

Minutes of the Parks & Recreation Committee Meeting, February 27, 2019

Park Gardens Rehabilitation and Nursing Center, 6585 Broadway

Attendees:

Committee: Bob Bender (chair), Robert Fanuzzi, Marvin Goodman, Donnel Leverett, Tao Moran (all CB8); Herb Barret, Christina Taylor (Community committee members)

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

DPR: Leenda Bonilla, Joseph Magneri, Mike Ortiz

Community: Jacqueline Horsford, Patsy Smyth, Joanna Nolan, (all Stewards of Brust Park); I-C L'Engel (BCEQ)

Agenda:

The meeting was called to order at 7:15 pm.

Update on Capital Projects in Local Parks. The chair asked Mike Ortiz from the Bronx Commissioner's office whether three projects currently underway in local parks are on track: the basketball court and adult fitness project in Henry Hudson Park, the ballfield renovation in Seton Park, and the spray shower installation and other improvements in Spuyten Duyvil playground. Mike said that all three are scheduled to be completed this fall as the Capital Projects Tracker indicates.

The proposed replacement of the now-closed birding bridge (a/k/a golfing bridge) in Van Cortlandt Park is short \$1.5 million of the necessary \$2 million. The proposed pedestrian bridge in VCP is short approximately \$12 million of a projected \$23 million cost.

There will be a meeting at the Kingsbridge Library on March 6 to discuss placing adult exercise equipment in Ewen Park, a project that is funded by Councilman Cohen. Tao Moran has volunteered to attend on behalf of the committee. The chair thanks her for volunteering.

A quorum being present, the January committee meeting minutes were approved with minor corrections.

Presentation by the Stewards of Brust Park. Three representatives of this neighborhood parks group informed the committee of their activities in this park, the lower portion of which is located directly across from Manhattan College, adjacent to the Methodist nursing home. The upper portion of this park is west of Greystone Avenue where it meets Manhattan College Parkway, adjacent to the Fieldston School.

The stewards have a lawnmower and have secured a planting grant of \$1,000. They have planted over 1,000 daffodils, which they hope to see blossom this spring. They are doing outreach to both Manhattan College and the Fieldston School. They have been working with Leenda Bonilla of the Partnership for Parks, a part of DPR that works with neighborhood groups. Their most immediate

concern is improving the drainage of the small brook that runs down the lower park into the city sewer, and also replacing or significantly upgrading the stairs connecting the lower park to Greystone Avenue. They would like to see lighting on these stairs as well.

The stewards are meeting with DEP about locating a hydrant adjacent to the upper park on Greystone Avenue, which would allow them to do plantings in the upper park.

Committee members expressed their appreciation to the group and discussed holding this year's "It's My Park" Day event at Brust Park in recognition of the stewards' efforts.

Discussion of Alternative BBQ Sites in Parks. A discussion took place regarding an alternative location for barbecuing to replace Washington's Walk, which was used illegally last summer, drawing numerous complaints from neighbors. The chair proposed property owned by DPR adjacent to the Jerome Park Reservoir on Goulden Avenue. Joe Magneri said that the site is problematic because it is too close to the street, making it unsafe. Discussion ensued about other locations in the Kingsbridge Heights neighborhood, including perhaps the future site of the restroom in Fort Four Park, currently unused. Mr. Magneri said that barbecuing is not allowed in playgrounds, even in a fenced-off area.

Discussion will continue at the March meeting.

Mike Ortiz reported that DPR is trying to identify an alternative site in Van Cortlandt Park. The current site will be inaccessible this summer because of the Parks without Borders project. Christina Taylor suggested a site that Mike said is under consideration by DPR. Everyone agreed that securing a site before the summer is essential.

Discussion of Preparations for Summer Maintenance in Parks. This discussion quickly became part of the discussion of committee budget priorities. Committee members reviewed the capital budget requests and agreed that all are relevant, although the order of priorities might change.

The chair noted that maintenance issues fall within the expense priorities. Last year there were many complaints about overgrown grass and bushes in the larger neighborhood parks. Joe Magneri and Mike Ortiz reported that District 7, which shares some resources with District 8 (these districts are the same as the community boards) has a new tractor mower, which may help to improve the maintenance situation in our parks this summer. It was also noted that there are now 56 PEP officers, a substantial improvement over current staffing levels.

The chair complained that DPR's response to the committee's expense budget priorities is always that the agency will try to accommodate the request with existing resources, which seems disingenuous given DPR's difficulty in performing necessary maintenance at present. Further discussion of this response will take place with the borough commissioner and perhaps at the borough budget consultation in September.

Mr. Magneri supplied the committee with his budget requests, which will be further discussed at the March committee meeting, where it is hoped that the budget priorities can be finalized.

Christina Taylor noted that the Nature Center in Van Cortlandt Park is often closed and does not seem to be as useful to visitors as it could be. It should either be upgraded or closed so that the space can be used for other purposes, possibly including a larger and better nature center as well.

Old and New Business. The chair reported that a new path is under construction in Raoul Wallenberg Park to replace the dilapidated staircase. The entrance to that staircase on Douglas Avenue will be closed and an entrance to the new path will be opened only a short distance away. This work is expected to be completed by the end of March.

The chair and Christina Taylor reported on the Bronx Parks Speak-Up held on Feb. 23. It was a very successful event. New Yorkers for Parks has started a “Play Fair for Parks” campaign urging that more money be spent on parks. Specifically, as Christina reported, they are asking that money for DPR staff be baselined so that those jobs are guaranteed every year. In addition the campaign asked for \$100 million in capital spending. DPR resources fluctuate annually, creating staffing insecurity and often postponement of maintenance and capital projects, to the detriment of the parks.

A “Play Fair for Parks” rally was held at City Hall on Thursday, Feb. 28 and received significant press coverage. City Council Parks committee chair Barry Grodenchik announced his support for the plan. A representative of New Yorkers for Parks will attend a future committee meeting to discuss the plan further.

The meeting adjourned at 9:05 pm.