

Minutes of the Parks & Recreation Committee Meeting, Sept. 27, 2017

6469 Broadway (Self-Help Building)

Attendees:

Committee: Bob Bender (chair), Eric Bell, Robert Fanuzzi, David Gellman, Daris B. Jackson, Tao Moran, Laura Spalter (community board members); Herb Barret, Christina Taylor (community committee members)

Absent: Marvin Goodman

Agency and Government: DPR: Iris Rodriguez-Rosa, Capt. David Calderon, Tony Rosa, Patricia Ferguson, Margot Perron; 50th Precinct: D.I. O'Toole, P.O. Cintron; Joshua Stephenson (Councilman Cohen's office), Farah Rubin (Sen. Klein's office)

In addition, 32 members of the community attended. Those names are on file in the CB8 office.

Agenda:

The meeting was called to order at 7:10 pm. Minutes of the May 2017 meeting were unanimously approved.

Discussion of New Plan for Bus Parking at Parade Ground Events in Van Cortlandt Park

The chair described a new plan to limit double-parking by directing bus drivers to a parking location and limiting double-parking by other vehicles. Bus drivers are being told to park on the northbound service road east of the Major Deegan Expressway (I-87) and north of E. 233rd Street. They are given a map to show them how to get there.

Bronx Parks Commissioner Rodriguez-Rosa explained that this plan was created by the Department of Parks & Recreation (DPR) and the 50th Precinct in conjunction with local elected officials and their representatives. It took effect when the cross country season began in early September. The plan relies on two elements: education to inform bus drivers and school coaches that double-parking on Broadway will not be tolerated, and enforcement to ticket vehicles that double-park for longer than it takes to discharge or pick up passengers and unload equipment. Parks Enforcement Police (PEP) officers will take pictures and send notices to those schools and bus companies that do not comply with the restrictions.

Deputy Inspector O'Toole advised that there is a learning curve in this process; double-parking cannot be completely eliminated, and change will not happen overnight.

Extensive discussion followed. Local resident Toni Butler recounted the long history of the double-parking problem. She agreed that the new plan offers potential to mitigate the problem, but she wants to know how bus drivers who don't comply will be sanctioned.

Tom Dewey, who said that he runs three cross-country meets each year, reported that he has advised coaches about the new procedure. He believes that meet directors are doing their jobs. He urged residents to understand that with these large meets, there will always be some problems.

Commissioner Rodriguez-Rosa said that given the limited number of PEP officers in the Bronx and available at any one time, the assistance of NYPD is necessary. D.I. O'Toole said that the police will take pictures and contact bus companies to make sure that drivers comply with the new regulations.

There was further discussion and suggestions about how to strengthen notification to schools as part of the permit process and how to enforce compliance by bus companies and drivers.

Proposed New Entrance to Van Cortlandt Park at W. 261st Street

Commissioner Rodriguez-Rosa described a proposed new entrance area to the park at W. 261st St. and Broadway. Currently this is an open lawn with several trees and two benches on the sidewalk. DPR proposes adding floral plantings and benches to create a more formal entrance to this part of Van Cortlandt Park, especially for residents of north Riverdale.

Several residents who live across Broadway expressed concern that the plan will encourage people from Yonkers to use the area and that there could be problems with parties taking place there, increasing the amount of noise. They worry that homeless people will sleep on the benches. They noted that at present young people sometimes gather in the woods behind this area to drink and they are concerned that this problem could worsen.

D.I. O'Toole urged resident to call 311 with noise complaints.

Christina Taylor said that the Friends of Van Cortlandt Park support the new formal entrance and noted that it is part of the Van Cortlandt Park master plan.

Some in the audience asked whether this entrance is linked to proposed new entrances to the park at the border with Yonkers that are mentioned in the VCP master plan. Christina responded that the trail from this area will connect only to existing trails.

Given the time spent on the first two items of the evening's lengthy agenda, the chair proposed tabling further discussion until the next meeting and urged DPR to come to that meeting with a better description of the proposal.

Repair of the Tibbetts Brook Bridge in Van Cortlandt Park

Commissioner Rodriguez-Rosa advised the committee that the footbridge over Tibbetts Brook in VCP is closed because its structural integrity is compromised. Some proposals have been made for how to repair the bridge as a capital project. She would prefer to find private funding to avoid going through the lengthy capital-projects process, which in addition to taking too long could result in a more elaborate bridge than is desirable or necessary for this natural area in the park.

There was discussion of who might provide funding. If the bridge were repaired along with its twin on the other side of the fence in the golf course, perhaps golfers might contribute. Perhaps birders, who use this area, might also contribute.

Christina Taylor said that FVCP would like to take on this project if it can get help in fund-raising. She has contacts through the NY-NJ Trails Conference who could design a natural-looking, appropriate bridge.

Some in the audience urged that the bridge be consistent with the natural area where it is located and not be over-engineered. There was general agreement on this suggestion.

Update on the Putnam Trail from the SWPPP Working Group

The chair reported that the SWPPP Working Group met with DPR representatives in August and subsequently conferred internally. DEC has certified DPR's wetlands permit as complete and it is now under review. This is the final permit required before the Putnam renovation can proceed.

The chair noted that DPR has agreed to a post-construction site maintenance plan as proposed by the SWPPP Working Group at the summer meeting. This is separate from and in addition to SWPPP permit requirements for construction and would ensure that the area is properly maintained after construction. DPR has recently presented a conceptual plan to enhance the VCP wetlands. Bioswales alongside the Putnam Trail could work in concert with the nearby and adjacent wetlands to improve the hydrology in the area if the bioswales are properly maintained. The SWPPP Working Group and DPR have discussed possible funding of a dedicated Putnam Trail/wetlands naturalist to do this maintenance work. There will be further discussion of this subject in the future.

DPR/DEP Jerome Park Reservoir Walk-Through Report

Committee members Bob Fanuzzi and Laura Spalter went on a walk-through of the reservoir area with representatives of DPR and DEP over the summer. This walk-through was agreed to at the joint Parks and E&S committee meeting in April to clarify areas of responsibility between the two agencies. Much was accomplished on this walk-through and a full report was provided at the September E&S Committee meeting. Bob noted that community gardens are possible and can be established through the Green Thumb program. Laura noted that there is a recurring problem with trash on Reservoir Avenue. Parks manager Tony Rosa will follow-up.

Old and New Business

The chair thanked committee member David Gellman – who is also CB8 Budget Committee chair – for meeting with DPR representatives in preparation for the borough budget consultation meeting. David and the chair will attend that meeting with DPR representatives on Sept. 28.

Christina Taylor informed the committee about upcoming FVCP events such as free canoeing on VCP lake on Oct. 21 and the Harlem River Water Conference on Oct. 25.

Herb Barret said that this year's VCP Memorial Grove Veteran's Day ceremony will take place on Nov. 5.

The meeting adjourned at approx. 9:10 pm.