

**Minutes of the Parks & Recreation Committee Meeting of April 24, 2019 at
Riverdale Housing for the Elderly, 6477 Broadway**

Attendees:

Committee: Bob Bender (chair), Robert Fanuzzi, David Gellman, Marvin Goodman, Donell Leverett, Tao Moran (all CB8); Herb Barret (community committee member)

Absent: Eric Bell, Daris B. Jackson (CB8); Christina Taylor (community committee member)

Guests: Stephanie Thayer, DPR; Gabriella Cappo, New Yorkers for Parks; Elizabeth Thompson, Kingsbridge Heights Neighborhood Improvement Association; Eusebio Baez, Joel Guerrero, Daniel Ranells

Agenda:

The meeting began at 7:20 pm.

Update on Van Cortlandt Park Capital Projects

The new playground at Mosholu & Broadway is supposed to break ground in May. Work is supposed to resume on the long-stalled skate park on Broadway in May. The Parks without Borders project is underway. Stephanie Thayer, deputy administrator of Van Cortlandt Park, reported that fencing is going up in the project area.

Eusebio Baez expressed concern about the design of the skate park. The chair replied that the design had been approved at a meeting attended by several skateboarders, but offered to forward Mr. Baez's concerns to DPR if Mr. Baez would email them to the CB8 office.

A quorum being present the minutes of the March committee meeting were unanimously approved.

Presentation by Gabriella Cappo, New Yorkers for Parks, Concerning "Play Fair for Parks" Campaign

The chair introduced Ms. Cappo and provided brief background about New Yorkers for Parks.

Ms. Cappo explained the "Play Fair for Parks" campaign. Funding for maintenance and operations at DPR has steadily decreased as a percentage of the city budget. It is now 0.59% of the city budget. New Yorkers for Parks is asking for an additional \$100 million in funding, which would bring the portion of the city budget allocated for DPR maintenance and operations to 0.69%. This additional money would baseline 100 city parks workers and 50 gardeners (their jobs would be stable, not subject to annual appropriations); provide funding for forestry care throughout the city; put a dedicated park worker in every park and playground with a restroom; and fund improvements in every Green Thumb community garden in the city. It would also provide additional afterschool programs in neighborhood playgrounds and fund Urban Park Rangers and PEP officers to preserve and protect parks and other natural areas.

More than 120 organizations have endorsed the “Play Fair for Parks” campaign. They include Bronx Council for Environmental Quality (BCEQ) and Friends of Van Cortlandt Park (FVCP).

The budget proposed by the City Council includes most, though not all, of this funding. That budget will now be subject to negotiation with the mayor.

Committee members agreed to endorse the campaign. Following is a resolution in support:

Resolution

Whereas New Yorkers for Parks is an independent non-profit advocacy group for New York City parks; and

Whereas New Yorkers for Parks has embarked on a campaign for increased funding of city parks called the Play Fair for Parks Coalition; and

Whereas 120 community groups have endorsed this campaign; and

Whereas 14% of all New York City land is under the jurisdiction of the Department of Parks & Recreation (DPR); and

Whereas this campaign calls for an increase in funding of \$100 million for city parks, which would increase the portion of the city budget dedicated to parks from 0.59% to 0.69%; and

Whereas spending for maintenance and operations in city parks has decreased as percentage of the city budget for the past two years; and

Whereas this funding would permit baselining of positions for gardeners, PEP officers, fixed-post permanent staff in individual parks citywide, a maintenance and conservation program for natural forests under the supervision of DPR’s Natural Resources Group, better community gardens, increased playground programming, and other basic programs essential to the maintenance and operation of city parks; and

Whereas inadequate maintenance is the number-one complaint about parks in Bronx Community Board 8;

Therefore, Be It Resolved that Bronx Community Board 8 endorses and supports the Play Fair for Parks campaign and urges our City Council representative and other elected officials to advocate for increased funding for New York City parks.

The resolution passed unanimously, 7-0-0 (Bender, Fanuzzi, Gellman, Goodman, Leverett, Moran; Barret). It now goes to the full board for discussion at the May board meeting.

“It’s My Park” Day

The chair reminded committee members of the annual “It’s My Park” event, scheduled this year for Saturday, May 4 at Brust Park. Flyers in English and Spanish were distributed.

New Business

Herb Barret said that the current signage at the Memorial Grove in Van Cortlandt Park is inadequate because it does not explain what the grove represents or who is commemorated there. He provided an example of informational signage that he thought would be appropriate. He would like to see signs on the east, west, and north sides of the grove.

Committee members agreed that more informative signage is appropriate but want to leave the decision about location and number of signs to the VCP administration. Stephanie Thayer, deputy administrator, said that there is a sign committee at DPR that will review the request.

The chair offered to send Herb an email confirming the committee's support in principle for some additional informative signage.

Joel Guerrero informed the committee about his efforts to find funders to help improve the condition of Fort Four Park playground. Mr. Guerrero had previously addressed the committee's September meeting on the same subject. Mr. Guerrero has already secured support for certain improvements from some potential funders. He said he has communicated with John DeSio in Bronx Borough President's office about his ongoing efforts.

The committee applauded Mr. Guerrero's initiative and advised that he should meet with someone in Councilman Cabrera's office and with the Bronx Parks commissioner to make sure that the proposed improvements are acceptable to DPR and that the funding is handled appropriately.

Dan Ranells brought up concerns about the bike route in VCP between the golf house and the Dickinson Ave./Van Cortlandt South entrance. Tree roots have created an uneven surface and the wider bikeway under the renovated Major Deegan overpass leads some riders heading west to speed up as they approach a tight turn and blind spot in the bike route. Dan proposed new signage telling riders to slow before the curve. Stephanie Thayer said she would look into the matter and follow up.

Robert Fanuzzi reported on a recent meeting between representatives from BCEQ, of which organization he is president, and DPR regarding Raoul Wallenberg Forest. DPR has agreed to expand the boundaries of the park to incorporate the mapped but unused portions of Seton Park that lie to the south and east of Raoul Wallenberg Forest. Trails will be extended to include the new park area. The proposal was met with approval from committee members.

The meeting was adjourned at 8:50 pm.

Submitted by Bob Bender