

**COMMUNITY BOARD NO. 8 BRONX  
MINUTES OF THE PARKS & RECREATION COMMITTEE  
HELD APRIL 27<sup>TH</sup>, AT THE BOARD OFFICE**

Attendees:

Bob Bender, Robert Press, Rosemary Ginty, Laura Spalter, Damian McShane, Brendan Contant, Steve Balicer, Tom Durham, Community Board 8; Margot Perron, Gal Lavid, Carlos Bonilla, Benjamin Kramer, DPR; Assemblyman Jeffrey Dinowitz, Daniel Johnson, Assemblyman Dinowitz's office; Jane Sokolow, I-C Levenberg-Engel, BCEQ; Andrew Sandler, Councilman Kopell's office; Brendan McHugh, Riverdale Review; Christina Taylor, FVCP; Chauncy Young, Dart Westphal, MariaLuisa Cipriano, Harlem River Working Group; Yael Levy, Mark Fleischner, Barbara Byington, community residents.

Agenda:

The meeting was called to order at 7:05 PM. The minutes of the March meeting were approved.

Chauncy Young of the Harlem River Working Group discussed that group's efforts over the past two years to bring Bronx residents to the river. There is little accessibility to the river, and as is the case with the Hudson River Greenway, the Harlem River group would like to see a greenway along the river. HRWG meets monthly, alternating between the Borough President's office and Bronx community boards. Dart Westphal, also affiliated with the HRWG, said that the Putnam Rail line, when extended south to W. 230<sup>th</sup> Street, could offer a "near connection" to the river. Perhaps water access to the river could be restored if Tibbets Brook can be daylighted. The closest current contact with the Harlem River in CB8 is at the Spuyten Duyvil triangle, which is currently closed to the public by the Metro-North and Amtrak rail lines. It may be possible through DOT to create access points to the river. Greenway access should be made a key component of any Harlem River plans.

Margot Perron spoke about the Van Cortlandt Park Conservancy. It is a public-private partnership similar to the Bronx River Alliance and conservancies and alliances in Central, Prospect, and Fort Tryon parks. Margot is a DPR employee and VCPC official; her dual role was vetted and approved by the city's Conflicts of Interests board. VCPC is trying to raise funds to help the operations costs in VCP, which currently run around \$4 million annually. VCPC has a website that lists all the board members; the annual report is online. (<http://vcpark.org>)

Margot reported that the Memorial Grove restoration contractor is trying to find a supplier who can make the missing bronze plaques.

There will be a daylong Birdathon in VCP on May 21.

It is unclear whether the NY Philharmonic will perform in the Bronx this summer, but the southern Parade Grounds area where these concerts have previously been held will be closed until next spring.

There was some discussion of the tennis court permits. Fees will be raised starting July 1 from \$100 to \$200. There have been objections to the steep increase. There was agreement that the procedure for raising these fees does not seem to allow public comment and that the procedure ought to be examined to permit public participation. The Chair will ask the Board office to contact DPR and request that public objection to the increase in fees be taken into account before July 1.

Damian McShane reported the results of a survey he commissioned on the proposed ice-skating rink. The survey was done online with the intention of soliciting parents of the children who attend schools in the community. There are 12 schools within 1 mile of the proposed site, Damian reported. The survey drew 300 responses within 2 weeks via 4 school parents' associations. A summary of the survey was provided. It showed that 87% of respondents said that their family would use the rink, 5.7% said they weren't ice skaters but liked the idea of the rink, 5.4% said there was no need for the rink, 2.0% had no opinion. Damian also reported on his conversation with former parks commissioner Henry Stern. Mr. Stern did not take a position on the proposed rink but did say that one important function of the parks is to provide recreational opportunities that bring residents to the parks.

Assemblyman Dinowitz commented that he does not want to kill the skating rink, but is concerned about the process and believes that there has not been sufficient public input. He wants to be sure that the community has an opportunity to speak while it matters, before decisions are made.

Bob Bender observed that this is the third meeting of the committee where the rink has been discussed and that there will be a site visit on April 28 open to the public as well as public testimony prior to the final decision by the Franchise Review Commission. The committee will continue to discuss the rink in future meetings as necessary.

Robert Press asked whether the city will charge for parking in the golf course parking lot and whether there are economic development issues with respect to the rink that should be examined.

Rosemary Ginty observed that process is essential and that she doesn't feel that the committee meetings alone constitute proper public process. She stressed the importance of community input.

Damian McShane observed that community input was the purpose behind his survey and that the survey demonstrates a desire for the rink in the community.

Rosemary Ginty commented that the details of the rink are important and that they won't be known until the RFP process concludes and a concessionaire is selected.

In response to a question whether the process could take place over the summer, Margot Perron observed that it could, and it is her hope that the regular community council meetings she wants to establish for the VCPC could help with the public input into such issues in the future.

Assemblyman Dinowitz commented that getting something done and doing it the right way are not mutually exclusive goals. There is still time, he said, to make sure of public participation in the decision about the ice rink.

*(Note: The site visit took place on April 28, the day after the meeting. Board members Bob Bender, Robert Press, and Tom Durham attended, along with District Manager Nicole Stent, Assemblyman Dinowitz and others. A report will be provided at the May meeting.)*

Margot Perron introduced VCP gardener Carlos Bonilla, who explained the red-flag system for warning prospective users that the Parade Grounds are closed because of weather conditions. There are now three red flags instead of one, providing increased visibility throughout the Parade Grounds.

Robert Press asked whether something can be done about buses double-parking along Broadway during events. Margot Perron and other board members observed that this is a long-standing problem that requires enforcement of parking regulations by the 50<sup>th</sup> Precinct.

There was a brief discussion of the Ft. Independence Park/Jerome Park Reservoir renovation, which came before the committee in 2009. The project had stalled over a DEP interpretation of federal guidelines concerning the reservoir. There now seems to be some movement between DEP and DPR to resolve the impasse. The committee will monitor the situation.

Robert Press asked about public access to the JPR, and Damian McShane responded that there are going to be meetings to discuss the DEP's JPR access report, presented to the Croton Filtration Monitoring Committee at its March meeting and which members of the CFMC found to be inadequate. Mr. Press asked that this item be carried to future meetings.

The committee discussed its 2013 budget priorities. After a review of the 2012 budget priorities and discussion of the various items, the following budget priorities were approved:

Expense –

1. Personnel sufficient for maintenance and enforcement in CB8 parks, especially on weekends and at times of high use.
2. Acquisition of a pick-up truck with snowplow, salt spreader, and water tank.
3. Two stump grinders for Van Cortlandt Park.
4. Installation of a permanent concrete ping-pong table in VCP near Broadway.

Capital –

1. Construction of a new restroom in Fort Four Park and related plumbing repairs.
2. Reconstruction of the Bailey Avenue playground including construction of a skate park.
3. Repair of the basketball court and the fences at Ewen Park. The committee notes that Councilman Koppell has already allocated \$700,000 toward these repairs but DPR has not yet proposed a plan for using these funds to make the necessary repairs.
4. Repair of the Henry Hudson Park basketball and handball courts.
5. Construction of a restroom at Broadway and West 251 Street adjacent to the Parade Grounds.
6. Reconstruction of the pond wall at Spuyten Duyvil Park to prevent water runoff onto the roadway in the parking lot at the Metro-North station.
7. Construction of a walkway with a permeable surface at the southern end of Seton Park parallel to West 232 Street.
8. Repair of the gas line in Classic playground to allow reopening of the restroom in the winter months and repair of the basketball courts in this playground.
9. Reconstruction of the stairway in Brust Park.
10. Renovation of Van Cortlandt Stadium.

A community resident complained about the condition of Ewen Park, specifically about fallen trees that have not been removed for several years, preventing the grass from being cut, which offers an opportunity for garbage to be disposed without notice, and which in turn attracts rodents. In addition sinkholes have appeared at various places in and adjacent to the park. Assemblyman Dinowitz's office has been in touch with these residents. The committee will monitor the situation.

Andrew Sandler reported that a bidder has been approved for the Sid Augarten ballfield renovation and that work is expected to begin over the summer.

Bob Bender reported that the new no-smoking regulations in city parks and beaches take effect on May 23. He also reported that Riverfest is scheduled for June 12 and that volunteers and donations are needed. ([www.riverdaleriverfest.org](http://www.riverdaleriverfest.org))

Rosemary Ginty observed with dismay that a new contractor is working at Spuyten Duyvil Park in some of the same sections that were just restored by the previous contractor. The committee will look into the situation and will work with DPR to make sure the area is restored once again.

Bob Bender reported that plans are in place for "It's My Park Day" at Vinmont Park on May 21, from 9 am to 3 pm. We hope to have 40-50 volunteers to assist in park clean-up activities. We also hope that this will be an annual event at different parks in CB8.

The meeting adjourned at 9:40 pm.

Bob Bender  
Chair  
Parks & Recreation Committee