

BRONX COMMUNITY BOARD NO. 8

MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE PARKS & RECREATION COMMITTEE HELD ON OCTOBER 22, 2014

Attendees:

Committee Members: Bob Bender (chair), Laura Spalter (vice chair), Sylvia Alexander, Michael Heller, Rosemary Ginty, Marvin Goodman, Maria Khury, David Kornbluh, James Rather, Mercedes Zegarra-Soja

Community Committee Members: Thomas Durham, Herb Barret

Other CB8: Herb Young

DPR: Margot Perron, Patricia Ferguson, Mike Grattan, Joseph Disponzio

Others: Assemblyman Jeffrey Dinowitz, Randi Martos, Justin Demko (office of Assemblyman Dinowitz); Councilman Andrew Cohen, Andrew Sandler (office of Councilman Cohen); Christina Taylor, Megan Joskow, Sebastian Valcarcel (Friends of Van Cortlandt Park); Peter Gauss, Michael Farber, Ken Kurtzman (South Riverdale Little League); Damian McShane (Riverdale Soccer Club); Sherida Paulsen (Riverdale Nature Preservancy); Peter Ostrander (Kingsbridge Historical Society); John L. Young, Catherine Minty O'Brien (Nature Group); Jodie Colon (Friends of Spuyten Duyvil); Rob Spalter, Katherine Pyntiel, Michael Holoszyk, Toni Butler, Jennifer Klein, David Gellman, Diane Meenagh, Diane Sargent, Gary Klingsberg, Frank Anelante, Deirdre Burke

Agenda:

The meeting was called to order at approximately 7:10 pm.

Minutes of the September meeting were approved with this correction made at the request of Ms. Ginty: p. 2, last paragraph under "Van Cortlandt Park Stables" in the sentence "Mr. Adler said that trail rides are an option, not a requirement of the concession," add "although trail rides were a requirement of the RFP."

Harlem River Development Opportunities

Christina Taylor and interns from FVCP discussed a survey they are taking to assess development opportunities along the Harlem River, specifically brownfield sites that can be transformed for recreational or other purposes. These are known as Brownfield Opportunities Areas (BOA). FVCP is working with the Bronx Council for Environmental Quality (BCEQ) to do community outreach through social media and other means to raise awareness of this subject and of the Harlem River more generally. Ms. Taylor left copies of the BOA survey with committee members and encouraged them to fill out and return the surveys. The survey can

also be taken online at the FVCP website (www.vancortlandt.org). There is also a dedicated email address: HarlemRiverBOA@gmail.com

Five sites are being examined in detail, one of which is near the Target shopping center. FVCP hopes to identify sites that can provide greater accessibility to the river and can also be developed into parkland. In answer to a question from Ms. Spalter, Ms. Taylor said that there are no plans at present for the area adjacent to the Harlem River at Spuyten Duyvil. In answer to a question from Ms. Ginty, Ms. Taylor responded that brownfields and Harlem River access are two separate issues. Survey responses will be analyzed and depending on what they show, capital funding will be sought. Consultants plan to analyze the survey responses by June, 2015.

Seton Park Renovation Plans

Ken Kurtzman of the South Riverdale Little League discussed the league's concerns about Seton Park. There are two ballfields. Seton I is a regulation baseball field with an artificial turf infield. Seton II is a softball field with a natural (dirt) infield. Seton II doesn't drain well. In Seton I, water is undermining the artificial turf. Besides SRLL, other community and high school teams use the fields. SRLL would like to see artificial turf on Seton II and would like to see repairs made to Seton I (the artificial turf has been repaired but the repairs have created some trip hazards). The artificial surface at Seton I is 9 or 10 years old. Drainage outside the artificial turf in Seton I can be poor. The field is sometimes used by high school teams wearing metal cleats and this damages the turf. SRLL wants the Parks Department to post "No metal cleats" signs at the field.

Damian McShane of the Riverdale Soccer Club spoke about the club's concern that work on the natural field used for playing soccer (and which is also the baseball and softball outfields) could take that field out of operation for a year or more, which would leave the club scrambling to try to find other locations for its extensive youth soccer program. There are some bare spots on the field as well as some depressions that hold water and create puddles. Leveling the field would be ideal but only if that will not take the field out of operation during the busy fall season. The area closest to the library is unplayable because of field conditions. Artificial turf would be acceptable to the RSC if it is the right kind of turf.

Councilman Cohen said that it isn't clear that the \$900,000 previously allocated for repairs at Seton Park can be spent for a different purpose than was originally identified.

Assemblyman Dinowitz asked whether DPR can tell us the life expectancy of artificial turf. He observed that we need more information and perhaps better materials before proceeding with alterations to the fields.

There were suggestions that the natural turf might be satisfactory if it is properly maintained with occasional re-seeding, fertilizing, sprinklers, etc.

SRLL officials said that the artificial turf on Seton I has held up pretty well since it was installed. In response to a suggestion to rotate the fields, representatives of the youth teams said that this would mean relocating teams to other fields that have not been identified.

Mr. McShane suggested that DPR meet with representatives of the local youth sports leagues to discuss the renovation plans, which seemed to be a widely shared sentiment.

Separately, Diane Sargent and tennis players who use the courts at Seton complained that the condition of the courts has deteriorated and badly needs resurfacing.

Historic Elements in Riverdale Park

Mr. Joseph Disponzio of the Parks Department presented a slide show about historic elements in Riverdale Park. Mr. Disponzio's specialty is historic and landscape preservation.

He began with a discussion of the fireplace that was removed from Riverdale Park in May, saying that in his judgment it was not a historic structure. He's not certain what it was but is certain that it was not a lime kiln linked to the Delafield property. That lime kiln was located well to the south of the dismantled fireplace. Mr. Disponzio suggested that the fireplace might have been a domestic kiln used for a more recent and smaller structure than the mansions that once occupied the site of Riverdale Park.

He cited a 1985 Department of Cultural Affairs report on Riverdale Park as well as a 1998 Riverdale Nature Preservancy (RNP) report as important sources of information about the park. He also explained that he studied the northern half of the park and did not study the southern half (below Spaulding Lane).

Mr. Disponzio said that the only historic elements he could identify were a stone wall approximately 15 feet high by 50 feet in length that appears to date from the 19th century and was most likely a retaining wall. He also identified a large Japanese maple tree that had to have been introduced by a homeowner many years ago because such trees are not native.

Sherida Paulsen of RNP said that Department of Cultural Affairs report issued in conjunction with Wave Hill did not study the northernmost section of the park but recommended it for further study. Like Mr. Disponzio, Ms. Paulsen said that there is not much left of historical value above ground.

Deirdre Burke said that the fireplace may have been attached to a structure that was part of a workers' village and it is premature to say that it had no historical significance. Mr. Disponzio said that the area where the fireplace was located was most likely a garden nursery and not historically significant.

Mr. Disponzio observed that the park would benefit from a cultural study. These studies, he said, fall into different categories. Reports by the Landmarks Commission and the Department of Cultural Affairs are good initial steps but more study is needed.

Ms. Paulsen said that a comprehensive cultural resource report that brings together different city agencies would be the ideal next step, followed by a management plan for whatever historical resources are documented. Signage explaining the significance of these resources could be recommended.

Other Business

Catherine Minty O'Brien discussed the Nature Group in Van Cortlandt Park. It has more than 100 members. VCP has many environments and the Nature Group wants to highlight these aspects of VCP. More than 240 species of birds have been reported in VCP. The Nature Group offers free nature walks, usually once a month on Sundays at 10 am, starting at the Nature Center in VCP (near the mansion). The Nature Group can be contacted at thenaturegroupvcp@gmail.com

Residents of Broadway complained about traffic problems caused by buses and cars associated with weekend and some weekday events in VCP, mostly concerning cross country races. They are frustrated that buses and cars double- and even triple-park, causing unsafe driving conditions and blocking parked cars.

Margot Perron said that all permit holders are advised about parking conditions and that schedules of events are provided to stores nearby on Broadway. She said that buses are the biggest offenders.

The Chair observed that the same discussion took place the previous night at the Traffic & Transportation Committee, where Bronx DOT Commissioner Constance Moran advised that this problem must be addressed by the 50th Precinct. The precinct has a traffic sergeant who can coordinate with local traffic enforcement officers to force double- and triple-parked vehicles to move.

Margot Perron reported that the Central Park Conservancy is providing assistance to the VCP Conservancy after Thanksgiving. She said that she is still waiting for a front-loader to place boulders at the Yonkers entrances to VCP to restrict the access of ATV's.

The Chair reported that the contractor at Ft. Independence Park expects to complete work by Nov. 30. This is the latest in a series of postponed completion dates.

Herb Barret informed everyone that the Veterans Day ceremony will take place at the Memorial Grove on Sunday Nov. 9 at noon.

David Gellman reported on the Tour de Bronx. *(This event was held the Sunday following the meeting, Oct. 26.)*

Christine Taylor reported on a variety of upcoming events sponsored by the Friends of Van Cortlandt Park. An up-to-date listing and description can be found at www.vancortlandt.org

Diane Sargent complained that Paul's Park (lower Henry Hudson Park) is suffering from erosion and that trees require pruning. She was advised to call 311 with the tree pruning request.

Mercedes Zegarra-Soja reported that DPR now has a capital projects tracker where anyone can find information about parks that are undergoing capital improvements. The website is <http://www.nycgovparks.org/planning-and-building/capital-project-tracker>

The Chair asked committee members to suggest ideas for topics to investigate and discuss at future meetings. He suggested pesticide/herbicide use in parks as a possible topic.

Finally, there was discussion of the committee's next meeting date, scheduled for November 26, the night before the Thanksgiving holiday. The Chair asked committee members to tell the Board office via email whether they could attend. It is expected that DPR will present its plans for the skateboard park in VCP at this meeting so a quorum will be important. *(Based on responses from committee members, it became clear that a quorum was questionable, so the meeting date was moved to Nov.6, the only open date on the CB8 calendar. DPR was notified of the new date.)*

The meeting adjourned at approximately 9:20 pm.

Bob Bender
Chair
Parks & Recreation Committee