

Minutes of the Special Committee on the Hudson River Greenway Meeting, June 13, 2019

Teen Lounge, Riverdale Y, 5625 Arlington Avenue

Attendees:

Committee: Bob Bender (chair), Dan Padernacht, Laura Spalter

Other CB8: Marvin Goodman, Eric Dinowitz

Community: Louis Kleinman, Waterfront Alliance; Tracy Shelton, KRVC; Cliff Stanton, Friends of the Hudson River Greenway; Joe Konig, Julius Motal, Riverdale Press; Gary Klingsberg, Riverdale Spuyten Duyvil Coalition; Terri Colon, Assemblyman Dinowitz's office; Sandy Shalleck, Betty Klein, Judy Michael (?), Michele Disco, I-C L'Engel, Robert Fass, Joe Kozlowski, Nortrud Wolf Spero, Paul Rivers, Steven Smith, Eric Milland, Daniel Ranells, Jordan Laks, Yael Levy

Agenda:

The meeting was called to order at 7:35 pm.

Minutes of the October 2018 meeting were unanimously approved.

Bob Bender updated the meeting on developments concerning the Hudson River Greenway (HRG) since the committee last met.

In December 2018 committee members met with Andy Beers, Director of the Empire State Trail, and Assemblyman Dinowitz. Mr. Beers provided information about the EST, and then the discussion focused on the Bronx HRG. Mr. Beers said that the State Parks agency could be involved but would not be the lead agency. He said that the Hudson River Valley Greenway, a state agency, provides funding and matching grants for HRG projects. The engineering study that is the next step in implementing the Bronx HRG would qualify for a matching grant if the City of New York provides initial funds for the engineering study.

Bob then brought up information about the Metro-North (MNR) Hudson Line tracks. The MNR feasibility study required that wherever the HRG is on piers in the river, it must be at least 12 feet above the mean water level. This would elevate the HRG higher than the tracks. Further research shows that the tracks lie within the current 100-year flood plain of the Hudson River. This would seem to require MNR to protect the tracks from storm surge, presumably by either building a wall along the riverbank or fortifying the riverbank riprap. Such protection might offer more opportunity to locate the HRG on the wall or the riprap, reducing the number of piers that might have to be built as well as the cost of the HRG.

Bob mentioned that CB8 chair Rosemary Ginty and he brought up this subject in a phone conversation with Sen. Alessandra Biaggi on March 22. Sen. Biaggi indicated her strong support for the HRG and said she wants to know more about MNR's plans for protecting the Hudson Line.

In addition Bob mentioned a recent discussion among MTA board members concerning funding by MNR of a portion of the Empire State Trail in Putnam and Dutchess counties. MNR will be allocating \$42 million toward constructing the trail along disused MNR property. Although MNR previously told CB8 that it would not provide any funding for the HRG, it will be providing funding for the EST. MTA board members also acknowledged that HRG construction could have collateral benefits for MNR's Hudson Line tracks. MNR's plans and obligations will be further examined.

In order to initiate the engineering study, we need money and an entity that can handle the funding from government sources. Councilman Cohen has said that he is prepared to request \$500,000 toward the cost of the engineering study, which is estimated at \$1 million-plus. The councilman suggested that Bob and Cliff Stanton, president of the Friends of the Hudson River Greenway, meet with Carter Strickland, director of New York operations for the Trust for Public Land. Bob and Cliff met with Mr. Strickland on June 11. He said that TPL would be willing to serve as the fiscal conduit for these funds, subject to approval from his board. He also provided some helpful information and advice based on TPL's experience with creating trails out of disused rail corridors and utility roadways.

There were several questions following up on these remarks and related matters. Among the questions: whether the engineering study will follow the route identified by the feasibility study (presumably so) and how the MNR riprap/wall issue might affect the eventual cost of the HRG. Other questions included the time frame for the engineering study (unknown but presumably at least as long as the feasibility study, which took one and a half years) and when MNR might have to start fortifying the riverfront (unknown).

Bob Bender said that while we await the funding for the engineering study, which is unlikely to be allocated before the 2021 city budget, which begins on July 1, 2020, there are other things we can do. A tax search has so far turned up no private owners of property along the HRG route or of riparian rights other than those already known (e.g., Riverdale Yacht Club, Hebrew Home, College of Mount St. Vincent), but rumors persist of other private owners. This issue should be fully resolved. The committee and HRG supporters can also investigate agency approvals and permits that will be required, such as Army Corps of Engineers, NYS Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC), and so forth. We should also reach out to organizations such as Rails for Trails and other bicycle and recreational organizations, especially those that operate in the Bronx, for advice and potential connections. There is still additional HRG research to do.

The meeting adjourned at 8:15 pm.

Submitted by Bob Bender