

BRONX COMMUNITY BOARD NO. 8

MINUTES OF THE PARKS & RECREATION COMMITTEE MEETING HELD ON NOVEMBER 13, 2013, AT THE RIVERDALE YM/YWHA

Attendees

Committee members: Bob Bender (chair), Laura Spalter (vice-chair), Marvin Goodman, Sylvia Alexander, Rosemary Ginty, Robert Press, Michael Heller, Maria Khury, James Rather, Mercedes Zegarra-Soja (all CB8); Herb Barret (Memorial Grove), Tom Durham

Other CB8: Robert Fanuzzi, Philip Friedman, Tony Creaney

DPR: Tannise Palmer, Donielle Lee

Others: Ruth Kraus, Peter Kines, Gary Klingsberg, Bricklin Dwyer, Paul J. Elston (FHRG), Gilbert Kepes, Himi Kittner, David Gellman, Mike Handelsman, Ann Creaney, Rose (?) Harrington, Mary Seric, Paul Thales, Amy Wolfson, Julio Hecker, Gerry Bogacz (NYMTC), Anita Dutt, Hal Dorfman, Judy Gurland, Paula Luria Caplan, Betty Klein, Roberta Strugger, Filip Condeescu, Frank Anelante, Howard Tarragon, Diane Meenagh, Sura Jeselsohn, Hannah McAllister, America Rosario, Rob Spalter, Deirdre Burke, Michael Zablauskas, Sandy Shalleck, Jos. A. Needleman, Yael Levy, Lorraine Simmons, Larry Wolf, Ethel and Stan Scher, Robert Fass, Neile Weissman, Thomas Bird, Andrew Cohen, Andrew Sandler (Councilman Koppell's office).

Agenda

The meeting was called to order at 7:07 pm.

Minutes of the October meeting were unanimously approved.

Donielle Lee of the Partnership for Parks introduced herself as the new representative to our district. She explained what the Partnership does and how it can help with local parks. She informed everyone of a conference on parks taking place November 16 at NYU.

Chair Bob Bender informed everyone that a skateboard scoping meeting would take place Monday November 18 at 4 pm at the proposed site, just south of Van Cortlandt Stadium.

The Chair mentioned the planned LG "groundbreaking" taking place on Thursday, November 14, as an ominous development in the effort to prevent construction of that building to its full height.

There was a brief discussion of parks closing hours, prompted by a complaint from a resident who was ticketed in Van Cortlandt Park for trespassing prior to 1 AM, which is when VCP closes. Closing hours for other parks are 10 PM; dusk for playgrounds. Tannise Palmer of DPR confirmed these hours. There was an inquiry about why VCP closes so later, which will be investigated.

The Chair congratulated committee member Herb Barret on the outstanding Veteran's Day ceremony at the Memorial Grove on November 10, and on his continuing efforts on behalf of the Grove.

Roberta Strugger spoke on behalf of the Fort Independence Dog Owners (FIDO). She acknowledged the work underway at the park and asked what will happen to the dog run. She urged DPR to place a double gate at the entrance to the dog run and to recycle to the dog run some of the benches that will be replaced in the park. She asked whether the plans for the renovation are available and whether they can be changed.

The Chair noted that the renovation plans had come before the committee several years ago and had been approved after some modifications were made. The dog run is included in the design but at a smaller scale. The design cannot be changed at this point. The park will close except for the restrooms – or at least, that is the plan. The Chair agreed to find where the plan is posted online and to inquire about the double gate and recycling of the benches. Tannise Palmer said that she thought both were possible.

Hudson River Greenway

Gerry Bogacz of NYMTC (New York Metropolitan Transportation Council) presented the final proposed route for the Hudson River Greenway, the culmination of his group's four-year study of various routes to connect the Manhattan and Yonkers portions of the Greenway.

Mr. Bogacz described the study, its genesis, goals, and procedure. The final route proposal contains three stages: Stage One is 1-3 years out, Stage Two is 3-10 years, and Stage Three is 10+ years. In the preferred scenario, total costs could range from \$80-\$100 million. Many of those in attendance at the meeting had walked the route with Mr. Bogacz on Sunday, November 3; others had attended a community briefing held in October; some had done both. As a result of these briefings, and others, certain concerns had been identified, and Mr. Bogacz addressed them. High on this list was the proposed widening of Palisade Avenue between Kappock St. and W. 232 St., which was almost universally denounced. Mr. Bogacz said that the study was investigating alternatives and design solutions to address these concerns. He emphasized that the study is still in a conceptual stage.

Another area of concern is Riverdale Park between Spaulding Lane and W. 254th St., which would use a DOT right of way through the park as part of the Greenway route. This route would require some widening of the pathway and possibly some re-surfacing with stone screenings. This proposal engendered strong opposition from many in the audience.

Following Mr. Bogacz's presentation, Paul Elston of the Friends of Hudson River Greenway (FHRG) presented some proposals that differ from Mr. Bogacz's. He stressed that river access is the primary objective of the route and that the preferred alternative in its final stage provides more than two miles of riverfront access. In contrast to a proposed causeway on the river, he urged relocating Metro-North's un-electrified and disused Track Six as well as the service road to the east side of the M-N tracks, and also burying the overhead electrical wires south of the Riverdale Station as has been done north of the station on the river side of the tracks to eliminate the wire towers. If this were done, then there would be room to locate the Greenway on the river side of the tracks. He stressed that this will happen only if there is a unified community effort behind it.

Mr. Elston also urged a route between Palisade Avenue and the railroad via the Hebrew Home, which he said the Hebrew Home has promised to consider. Neither the Hebrew Home nor Metro-North has made any commitment to such a route, however.

Following these presentations, Mr. Bogacz answered questions from the audience. Below are some of the questions and answers.

The route from the Henry Hudson Bridge to W. 232 and Palisade Ave. is highly problematic. The report is being delivered to the steering committee in December but no engineering or traffic studies have been done. Community concerns can be added to the report that will be delivered to the committee.

Why not use Independence Avenue rather than Palisade Avenue to W. 232 St.? Independence between W. 231 and W. 232 is a dangerous curving street. It might be possible to use W. 231 St. to connect between Independence and Palisade to get to Palisade and W. 232 at Riverdale Park.

Why don't you use the swing bridge at Spuyten Duyvil? Amtrak will not permit this.

Who controls decisions over the widening of streets? NYC DOT.

You call these routes "preferred." What does that mean? All three stages are the "preferred" routes for those stages, based on the research done for the study.

Why don't you ask Amtrak to justify its refusal to allow a cantilever for bikes and pedestrians on the Spuyten Duyvil swing bridge? We can do this, but they have consistently opposed using the bridge.

Relocating the power substation at approximately W. 231 St. on Metro-North would be a problem. Agreed.

The curve on the Henry Hudson service road where the pathway intersects the Henry Hudson Bridge is dangerous. Agreed, but this is the current route for accessing or exiting the bridge.

SNAD regulates any tree removal on Palisade Avenue. Agreed.

How can you put a bike route through Riverdale Park without changing the character of the park? It would be necessary to widen the pathway and provide some re-surfacing with stone screenings.

The right of way you identify in the park is what everyone regards as the park. True, but it's still a right of way.

Riverdale Park has to be de-mapped for it to be used as you propose. It is possible to get a waiver for this use if the Parks Department will grant one.

The Hebrew Home alternative route looks attractive. Agreed.

How will you proceed from here with the community? Eventually a plan has to be approved, but that will require community input.

How did you manage the plan in Yonkers? It was a bit easier, although there were similar concerns. But the Yonkers portion of the trail is not as close to the water. That's the trade-off: waterfront access is more attractive but can be more difficult to get.

Temporary solutions can have a lasting impact on the community. Agreed: we call them "interim" not temporary because they aren't temporary.

A contiguous bicycle roadway from Manhattan to Yonkers is a gift to the people of New York City. Agreed. But the gap in the Bronx presents particular problems that didn't exist in Manhattan.

How come the Bronx doesn't get funding for the Greenway the way Manhattan did? We never said that getting funding wasn't possible.

Waterfront access is the ultimate goal. Let's focus on that and not on the route between the HH Bridge through the community. People already access the HH Bridge from wherever they live. Let's leave that as is and figure out how to get to the riverfront. This can be done if that's what everyone wants. Just be aware that getting to the river will take years to accomplish.

Waterfront access is what everyone wants. But how do we get there? The community can decide to skip Stage One and go directly to Stage Two. In that case, the community board would have to guide the process.

It's possible to have a separate drawbridge that would connect Manhattan and the Bronx. The engineering is possible, but that would be an expensive option.

What happens next? Where do we go from here? We will take these various ideas to the NYMTC steering committee, then come back to you. There will be a final report. This report must be submitted to the federal sponsors who paid for the study.

Mr. Bogacz indicated that he would be willing to come back to the committee in early 2014 to tell us how the steering committee of NYMTC responded to the community's concerns. The Chair thanked Mr. Bogacz for his presentation, for taking questions, and for meeting with the community whenever requested to discuss the Greenway study.

There was discussion about dates for the December committee meeting, which will be resolved online after the meeting.

The meeting adjourned at 9:20 pm.

Bob Bender
Chair
Parks & Recreation Committee