

COMMUNITY BOARD NO. 8 BRONX

**MINUTES OF THE PARKS & RECREATION COMMITTEE MEETING
HELD JANUARY 28, 2008
AT THE BRONX COMMUNITY BOARD 8 OFFICE**

PRESENT

AFFILIATION

Bob Bender	Committee Chair
Anthony Perez Cassino	CB #8
Tom Durham	
James Plaza	CB #8
Evelyn Tossas Tucker	CB #8
James Donaldson	Friends of Stadium - Van Cortlandt Park
Shirley Echevarria	Department of Parks & Recreation
Kirti Gandhi	Gandhi Engineering
Ann Marie Gartl	Jerome Park Conservancy
Neil Iodice	
Sura Jeselsohn	Along the Hudson Homeowners Association
Bryna Landes	
Emilio Llopiz	
Aaron Mittman	Riverdale Nature Preservancy
Rebecca Patt	Mutual Housing
Margot Perron	Department of Parks & Recreation
Maria Petkanas	Department of Parks & Recreation
S. Purdue	Gandhi Engineering
Hassan Rashid	Department of Parks & Recreation
Christina Taylor	Friends of Van Cortlandt Park

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

New Business:

Mr. Kirti Gandhi gave a presentation on his recent engineering study of the Van Cortlandt Park stadium. The stadium contains numerous cracks in the concrete, as a result of which water is infiltrating the walls and ceilings of the interior structure. Pipes are corroded, electrical wiring is substandard. The building does not meet current building codes, and it is not ADA accessible. There is asbestos in the building, and there may be lead paint, too.

Mr. Gandhi presented three reconstruction scenarios, ranging in price from \$6.1 million to \$7.5 million in construction cost. In all scenarios, he recommends repairing, refurbishing and upgrading mechanical, electrical and plumbing systems, and removing hazardous materials. In the more ambitious scenarios he recommends adding one or more elevators to make the building handicapped accessible as well as upgrading the heating by adding a second boiler.

Margot Perron, Van Cortlandt Park Administrator, said that the community must decide what to do with the stadium. Is it worth upgrading? The total cost of upgrading would be \$12 to \$15

million because of design, supervision, and contingency costs. The design work could be done in six months but will not be initiated until funding is in place.

Ms. Perron says that the stadium is very active in the warm-weather months.

Tony Cassino observed that there is no other location in the park that can serve for track meets and other community events.

Tom Durham asked whether two boilers are necessary to redistribute heat. He wondered whether plumbing that is arranged to serve different zones in the building might work better. Mr. Gandhi said he would consider this suggestion.

The stadium is currently closed during freezing weather because it is too expensive to heat. This means that the bathrooms on the lower level are inaccessible during the cold-weather months.

Tony Cassino asked what the next step in the process is, and Ms. Perron replied that it's up to the community to decide how to proceed. Funding would have to come from elected officials.

There seemed to be agreement among the committee members that the interior space – bathrooms, fieldhouse or community rooms – are more important than the stadium seats.

Mr. Gandhi left committee members with a copy of his study, "Reconstruction of the Stadium Building at Van Cortlandt Park, The Bronx."

Ms. Sura Jeselsohn of Along the Hudson Homeowners Association made a presentation regarding West 232 Street between Independence and Palisade Avenues, where she lives. This street is a private street. It is narrow, only 16 ½ feet wide, and two way. There is no sidewalk on either side of the street. Ms. Jeselsohn and other homeowners believe that the street is unsafe. They would like to see a sidewalk installed. Because this is a private street, DOT will not install a sidewalk. Ms. Jeselsohn suggests that the sidewalk be placed on the north side of the street, in a naturally wooded area just south of Seton Park. Ms. Jeselsohn provided the committee with a petition signed by homeowners on the street, plus copies of e-mails from other local residents in support of a sidewalk. She also included letters from Councilman Koppell, Assemblyman Dinowitz, and State Senator Schneiderman supporting the concept of a sidewalk. Ms. Jeselsohn wondered whether the Parks Department might cover the expense of the sidewalk. She mentioned a contractor who suggested a price of \$60,000, but committee members agreed that this was far too low an estimate for the work involved.

Shirley Echevarria, the Parks Department representative for the Bronx Community Board No.8 area, said that Parks is not required to build the sidewalk and that loss of trees and erosion resulting from a sidewalk would be major concerns. She noted that the street slopes sharply downhill from east to west, exacerbating erosion. She also questioned who would be responsible for maintenance of the sidewalk and the adjacent trees and bushes. Emilio Llopiz of Parks observed that even to construct the sidewalk would require introducing heavy equipment that would damage tree roots. Ms. Echevarria said she would inform the Bronx Parks office of the request and solicit comments on the proposal.

The committee agreed that while the sidewalk would be a benefit to the immediate community, there are substantial obstacles that require further investigation.

Tom Durham mentioned a survey of bicycle racks recently undertaken in the Bronx Community Board No.8 area. He asked whether Parks has an inventory of bike racks. Both Ms. Perron and Ms. Echevarria said that they were not aware of such a thing. Ms. Echevarria mentioned that she knows of bike racks at the Marble Hill playground and the Bailey Avenue playground. Ms. Perron said that there are bike racks at the Van Cortlandt golf house and at Saxon Woods playground near Gun Hill Road and Jerome Avenue. She would like one placed at the Van Cortlandt Park pool. Both Ms. Echevarria and Ms. Perron thought that a bike rack map would be an asset to the community and promised to recommend this idea to Parks headquarters.

Christina Taylor of the Friends of Van Cortlandt Park announced the Bronx Parks Speak-Up on February 28 from noon to 5 pm at Lehman College.

Old Business:

Rebecca Patt commented on the proposed renovation of Jerome Park reservoir and Ft. Independence Park. She objects to the size and location of the dog run, and she is concerned about the maintenance of the new exercise equipment, as well as its location. She is also concerned about the proposed new lighting and wants to be sure that it will not adversely affect residents of her building, 3850 Sedgwick Avenue.

Chair Bob Bender observed that several people commented on the dog run and exercise equipment at the January 8 Parks Committee meeting, including Ms. Patt's husband, Joseph Cohen. Because of those comments, the design is being revised and will be presented to the community again when it is ready.

Anne Marie Garti expressed her continued opposition to the jogging path proposed in the plan. She said that Bronx Community Board No. 8 has consistently supported access to the reservoir and urges that the committee and the full community board reject the plan if it does not provide access to the reservoir. She expressed concern about the fact that the plan does not address the Goulden Avenue side of the reservoir.

The Chair agreed that access to the reservoir is something that Bronx Community Board No. 8 has consistently supported, and observed that DEP has recently established a task force to investigate this issue. He expressed concern that if the community rejects the plan, it will lose the funding and lose an opportunity to upgrade Ft. Independence Park and adjacent areas. He recommended waiting until the revised plan is presented to the community and then letting the community as a whole decide these issues.

Ms. Perron reported that she is waiting for the design for the Memorial Grove in Van Cortlandt Park. She is also waiting for a design for the Putnam Trail. She will inquire about a revised design for the proposed parking lot at the Mosholu Golf Course, which the Design Commission told DEP must be changed.

The committee will not meet on February 25th as it normally would. Instead there will be a joint meeting of the committee and the Public Safety committee on March 5, most likely at the 50th Precinct community room, and preferably at 7 pm. These details will be confirmed. The purpose of this meeting is to review the complaints received from residents about parks last summer and to urge the 50th Precinct to put in place plans for patrolling the parks during the warm weather months this year.

The meeting adjourned at 8:55 pm.

Submitted by,

Bob Bender
Chairman
Parks & Recreation Committee Meeting

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