

Minutes of the Parks & Recreation Committee Meeting, November 28, 2018

Van Cortlandt Golf House, 115 Van Cortlandt Park South

Attendees

Committee: Bob Bender (chair), Eric Bell, Robert Fanuzzi, David Gellman, Tao Moran (all CB8); Herb Barret, Christina Taylor (community committee members)

Absent: Marvin Goodman, Daris B. Jackson, Donnel Leverett

DPR: Margot Perron, Henri Bonner

Community: Karen Argenti, I-C L'Engel, BCEQ; Laura Carpenter, Van Cortlandt House Museum; Nick Dembowski, Kingsbridge Historical Society; Margaret Yang, Phil Shen

Agenda

The meeting began at 7:05 pm.

FVCP/BCEQ Presentation for a Living Shoreline in Van Cortlandt Lake

Karen Argenti from BCEQ (Bronx Council for Environmental Quality) and Christina Taylor, executive director of FVCP (Friends of Van Cortlandt Park) presented a conceptual design for a living shoreline at the south end of Van Cortlandt Lake.

Karen began by noting that the lake is a polluted water body under the definition of the NY State Department of Environmental Conservation. Some of this pollution comes from sources in the park but most of it comes from highway and street runoff. The living shoreline would help to address this problem by filtering outside runoff through aquatic plants and small ponds. These plants would be native to the area. The total area in question is approximately 120' by 60'. This is only a pilot project.

The next step in the process is finding funding to hire an engineer with a specialty in ecological design who can cost-out the plan so that funding to put it into place can be obtained.

Members of the committee were sent the design in advance of the meeting. It can be found at <http://www.bceq.org/2018/10/30/living-shoreline-green-infrastructure-project-2018-19/>

Following the presentation Karen and Christina informed the committee about problems with the weir in Van Cortlandt Lake. The screen in front of the weir requires periodic cleaning. Due to heavy rain plus an accumulation of leaves and debris, the screen has become partly blocked, which impedes the water flow into the city sewer system, where the lake empties. Consequently there has been extensive flooding in the vicinity of the lake. DEP was asked to clean the screen, but has been slow to respond. The chair said that he would bring the matter to the attention of the community board district manager for discussion at next week's District Service Cabinet meeting.

Van Cortlandt Conservancy Presentation about Contributions by Slaves in Van Cortlandt Park

Margot Perron introduced the subject, explaining that a grant from the Department of Cultural Affairs and Councilman Cohen has made it possible. The project is investigating contributions made by enslaved workers on the Van Cortlandt estate, which subsequently became Van Cortlandt Park. Laura Carpenter and Nick Dembowski (identified above in attendees) are part of the team doing research on this subject. They explained that during the colonial era, the population of Africans and African-Americans in the area was as high as 20% of the general population because of slavery. The Van Cortlandt estate depended on slaves to harvest wheat and operate the mill that was powered when the Van Cortlandts dammed Tibbets Brook, creating today's Van Cortlandt Lake. After slavery was ended in New York State, most of the emancipated slaves left the area to find paid work elsewhere, and the population of African-Americans declined precipitously until recent decades.

It is known that there is a burial ground not far from the Van Cortlandt House museum that contains the remains of white people, known locally as the Kingsbridge Burial Ground, and there is some historical evidence that there is a nearby cemetery for the African and African-American population. Further research into this latter subject will take place as part of the project.

Eventually this project will connect in some way with other locations that are of particular significance in African-American history, such as the African burial ground in lower Manhattan.

Bob Fanuzzi, who has had some experience with this subject in Staten Island, said that it will be important to engage the community in this project as it moves forward and offered to assist in this regard. It was agreed that there are significant educational opportunities in this project.

A quorum being present, the minutes of the October meeting were approved. The chair made a motion to modify the minutes by removing the sentence characterizing Michael Holoszy's comments at that meeting and substituting his written statement. Corrected minutes will be sent to the CB8 office.

New Business

Margaret Yang of 5433 Fieldston Road complained about a tree that she said had been badly trimmed by Con Edison and which she believes poses a danger to her family. She said that DPR has improperly classified the tree as not dangerous at present and she asked that DPR reconsider. The chair advised her to file a new complaint with 311 and report it to the board office, where it will be possible to follow up directly with DPR on the condition of the tree.

Old Business

The chair mentioned that with work scheduled to begin on the Putnam Trail renovation, the SWPPP Working Group will reactivate under the leadership of Christina Taylor. The chair will update the members of the Working Group with the most recent information about the project.

CSX/Putnam South. The chair mentioned that the CB office just received a letter from CSX to Sen. Schumer's office regarding the CSX property appraisal. The letter is disingenuous, and there was discussion of how best to proceed, with a consensus that we have to rely on Sen. Schumer to help persuade CSX to abide by its agreement to accept the appraisal as agreed to by CSX and DCAS. The chair will follow up.

The chair brought up the issue of bus parking on Broadway for cross-country meets. Margot Perron and Henri Bonner reported that Henri has been noting those bus companies that are not abiding by instructions requiring them to park in the designated area on the other side of VCP at Jerome Avenue. DPR's legal department has approved a letter that can be sent to meet directors advising them that using bus companies that repeatedly fail to comply with the parking requirement will be a factor considered in granting future permits for meets. Some of the bus companies are used by soccer and cricket leagues, and these leagues will be similarly advised if their buses do not comply.

There was a brief discussion about whether to meet on December 26 with agreement that it was not a good date. Consequently, the next committee meeting will take place in January. At that meeting, we will be briefed on updates to the Parks without Borders plan for the entrance to VCP. Work on that project is anticipated to begin around the end of February.

The meeting adjourned at 8:40 pm.