

Minutes of the Parks & Recreation Committee Meeting of January 22, 2020 at
Mosaic Mental Health conference room, 5676 Riverdale Avenue

Attendees:

Committee: Bob Bender (chair), Robert Fanuzzi (vice chair), Eider Garcia, Marvin Goodman, Robert Jacklosky, Donell Leverett, Laura Spalter, Debra Travis (all CB8); Herb Barret (CCM)

Absent: Eric Bell, David Gellman, Daris B. Jackson

DPR: Stephanie Thayer

Community: Tom Russell, Founders Entertainment; Christina Taylor, VCP Alliance; IC L'Engel, BCEQ; Rob Spalter

Agenda:

The meeting began at 7:15.

Review Status of Proposed School Construction Authority Project at PS81/Sid Augarten Ballfield in Vinmont Park

The chair reported that SCA has delayed the project to September 1. The Little League season at the ballfield, which begins April 1, is no longer in jeopardy. The chair thanked the SCA for its decision.

Preliminary Discussion of Budget Requests

Committee members reviewed last year's capital budget priorities, noting with some satisfaction that three items have now been funded: the Strong Street playground renovation, the pedestrian bridge in Van Cortlandt Park, and repairs to the Kingsbridge Heights Community Center.

Laura Spalter asked whether 911 is available in Van Cortlandt Park in the vicinity of the stables. The cable there has been upgraded and 911 is available, although problems have been reported with exact locations throughout the park.

Stephanie Thayer asked that the committee consider a capital request to install a sewer line at the old Mosholu Golf House, which is being converted to a park headquarters. She also asked for two expense items, a new packer (garbage truck) and a Z-track mower for smaller areas in VCP.

Bob Bender shared a list of expense requests from DPR district manager Joe Magneri. They include a mini-packer (small garbage truck), ToolCat with plow and cutting attachments, and a 20 cubic yard storage container to be placed in the DOT parking lot in VCP as well as a trailer for district staff also to be placed in VCP.

Stephanie said that she would review the last two items with Joe.

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

Review Status of Governors Ball in Van Cortlandt Park.

The Governors Ball will be held at Randalls Island this year, as in years past. Discussion began with the question of whether the committee even needed to address this issue. The chair noted that Founders Entertainment could propose the event again next year, and also that the committee should go on record with its concerns to provide guidance for possible future events.

Debra Travis said that whatever the merits of the Governors Ball, there are opportunities for events at VCP in the future, whether at the Parade Grounds or elsewhere in VCP. Christina Taylor, executive director of the VCP Alliance, said that the Alliance is exploring possible events with Tom Russell of Founders Entertainment, but they would have to be appropriate for the community.

Rob Jacklosky asked Mr. Russell whether he would consider smaller events. Mr. Russell explained that smaller events are more challenging because many of the costs involved in putting on a smaller event are similar to those in a larger event, even though smaller events produce less revenue.

Herb Barret stressed the importance of involving the community in these decisions. Laura Spalter noted that the resolution circulated to committee members by the chair in advance of the meeting does not prohibit future events.

Debra Travis encouraged VCPA to reach out to the Central Park Conservancy to tap their expertise with large events. Christina said that the Alliance is in communication with the CP Conservancy. Eider Garcia cautioned that Central Park is more suited to large events than VCP.

Mr. Russell said that although DPR turned down the event, DPR responds to community wishes. He is open to rethinking his event, perhaps holding it later in summer when he says his observations show the Parade Grounds to be less heavily used than in spring and early summer.

There was a consensus that conversations on this subject should continue. The chair thanks Ms. Travis and other committee members for thoughtfully engaging this issue.

The following resolution was introduced:

Resolution

Whereas Mr. Tom Russell of Founders Entertainment appeared before the committee on December 12, 2019, and proposed to move the Governors Ball musical event from Randalls Island, where it has operated for several years, to the Van Cortlandt Park Parade Grounds from June 5 to 7, 2020; and

Whereas Founders Entertainment will sell 50,000 tickets to the event each day; and

Whereas the largest concert currently held at the Van Cortlandt Park Parade Grounds, the New York Philharmonic concert, draws an estimated 2,000 to 3,000 people, and the largest cross-country meet, the Manhattan College Invitational, draws close to 10,000 people and produces severe traffic challenges for the NYPD and neighborhood residents; and

Whereas the set-up and breakdown periods would require that parking be eliminated from the east (park) side of Broadway from the Mansion Road entrance (approx. W. 244th St) to West 252nd St. from May 26 to approximately June 12, eliminating dozens of parking spaces for community residents during that time; and

Whereas the set-up and breakdown periods would require gradually closing the Parade Grounds to other activities during a time when the Parade Grounds are typically heavily used, denying access to existing permit holders; and

Whereas Founders Entertainment would be selling food and beverages, including alcoholic beverages, at the event, creating the potential for substantial disturbance to the community immediately adjacent to Van Cortlandt Park; and

Whereas Founders Entertainment intends to try to discourage concertgoers from parking in the area and hopes to persuade the MTA to run additional #1 trains to the Van Cortlandt Park station and to obtain parking facilities from Manhattan College during the event, neither of which has yet been confirmed, and

Whereas Founders Entertainment's proposed transportation plan, described as "a very fluid document," has been reviewed by NYPD but neither approved nor disapproved; and

Whereas equipment placed on the Parade Grounds during the construction and breakdown of the stages and other necessary work could potentially damage the thousands of irrigation sprinkler heads that irrigate the Parade Grounds and were installed as part of a \$15 million renovation of the Parade Grounds; and

Whereas the presence of 50,000 or more people on the Parade Grounds for three consecutive days could damage the Parade Grounds and necessitate extensive repair, further limiting use of the Parade Grounds during the peak summer season; and

Whereas community groups such as Bronx Council for Environmental Quality and the Broadway Community Alliance strongly oppose the proposed concert; and

Whereas the Department of Parks & Recreation (DPR) has denied a permit for the event, noting that the event cannot be reasonably accommodated in this location, that it would deny access to a significant portion of the park to other park users, and that it is completely out of scale with other events held in the park, in addition to which the use of this large public space for a paid limited-access event raises concerns about a potentially harmful precedent for park use, and furthermore has rejected Founders Entertainment's appeal of the original permit denial;

Therefore, Be It Resolved, that the Parks & Recreation Committee strongly supports the decision by DPR to deny a permit for the Governors Ball at Van Cortlandt Park.

Bob Fanuzzi proposed the following amendment:

Whereas DPR policies do not recommend the use of Van Cortlandt Park for events of more than 5,000 people and a duration of more than one day.

The chair agreed to include it as a friendly amendment. The committee voted as follows:

Approve: 9, Barret, Bender, Fanuzzi, Garcia, Goodman, Jacklosky, Leverett, Spalter, Travis

Oppose: 0

Abstain: 0

Discussion about Updating Parks Resource Guide

The committee agreed that an update is needed but that it can be online only. Among items noted for inclusion are how to make a 311 complaint, noting deadlines for parks funding, and adding the names of elected officials.

Committee members Rob Jacklosky, Laura Spalter, and Deb Travis agreed to form a working group to update the guide. The chair thanked Rob, Laura, and Deb.

Old Business/New Business

Christina Taylor and IC L'Engel reported that the Bronx Parks Speak-Up will take place Saturday, February 29 at the Music Building at Lehman College, from 11 am to 5 pm. They provided information about the event to new committee members.

The meeting adjourned at 8:50 pm.

Minutes written and approved by chair Bob Bender.