

BRONX COMMUNITY BOARD NO. 8

MINUTES OF THE PARKS & RECREATION COMMITTEE MEETING HELD ON NOVEMBER 25, 2009

Attendees:

Community Board Members: Bob Bender, chair; Ari Goldman, vice chair; Tom Durham, Karen Pesce, Yael Levy

Other Committee Members: Lynn Schwarz, FIPNA; Michael Gary, Sen. Espada's office; Herb Barret and Don Tannen, VCP Memorial Grove

Other Community Residents: Harold Winkler; George Downs, Madeline Downs, Frieda Barret, Lawrence Moiatto, Memorial Grove; Michael Newman, Randy Shull, NRBL; Candice M. Giove, Riverdale Review; Joe O'Brien, Congressman Engel's office; Tracy McDermott, office of Borough President; Harold Kelvin, Renee Kelvin.

DPR: Margot Perron, Shirley Echevarria, Jim Mituzas

The meeting began at 7:07 PM. Minutes of the October meeting were approved.

The Chairman reported on the November 11 Veterans' Day ceremony at the Van Cortlandt Park (VCP) Memorial Grove, which was attended by several members of the committee. Herb Barret and Don Tannen were thanked again for their efforts on behalf of the Memorial Grove.

The Chair reported on the November 18 meeting of the Hudson River Valley Greenway Task Force at Wave Hill. The HRV Greenway will run through Community Board 8 in the Bronx. The project is in the planning stage thanks to a grant from Sen. Schumer. Primary responsibility for monitoring the project lies with the Traffic & Transportation Committee, but there is overlap with our committee. The Task Force is charged with identifying two routes through the Bronx, one near the river, one farther inland. Those attending the meeting all hoped that a river route could be identified and funded. Additional meetings of the HRVG Task Force are anticipated.

The Chair also discussed the Kingsbridge Heights Community Center homeless shelter, which has been closed by order of the Parks Department (DPR), which oversees the KHCC. When KHCC applied for renewal of its lease, DPR insisted that the shelter violated Parks Department policy forbidding use of DPR facilities overnight. (The shelter had been in operation for more than ten years and is listed on the KHCC website, but DPR claimed not to have known about it prior to the lease renewal.) The Board has been apprised of the situation and is trying to find a solution that will permit this model homeless shelter to resume operating. Tom Durham, Chair of the Housing Committee, explained that for budgetary reasons the city has been closing all small homeless shelters such as this one, and this may be a factor in reopening the shelter.

Lynn Schwarz of FIPNA informed the committee that DEP is obligated to provide a pedestrian footbridge over the Major Deegan Expressway in VCP according to the ULURP resolution in the City Council that authorized the Croton Filtration Plant Bronx parks mitigation money. DEP has said that the footbridge would be too expensive to build, she reported. She urged the Board to investigate this matter. Margot Perron said that DPR cooperated on the investigation that concluded that the bridge was prohibitively expensive. The matter has been brought to

the attention of the Board and may be pursued further at a future Croton Filtration Monitoring Committee (CFMC) meeting.

Michael Gary reported that cuts will be coming to state and city parks, and that we should anticipate “substantial cuts” in the new state budget.

Harold Kelvin expressed his dismay that the Putnam Trail is being considered for paving. The Chair explained that a previous meeting thoroughly examined the Putnam Trail situation, including the requirement from the state for paving. A side-by-side paved/unpaved trail is under consideration. No further word has been received from the state whether such a solution meets the funding requirements. The subject will come up for discussion again at a future meeting once we know what the state will permit.

Margot Perron urged the community to participate in the December 21 Winter Solstice celebration in VCP.

The committee was informed by Mr. Gary that Classic Playground bathroom is closed for the winter. Margot Perron is investigating to see whether the bathroom can be kept open.

Mr. Jim Mituzas of DPR presented design plans for two projects, VCP Memorial Grove and Vinmont Park Ballfield (Sid Augarten Field).

Memorial Grove. \$250,000 has been allocated by Councilman Oliver Koppell to refurbish the grove and restore the markers. \$193,000 of this money will go toward construction. The grove is comprised of oak trees. The goal of the new design is to discourage pedestrian traffic through the grove and to discourage barbequing. The grove is intended to be a place for reflection. DPR would like to introduce new low pipe-rail fencing. (In response to a question, Mr. Mituzas said that this will be standard two-rail, 36-inch-high fencing.) There will be two entrances to the grove – one off Mansion Road at the north end, one to the south near the maintenance building/comfort station. 24 existing plaques will be refurbished and 15 missing plaques will be “recreated.” All the plaques will be remounted on new granite foundations. (The plaques will be designed and mounted in such a way to discourage vandalism.) All the plaques will be placed on the north side of the trees, 4 feet removed from the nearest tree. New plantings will be introduced to stabilize the soil and prevent erosion, which is currently a serious problem. In addition to these shrubs, 13 new oak trees will be planted, and 3 benches will be installed. DPR hopes to have its plans ready by December 31 to be reviewed by the Legal Department and then put out for bid by March, 2010, with a contractor in place by May or June. The project should take approximately six months to complete. Committee members urged that the project completion deadline be advanced to November 11, 2010, next Veterans’ Day. Mr. Mituzas agreed that this would be ideal. In response to questions from the floor, Mr. Mituzas indicated that lettering on the plaques will be one-half inch high. He said that while the addition of boxwood shrubs alongside the pipe-rail fence perimeter would be attractive, the current design does not allow for this because it would be too expensive. There will be shrubs along the Broadway side of the Memorial Grove, however. No large monument or marker identifying the grove is planned in part because none was ever there. Similarly there will be no flagpole (there is one in front of the mansion nearby). In addition, these items have not been budgeted. In response to several speakers who asked for some way to display small flags alongside the markers, Mr. Mituzas indicated that he will try to find some way to permit this in the design.

There was general agreement that the design is attractive and respectful.

Mr. Mituzas then presented the design for the renovation of Vinmont Park/Sid Augarten ballfield behind PS 81 on Mosholu Avenue.

The renovation is currently budgeted at \$1.01 million, with another \$700,000 pledged by Councilman Koppell for a total budget of \$1.71 million. There will be a sand-based turf outfield with a clay-based infield with “under drainage” and in-ground irrigation throughout the field. The irrigation will be controlled automatically from the comfort station in adjacent Vinmont Park playground. (Mr. Mituzas then reviewed the landscaping work already performed on the hill behind the ballfield and on the perimeter of the playground under an existing requirements contract.) The irrigation pipes will connect under the playground – under where the swings are now – to the ballfield. (New swings and a new surface will be installed.) There will be a new backstop and new dugouts. The dugouts will be benches with a fence in front, similar to the existing dugouts. The field will be re-graded to raise the pitch at home plate (approx. 1 ½ feet) and lower the outfield. A new 16-foot fence will be installed around the ballfield. A new equipment shed and scoreboard will be built, and new ADA-compliant bleachers will be installed. There will be additional new plantings on the hillside to prevent erosion. The sidewalk on Mosholu Avenue will be widened and new amphitheater-style seats will be installed in left field to take advantage of the existing topography. An 8-10-foot fence will be placed in front of these seats. There will be new outfield wall constructed.

The current timetable anticipates getting the design to the Legal Department for review in December, putting the project to bid by April, 2010, and awarding a contract by June. Work will begin after the North Riverdale Baseball League (NRBL) season ends in July with a goal to try to finish by April, 2011. However, NRBL should prepare for the possibility that the field will not be ready for the 2011 season. Weather conditions will have a major impact on the timetable.

The comfort station in the playground will have to be closed during the installation of equipment. It is anticipated that this will take about two months. It will happen at the beginning of the construction project, i.e., sometime during the summer of 2010. In response to comments from the floor, Mr. Mituzas agreed that DPR will install Porta-Potties during the duration of the closure of the comfort station. The affected portion of the playground (swing area) will be closed during installation of the pipes, again expected to be during the summer of 2010.

Once the sod has been installed on the field, it will have to knit. Ideally this would mean closing the ballfield, but there may be a way to cover the sod in the outfield and permit play. NRBL representatives expressed concern about maintenance of the ballfield once it is reconstructed. This will be a particular concern if anticipated cuts to the DPR budget take place. The NRBL representatives also asked whether the field can be closed when not being used by NRBL, which has the exclusive permit for the field. Shirley Echevarria of DPR indicated that this is unlikely because the field should be available to the community when not in use for NRBL games or practices. The Chairman agreed. The question of access to the field and use of it by dog walkers and others will be discussed in the future as part of the reconstruction.

Shirley Echevarria said that she did not have answers yet on the questions of re-paving the sidewalk alongside Riverdale Park, which perhaps DOT can help with, or on locking the basketball court at Ft. Independence Park. She promised to have an answer on the latter question by the January meeting.

Minutes of the Parks & Recreation Committee Meeting held on November 25, 2009

The meeting adjourned at 8:40 PM. The next meeting will be January 27, 2010.

The Chairman thanks Tom Durham for his assistance with the minutes.