

(Pending Committee Approval)

Minutes of the Parks & Recreation Committee Meeting
Bronx Community Board 8
Wednesday, October 22, 2025 at 7:00pm
Board Office – 5676 Riverdale Ave, Suite 100, Bronx, NY 10471

Attendees

Committee:

Present: Bob Bender, Carol Blake, Miriam Filer, Debra Travis (Chair)

Absent: None

Other Board:

Laura Spalter

Department of Parks and Recreation:

Valerie Davis-O'Neal (Special Assistant to the Bronx Borough Commissioner), Katerine Borrome (Director of Capital Projects); Joe Magneri (District Parks Manager, DPR)

Fort Four Playground Reconstruction Team (NYC Parks):

Tara Valenta, Tom Balsley, Paul Rube, Hsiao-Ying Yang

The meeting commenced at 7:05pm

1. Welcome and Introduction of Committee Members and Guests

2. Approval of the September 29, 2025 Minutes

The meeting minutes were approved unanimously

3. Chair's Report

Tree planting plan – The Forestry department has informed us that our district is slated for tree planting this fall as part of their new nine-year cycle. Nineteen street trees have been planted along Washington's Walk and approximately thirty are scheduled to be planted near Amalgamated. The Forestry Department has been invited to our December meeting to discuss this new plan and how best to advocate for replacement street trees.

4. Fort Independence Playground & Public Restroom Building Design

The Parks Department presented their revised plan for Fort Independence Playground. In response to feedback from the community, the changes included:

- Widening the walkway into the playground from ten feet to twelve feet
- Adding an area for children's birthday parties
- Adding removable bollards to prevent vehicle use on the walkway
- Moving the restroom structure closer to the flag pole area and moving the flag pole into the play area
- Adding benches
- Adjusting the planting list to native plants

- Keep the Giles Street entrance open - Parks will do their best to keep a four-foot-wide access path into the park available during construction. There may be brief periods when this is not possible due to the proximity of the pathway to the construction site
- Adding additional baby bucket seats for a total of four

The Parks Department is unable to accommodate a request by the community to move the restroom further into the park so that it is not visible from the street. As an accommodation, the Parks Department is adding plantings around the restroom to soften the border.

The committee requested:

- The elimination of the proposed green area around the flag pole to allow the children to interact with the pole. Parks agreed.
- More shade trees planted on the hill – Parks Dept will consider this, but this is dependent on the results from boring tests during the design phase
- The integration of pigeon themes into the playground since the park is locally known as Pigeon Park. Parks suggested adding pigeons to the panels on the play equipment.

The committee voted to approve the revised design:

WHEREAS, Fort Independence Playground was selected as a recipient of the Community Parks Initiative program, and the New York City Parks Department held community feedback sessions in 2025 to guide updates to the Fort Independence Playground in Kingsbridge Heights; and

WHEREAS, the Bronx Borough Parks Department Capital Division presented its plan for reconstruction of Fort Independence Playground to the Community Board 8 Parks Committee on September 29, 2025; and

WHEREAS, modifications were made to the design based on input from community stakeholders and members of the committee, and the Parks Department presented its modified plan to the Parks Committee on October 22, 2025;

THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED, the Parks and Recreation Committee approves the revised plan as presented.

Committee Vote

In favor: Bender, Blake, Filer, Travis

Opposed: None

Abstain: None

5. Request for Lighting in Sid Augarten Ballfield

The committee returned to the discussion of the impact of adding lights to Sid Field. The community board office received confirmation from the 50th Precinct that they had no concerns regarding public safety or double parking. The 50th Precinct did recommend that the little league be asked to work with parents to avoid double-parking since it is so common on Mosholu Avenue.

The chair provided responses from the Parks Department regarding previously raised questions:

What Are The Active Little Leagues in District 8?

NYC Parks currently permits North Riverdale Baseball and Softball League, South Riverdale Little League, and Kingsbridge Little League, along with several smaller youth baseball and softball organizations active within CB8. These three remain the primary users of district ballfields.

How Many Adult, High School, and Middle School Leagues Are In Our District?

The district's current permitted activity is predominantly youth-based, with some adult league play. Public, middle, and charter school athletic leagues also utilize fields in the district, along with other community-based youth programs. There is only one active adult league and several high school and middle school leagues that play in our district.

Are Our Fields At Capacity and Is There Adequate Availability?

Field utilization varies by site and season. Most fields experience high demand during the spring and summer, though limited additional availability remains at certain sites and times. NYC Parks actively inspects fields to verify permitted use and continues working with leagues to ensure allocations reflect current registration levels and program size.

Priority for Non-Profit Little Leagues

NYC Parks has long maintained a youth-focused approach in field and court permitting. In November, the Department finalized a rule change introducing a formal category for Not-for-Profit Youth Organizations. While this rule does not explicitly guarantee priority, it allows Parks to consider nonprofit status when resolving conflicts or competing permit requests.

Kingsbridge Little League / Lit Field Operations

Kingsbridge Little League primarily operates at Cooney Grauer Field, which is the only lit field in our district. Their permits generally extend to 10:00 p.m. on select nights. Parks will continue coordinating with the league to ensure permitted space aligns with current programming and registration levels and their inspection program monitors compliance.

Is Sid Augarten Field Currently At Capacity?

North Riverdale Little League utilizes nearly all available weekend and early-evening slots during the spring season. The field is considered fully utilized at present. NRBL utilizes Kelly Field at least five days a week during the spring / summer/fall. NRBL utilizes Carly Field approximately once a week.

Does NYC Parks Support Lighting In Sid Augarten Field?

NYC Parks continues to pursue expanded sports lighting where appropriate to extend playable hours and meet growing demand. Lighting installations are typically integrated into capital renovations of athletic fields. While lighting is a significant investment, it is one of the most effective ways to increase field access. The Department welcomes community board advocacy in support of future lighting projects. All NYC Parks lights operate on automated schedules tied to permitted activity and remain off when no permit is active.

Is the Baseball Field at Marble Hill Playground Being Eliminated?

The site currently provides open turf suitable for both soccer and diamond-sport play. The proposed capital project for artificial-turf reconstruction will retain multi-use functionality within the design.

Is This a Capital Project?

For new field lights to be installed at any ballfield, it would need to be funded as a capital project. Unfortunately, Parks does not have the funding for this, so we rely on support from elected officials to help make it happen.

Can The Lights Be Programmed to Turn Off At 9PM?

Yes, the lights can be controlled through a system NYC Parks currently have under contract. As long as the new lights are included in that contract, coordinators will be able to manage them.

There was a request from local residents to have the lights turn off at 8:30pm. This was discussed with the little league and would require games to end by approximately 8pm in order to allow for equipment to be removed. It was determined that turning off the lights at 8:30pm was likely not practical and would interrupt the safe conclusion of ball games. The committee overwhelmingly supported children getting outside and playing sports. Once NYC Parks has created a design for the lights, the committee expressed an interest in visiting fields with similar equipment to understand what the light spill is like from newer equipment.

The committee voted to support the request for lighting at Sid Augarten Field.

October 22, 2025

WHEREAS, the North Riverdale Baseball and Softball League (NRBL) is requesting support from Bronx Community Board 8 for installation of lighting on the Sid Augarten Ballfield (Sid Field) in Vinmont Veterans Park in North Riverdale; and

WHEREAS, NRBL is the incumbent, renewing permit holder for Sid Field, which gives it the status of sole permit holder with the expectation that it will care for the field; and NRBL has been the sole permit holder for seventy-two years at Sid Field; and

WHEREAS, NRBL is requesting lighting be installed at Sid Augarten Ballfield to be used approximately nine weeks a year primarily during their fall season because they are unable to meet current demand for playing time due to shorter daylight hours; and

WHEREAS, the NRBL proposal would allow its fall game schedule to match its spring game schedule by adding fifty-six more fall games and enabling an additional one hundred and fifty children to play, and is supported by a petition from 489 local residents; and

WHEREAS, twenty-six residents of the Vinmont Houses neighborhood signed a petition of opposition to the proposal citing concerns of double parking, glare from the lighting, and additional noise impacting quality of life;

WHEREAS, of the eight single and two-family houses directly opposite to the baseball field, five households signed a petition opposed to the lighting and three signed a petition in support;

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED, the Parks and Recreation Committee supports installing lighting on Sid Augarten Ballfield contingent on NRBL using its best efforts to discourage double-parking by parents; the lighting ending no later than 9pm; and the lighting units minimizing glare and light spillover, following the best-practice standard from the International Dark-Sky Association for sports fields that 85% of lumens fall onto the field of play or equivalent;

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, the Parks and Recreation Committee requests that the Parks Department return to the committee upon completion of the preliminary design for lighting on Sid Augarten Ballfield;

Committee Vote

In favor: Bender, Blake, Filer, Travis

Opposed: None

Abstain: None

6. Old Business

Parks Resource Guide – The committee is going to undertake updating the existing Community Board 8 Parks Resource Guide. Carol and Miriam will work on adding numbers to a map of the district to make it easier to find local parks. Deb will update the list of Park Stewardship groups. Deb will request a copy of the existing text in an editable format from the office and distribute it to the committee.

7. New Business

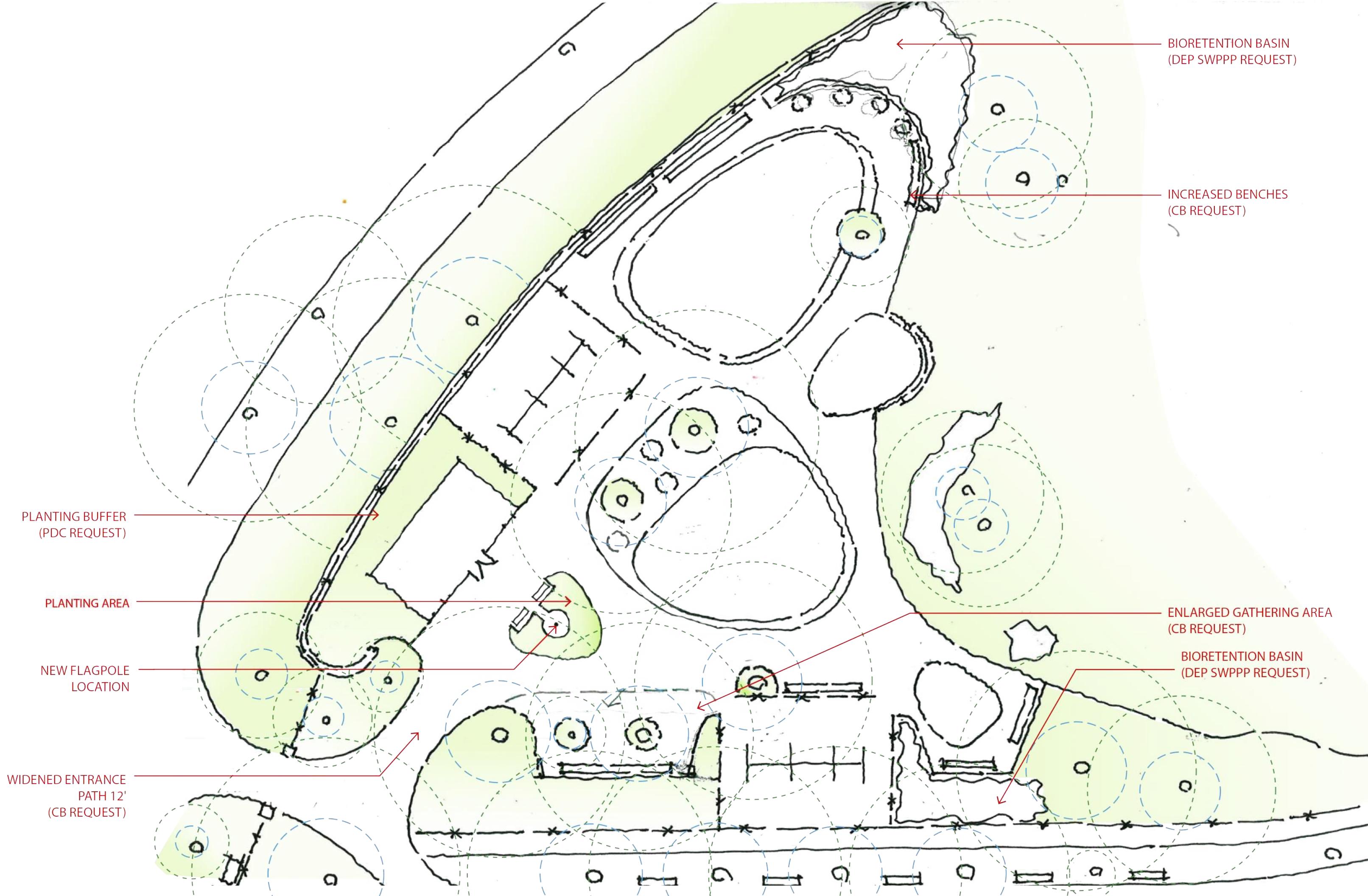
Due to the holidays, the next Parks Committee meeting is December 11th

The meeting adjourned at 9:40pm

Minutes submitted by Deb Travis

Recording Link: https://youtu.be/PKNb-N00paA?si=2Lt_GqVPuEB1Fvwm

Ft. Independence Playground Site Revision Plan Attached
North Riverdale Baseball League Letter Attached





-Supplemental Information-
to Parks and Recreation Committee
“Resolution in Support of Lighting in the Sid Augarten Ballfield”
for
Bronx Community Board 8
Regular Board Meeting
Thursday, October 30

1. NRBL

North Riverdale Baseball and Softball League has been serving the local community for 72 years

2. League Growth and Needs

Just as many other little leagues have seen significant drops in registration, especially in urban areas (see three example sources below), NRBL has seen YOY growth since before COVID (see Appendix A). We've added a Fall Season, inexpensive Travel Team options (~20% of the cost), and nearly year-round activities. Especially during our Fall Season, lack of sunlight has caused us to limit teams and playing time. Lights at Sid would mean more practice, more games, and more time on the field for hundreds of our community's kids.

The Atlanta Journal-Constitution:

- <https://www.ajc.com/sports/baseball/little-league-baseball-faces-declining-participation/bTzEuMq7XVLZRthhDQFaIP/>

The Hartford Courant

- <https://www.courant.com/2019/07/10/connecticut-little-leagues-forced-to-adjust-amid-youth-baseball-participation-decline/>

The Amsterdam News

- <https://amsterdamnews.com/news/2024/02/08/harlem-little-league-faces-steep-registration-decline/>

3. Funding

NRBL has verbal commitment from State Senator Gustavo Rivera for State funding for Lights at Sid. He is awaiting cost estimates from the Parks Dept in order to proceed - which Parks will not do without support from Bronx Community Board 8.

4. Support

While there is a small but vocal opposition, support of the project is broad and deep across the community. Nearly 600 people signed a petition in support (including residents who live across the street from Sid Field). We also have the support of other community organizations (such as the Riverdale Neighborhood House), local businesses along Mosholu Avenue (e.g. earlybird and Emiliano's), as well as local politicians (State Senator Gustavo Rivera, Councilperson Eric Dinowitz).

5. Concern about dangerous parking and traffic conditions

As per the NYC Traffic/Collision Database (<https://crashmapper.org/>), there have only been 2 traffic accidents on Mosholu Ave near Sid Field going back to Jan-2011 (nearly 15 years of data). Also, as stated by Parks and Recreation Committee Chair Debra Travis at the October 22nd Committee Meeting, the local NYPD (50th) Precinct reports no history of habitual traffic issues around Sid Field nor concern over expanded use of Sid Field if there were lights

6. Concern about late night use of Sid Field

While NYC already has a standard 10pm lights-out curfew for lighted sports fields, we have discussed working with the Parks Dept to put in place an earlier, 9pm end-time for permitted use of Sid Field to be respectful of local residents. Once in place, this 9pm curfew will automatically limit use of lights later in the night as the Parks Department has indicated (during the October 22nd Parks and Recreation Committee Meeting) that lights would automatically turn off when the field is not permitted for use.

7. Concern about glare and “Spillage” affecting the few local residents

Modern field lighting technology allows for targeted and focused lighting to a degree unimaginable 20 years ago – with Light Pollution and Light Spillage reduced up to 90%. (see Appendix B). Further, not only does the NYC Parks Department make use of such modern lighting but they REQUIRE it. As per feedback from the NYC Parks Dept: “the [Parks Dept] specifies lighting that complies with ‘Dark Sky’ requirements. These standards reduce light pollution by minimizing light spill, glare, and skyglow outside the project area, thereby preserving the quality of the night sky and reducing environmental impact.”

For more details on Dark Sky compliant Sports Lighting:

- <https://darksky.org/what-we-do/darksky-approved/outdoor-sports-lighting/>

8. Concern that Lights will attract outside use of the field, especially older/adult leagues

NRBL is the exclusive permit holder for and primary maintainer of Sid Field (all mowing, maintenance, upkeep, etc.). Even were this not the case, Sid is a Youth Baseball field, not only in size and shape, but in permitted use. Adult leagues and high school age leagues cannot even apply for a permit on the Parks Dept Permitting Portal to use Sid.

I hope this information is helpful to the board in its discussion about and voting on the resolution..

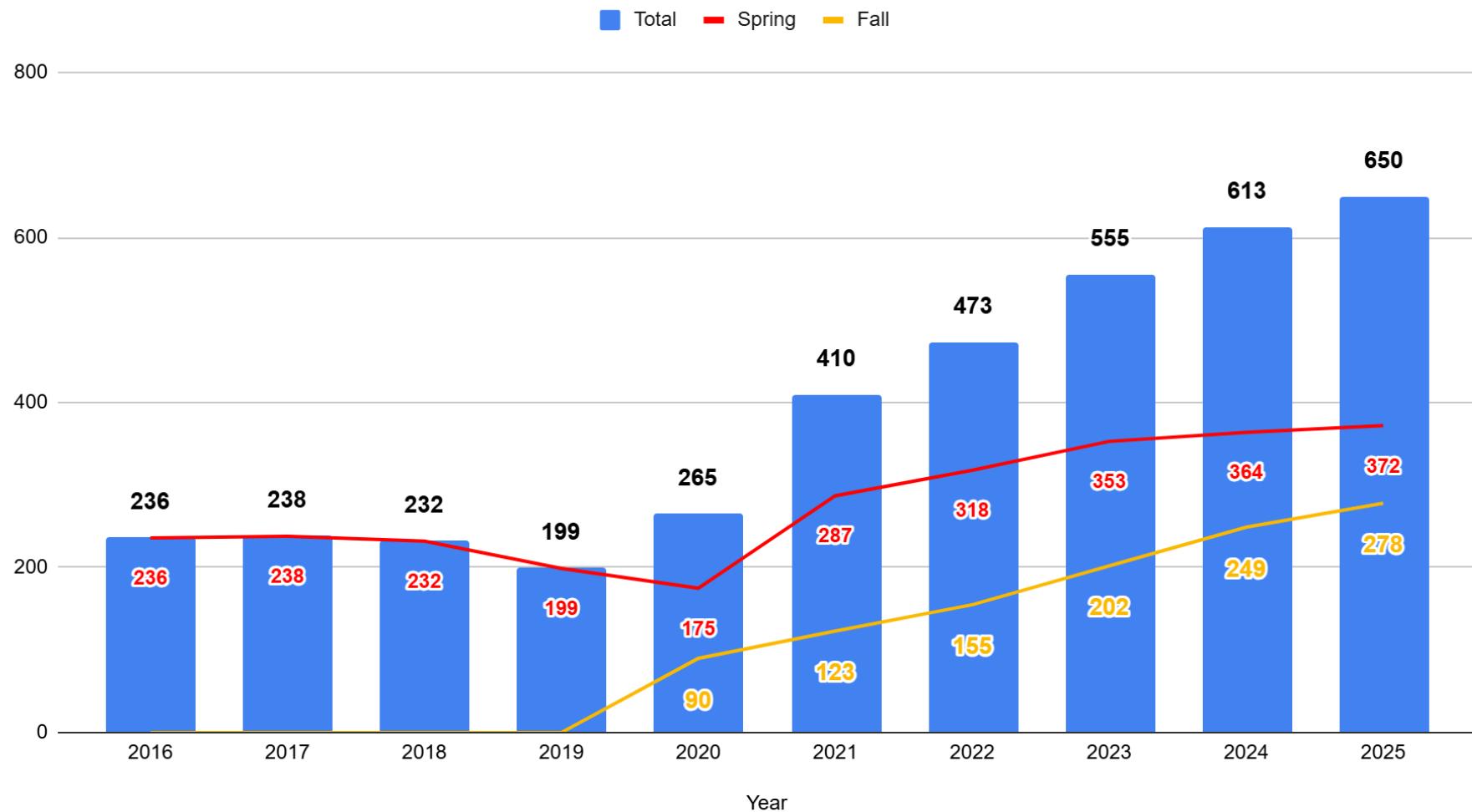
With appreciation,



David Zarnitzky
President, North Riverdale Baseball and Softball League
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Appendix A - NRBL Registration Data

Registration 2016 to Present



Appendix B - Older Generation vs Modern Field Lighting

