

Minutes of the May 22, 2019 Meeting of the Parks & Recreation Committee at Manhattan College,
Raymond Kelly Building, 3900 Waldo Avenue
(pending committee approval)

Attendees:

Committee: Bob Bender (chair), David Gellman, Marvin Goodman, Donell Leverett, Tao Moran (all CB8); Herb Barret, Christina Taylor (community committee members)

Absent: Eric Bell, Robert Fanuzzi, Daris B. Jackson

Other CB8: Rosemary Ginty (board chair), Laura Spalter (board vice chair)

DPR: Stephanie Thayer, Jean-Paul Catusco, Julie Micou Cerf

Community: Oded Holzinger, Brigitte Griswold, Robert Baron (all Groundwork Hudson Valley); Tara McMaster, Debbi Dolan, Matt Turov, Catherine O'Brien, John Young, Benigno Veraz, Rob Spalter, IC Levenberg, George Diaz, Karen Argenti, Kathryn Heintz

Agenda:

The meeting began at 7:05 pm. The chair introduced Julie Micou Cerf.

Introduction to New Van Cortlandt Park Alliance

Julie Micou Cerf is the interim executive director of the VCPA, which was formed by the merger of the Friends of Van Cortlandt Park and the Van Cortlandt Conservancy. The goal of the new organization, Ms. Cerf said, is to provide stronger advocacy for the park and to help realize the goals of the 2034 Master Plan for Van Cortlandt Park. The mission statement: "The Van Cortlandt Park Alliance preserves, supports, and promotes the recreational, ecological, and historical value of Van Cortlandt Park." Ms. Cerf expects to serve until a permanent executive director can be found.

In response to questions Ms. Cerf said that VCPA will work in conjunction with the Parks Department but is separate from DPR. The deputy park administrator, Stephanie Thayer, will serve in the role that Margot Perron formerly occupied, overseeing day-to-day operations.

Plans for implementing the 2034 Master Plan will be forthcoming.

The chair thanked Ms. Cerf for the presentation and mentioned that the community board had sent a letter of appreciation for Margot Perron's twelve years of service to DPR officials and elected officials.

A quorum being present, the minutes of the April 2019 meeting were unanimously approved.

Groundwork Hudson Valley Feasibility Study

Oded Holzinger presented this study, which covers southwest Yonkers and potentially Van Cortlandt Park (VCP) as well. Mr. Holzinger began by stating that there is no plan to pave any part of Van Cortlandt Park. He then described a proposed Yonkers Greenway that will occupy the former Putnam Line Getty Square branch roadbed and right of way in Yonkers, leading from Caryl Avenue to the Hudson River waterfront, following the roadbed. This Yonkers Greenway would be recreational parkland that would be operated by the Yonkers Parks Department.

Mr. Holzinger said that Groundwork Hudson Valley (GHV) has raised money and intends to hire a planning firm to conduct a feasibility study for the Yonkers Greenway and a connection to Van Cortlandt Park from Caryl Avenue in Yonkers. He explained that community outreach will be a vital part of the feasibility study. GHV wants to gather community opinion on both sides of the Yonkers/Bronx city line. The study will likely take two years.

Mr. Holzinger said that there is already cooperation between youth groups in Yonkers and Van Cortlandt Park to address ecological issues such as water quality and invasive species.

The presentation focused on the border between Yonkers and VCP at Caryl Avenue. GHV hopes to improve this area inside the park to reduce littering and beautify the existing entrances from Yonkers at Saratoga and Van Cortlandt Park avenues.

One option would be to connect Caryl Avenue to the protected bike lane on Broadway via the equestrian path in VCP. Mr. Holzinger is aware that many in the community oppose this idea and connection via the Putnam Trail and directly from Caryl Avenue to Broadway will be considered “main assets” for cyclists.

Following the presentation there were numerous questions from the audience. Mr. Holzinger indicated that the current pedestrian entrances to the park from Caryl Avenue may not change at all. In response to concerns expressed about littering and misuse of the park, he said that parks thrive when people in the community use them. He allowed for the possibility of installing cameras at these entrances.

In response to other questions urging that the park be left alone and that bicycle connections to Broadway be made via Caryl Avenue, Mr. Holzinger repeated that this is under consideration as is the Putnam Trail. The study is not intended to expand bicycle use on the equestrian trail in VCP.

Mr. Holzinger agreed with speakers who said that the equestrian trail and the Cass Gallagher trail serve important functions as they currently exist and that he does not want to change them. He would like to find a point of connection between VCP and the proposed Yonkers Greenway without damaging VCP.

There was consensus that the park should be left as is with additional bicycling on the equestrian trail discouraged. Mr. Holzinger will explore making bicycle connections via Caryl Avenue. He will return for further discussions as part of the community outreach before any further action is taken.

Old Business

The chair thanked board members who participated in “It’s My Park” Day at Brust Park.

New Business

The chair mentioned that Councilman Cohen has written to Commissioner Rodriguez asking that the tennis courts in Seton Park be resurfaced.

Community resident Tara McMaster said that she has sent complaints about dangerous tree conditions on her block to DPR without response. She forwarded the information to the community board office and said that there was still no response. The chair asked that she re-send the previous information and that he and the community board office will follow up directly with the forestry division of the Parks Department.

The meeting adjourned at 8:50 pm. The committee will meet again on June 26.