July 11, 2024 – Bronx County Historical Society: Artist Talk with Edwin Pagan
 - July 5, July 19, Aug. 2, Aug. 16, 2024 - LINC NYC Bilingual Reading Program
- **Recent Events & Discounted Entry: For more recent events please go to www.vchm.org**
 - June 7, 2024 - Cornelius Eady Group Live Concert, *Free*
 - June 19, 2024 – Van Cortlandt Park Alliance: 3rd Annual Juneteenth Celebration, *Free*
 - May 8, 2024 - “Insights into Revolutionary History” with Museum Educator Nick Dembowski, *Free*
 - May 4, 2024 – Van Cortlandt Park Alliance: Annual Pinkster Festival, *Free*
 - April 16, 2024 – Van Cortlandt Park Alliance: Talking to the Bones: Poetry Reading by David Mills, *Free*
 - March 2024 - Admission Free for Women’s History Month
 - February 2024 - Admission Free for Black History Month

- October 28, 2023 - Archaeology & History at Van Cortlandt Park, *Free*
- October 14, 2023 - Delft Tile Tour, \$10 Tickets
- August 19, 2023 – Van Cortlandt Park Alliance: Bronx Arts Ensemble String Quartet: Music in the Digital Age, *Free*
- August 12, 2023 – Van Cortlandt Park Alliance: Stephanie Ehrlich’s Big Bowl of Soul, *Free*
- August 5, 2023 – Van Cortlandt Park Alliance: Party in the Park with The Bronx Arts Ensemble Woodwind Quartet, *Free*

VOTE: SAPO Application – Review of James Baldwin Outdoor Learning Center Community Farmers Market application for a street permit at the intersection of Goulden Avenue / Sedgwick Avenue / West Mosholu Parkway South adjacent to DeWitt

The James Baldwin Outdoor Learning Center has hosted a farmers market adjacent to DeWitt Clinton High School for the past five years. Ray Pultinas and Sung Kim are the chief organizers and came before the committee requesting a resolution in support of the street activity permit (SAPO). The farmers market will start June 15th and will be held every Saturday from 10am to 3pm. There have been no community complaints and this farmers market has been very popular. The committee voted unanimously to support the SAPO.

Resolution

Bronx Community Board No. 8 Street Activity Permit Request for Goulden Avenue from May 22, 2024 Meeting

WHEREAS, the James Baldwin Outdoor Learning Center presented their plan for a weekly farmers market on the closed slip lane and within the green space bordered by Goulden Avenue, Sedgwick Avenue and West Mosholu Parkway South on Saturdays from June 15, 2024 through October 26, 2024 between the hours of 8am and 4pm including setup and breakdown time;

WHEREAS, this farmers market has occurred at this location during the summer since August, 2020 without any community complaints;

WHEREAS, the JBOLC Farmers Market is a valuable source for the Kingsbridge Heights community of locally grown, fresh vegetables and fruit and features activities that include healthy cooking demos, story reading for children, poetry readings, and dance and music performances;

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED THAT, the Bronx Community Board 8 Parks and Recreation Committee supports the street activity permit for the partial sidewalk closure on the closed slip lane and within the green space bordered by Goulden Avenue, Sedgwick Avenue and West Mosholu Parkway South as requested by the James Baldwin Outdoor Learning Center for the purposes of their farmers market.

Committee Vote:

Favor: Debra Travis (Chair), Bob Bender, Margaret Della, Rashida Hilliard, Ramdat Singh

Oppose: None

Old Business

Jodie Colon of Stewards of Henry Hudson Park reported that someone is using a string trimmer in Henry Hudson who is not authorized. They are claiming to be associated with Stewards of Henry Hudson Park. She has asked if the Parks Department can issue permits or identifying documentation for volunteers so that Parks staff can verify if a person says they are part of a group. This person also makes false claims that they are with the Parks Department.

New Business

Christina Taylor reported that Van Cortlandt Park participated successfully in the City Nature Challenge in May winning “Most Observations” and “Most Species”.

Upcoming Van Cortlandt Park Alliance Events:

- Barefoot Dancing featuring Samba, June 1
- New York Philharmonic, June 11
- Juneteenth Celebration, June 19

The meeting adjourned at 9:00pm

Minutes submitted by Deb Travis

Recording Link: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=X75fds3stN8>