

## BRONX COMMUNITY BOARD NO. 8

### MINUTES OF THE JOINT MEETING OF THE PARKS & RECREATION AND TRAFFIC & TRANSPORTATION COMMITTEE'S HELD ON MARCH 26<sup>TH</sup>, 2014, AT BON SECOURS/SCHERVIER

#### **Attendees:**

CB 8 committee members: Bob Bender (chair, Parks & Recreation), Dan Padernacht (chair, Traffic & Transportation), Robert Press (vice chair, T&T), Laura Spalter (vice chair, Parks), Herb Young, Michael Heller, Margaret Donato, Bill Stone, Maria Khury (board vice chair), Tony Creaney, Steven Balicer, Marvin Goodman, James Rather, Mercedes Zegarra-Soja, Karen Pesce, Rosemary Ginty, Arlene Feldmeier, Sylvia Alexander

Parks & Recreation community committee members: Herb Barret, David Gellman, Tom Durham

Other CB8: Robert Fanuzzi

Others: Michael Blaustein (rep. Sen. Jeff Klein); Justin Demko (rep. Assemblyman Jeffrey Dinowitz); Richard Stein, *Riverdale Press*; Andrew Sandler (rep. Councilman Andrew Cohen); Councilman Cohen

DPR: Charles McKinney, Margot Perron, Dennis Burton, Rucha Mandlik

*In addition, more than 70 others attended. Sign-in sheets are available at the CB8 office.*

#### **Agenda:**

The meeting began at approximately 7:10 pm. Minutes of the February 26 meeting were approved.

#### **Hudson River Greenway**

Bob Bender began the discussion of the first agenda item, the Hudson River Greenway, by reviewing the three stages of the NYMTC Hudson River Greenway plan, which was presented to the committees along with other plans, suggestions, and comments at the February 26 meeting. After concluding, he opened the floor to discussion by committee members. James Rather, David Gellman, and Mike Heller offered observations about the NYMTC plan. Laura Spalter raised several objections to the NYMTC plan and to proposed alternative plans, including opposition to reconfiguring traffic lanes on the Henry Hudson Bridge and to the cantilever attachment to the bridge, altering Palisade Avenue, and concerns about the intersection of Independence Avenue and Kappock Street.

Tom Durham recommended keeping the HRG on the river and noted that no funding for the project currently exists. Mike Heller urged consideration of two lanes of traffic instead of three on the Henry Hudson Bridge, as proposed by the Friends of the Hudson River Greenway.

Rosemary Ginty said that she feared “unintended consequences” of various proposals and said that Metro-North must be part of the discussion. Bob Bender observed that there are unanswered questions but the Greenway will be subject to more meetings before it is implemented. The next step should be to do engineering and other studies to answer some of these questions. Metro-North is a partner in NYMTC and has been consulted on NYMTC’s recommendations. David Gellman said that moving the safety barriers to widen the pedestrian/bicycle lane on the Henry Hudson Bridge if the traffic is reduced to two lanes is relatively easy and inexpensive. He also observed that the HRG will benefit people in Riverdale more than those in Manhattan.

Laura Spalter said that the MTA must be at our meeting, that Senator Schumer says that funding for the HRG exists, that the Sisters of Charity and other private stakeholders must be represented. Bob Bender observed that the HRG lies within the Metro-North right of way and does not impinge on property of private landowners, that there is no reason to assume that the private institutions along the Greenway route have objections to the HRG that they have failed to communicate. Bob Fanuzzi asked for clarification on Palisade Avenue north of West 254 Street, and Bob Bender replied that no one other than NYMTC has recommended using this narrow winding street for the Greenway even though it is open to bicycles, as is every street in the community. Mike Heller said that Palisade Avenue between the Henry Hudson Bridge and West 254 Street can be used and could be striped.

Dan Padernacht observed that striping and signage are under the regulation of NYC DOT. He urged that the Greenway stay on the water. He said that the MTA has done work on the Henry Hudson Bridge and that safety is MTA’s priority. Steve Balicer asked that people in wheelchairs be given access to the Henry Hudson Bridge walkway and to the entire Greenway. There was discussion by several committee members of the importance of providing a response to the NYMTC plan, which NYMTC awaits.

Bob Bender introduced a resolution that he had prepared and sent (via the Board office) to committee members in advance. Bob Fanuzzi seconded. Laura Spalter introduced an amendment in the form of her own resolution. There was discussion of whether the motion was correct and board parliamentarian Rosemary Ginty ruled that the Spalter resolution took precedence over the Bender resolution as an amendment to the latter. The Spalter resolution follows:

WHEREAS, the New York Metropolitan Transportation Council (NYMTC) has completed its final plan for the Bronx link of the Hudson River Valley Greenway and seeks formal Bronx Community Board 8 comments, and;

WHEREAS, NYMTC has presented its Final Preferred Route to the Parks and Recreation and Traffic and Transportation Committees on October 16, 2013 and February 26, 2014, and;

WHEREAS, while the NYMTC Plan is conceptual, it will serve as the blueprint for utilizing federal transportation monies to implement these projects in Community Board 8, and;

WHEREAS, members of the public, community board, community organizations, and elected officials objected strongly to most elements of the NYMTC Plan, including but not limited to, constructing a new shared-use cantilever path and reconfiguring traffic lanes on the Henry Hudson Bridge to accommodate bicycles, constructing bicycle roads, ramps and bridges through Forever Wild Riverdale Park, widening and designating inappropriately narrow streets or private streets, and eliminating traffic lanes and / or street parking, and;

WHEREAS, on May 8, 2012 a preliminary resolution was presented by the Friends of the Hudson River Greenway and passed by Community Board 8 that supported construction of a cantilever on the Henry Hudson Bridge, reconfiguring traffic lanes, and bicycle roads through Riverdale Park, and;

WHEREAS, Community Board 8, community groups, and elected officials continue to support waterfront access to the community for recreational use;

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED THAT:

1. Bronx Community Board 8 rejects the final NYMTC Plan in its entirety and,
2. This resolution supersedes the preliminary resolution passed by Community Board 8 in May 2012, and
3. BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED THAT, further consideration of an all river Greenway route should continue under the auspices of Bronx Community Board 8 in cooperation with local residents, community groups, and elected officials.

In favor: 9, A. Feldmeier, R. Press, D. Padernacht, M. Donato, L. Spalter, R. Ginty, S. Alexander, H. Barret, H. Young

Opposed: 10, M. Heller, B. Bender, I.W. Stone, S. Balicer, M. Goodman, D. Gellman, J. Rather, T. Durham, M. Zegarra-Soja, K. Pesce

Abstain: 2, M. Khury, A. Creaney

The resolution failed.

The Bender resolution was then discussed. Changes to the resolution were suggested by Bob Fanuzzi, Maria Khury, Laura Spalter, and Mike Heller. Changes that were agreed included strengthening the prohibition against bike routes in Riverdale Park and eliminating a clause that recommended searching for a second access point to the Greenway in Riverdale. The modified resolution follows:

WHEREAS residents of Community Board 8 support a riverfront Hudson River Greenway extending from Spuyten Duyvil to Yonkers, providing runners, walkers, cyclists, people with disabilities, and others a superb view of the Palisades and access to the Greenway to the north and to the south that establishes continuous Greenway access between Manhattan and Westchester; and have advocated locating the Greenway route along the Hudson River in the 1998 report of the Bronx Advisory Committee to the Hudson River Valley Greenway;

WHEREAS the New York Metropolitan Transportation Council (NYMTC), with funding provided in part by Senator Charles Schumer, has on several occasions presented to the Parks & Recreation Committee of Bronx Community Board 8 and most recently to a joint meeting of that committee and the Traffic & Transportation Committee a conceptual study of a proposed Hudson River Greenway route connecting Manhattan and Westchester portions of the Greenway, which includes a shorter-term inland route from the Henry Hudson Bridge to the city line at Riverdale Avenue and a longer-term waterfront route from the Henry Hudson Bridge to Yonkers along the Hudson;

WHEREAS Bronx Community Board 8 has made pedestrian and bicycle access on the Henry Hudson Bridge a community priority as stated in the 197-a plan and elsewhere;

WHEREAS residents of Bronx Community Board 8 reject the NYMTC plan for many reasons, including but not limited to proposed widening of streets, removal of trees, loss of traffic and/or parking lanes on local streets, and locating bicycle routes in Riverdale Park, among other objections;

THEREFORE, Be It Resolved That Bronx Community Board 8 makes the following recommendations:

That appropriate engineering and other studies be financed and conducted by the relevant agencies to evaluate the possibility of connecting the Hudson River Greenway across the Harlem River at Spuyten Duyvil, whether as part of the Amtrak swing bridge or on a purpose-built swing bridge, and that our elected officials assist in obtaining funding for such studies and addressing objections from Amtrak to the use of the swing bridge for the Hudson River Greenway;

That until a Spuyten Duyvil Greenway connection can be implemented, a riverfront Greenway should be established by using the existing bridge to cross the Metro-North tracks at West 254th Street, and then continuing north on the west side of the tracks to Yonkers, as envisioned in Stage Two of the NYMTC plan;

That instead of NYMTC's Stage Three plan for the Greenway route south of West 254th Street, which locates the Greenway on piers built over the Hudson River and riverbank riprap, the Greenway should be built on the west side of the Metro-North tracks on land made available by burying overhead power lines (which Metro-North has buried underground north of West 254th Street), removing Track 6, and sharing the utility road (as is done on the Greenway in lower Manhattan), to provide a less costly route than envisioned in NYMTC's Stage Three;

That until a Spuyten Duyvil Greenway connection can be implemented, the Metropolitan Transportation Authority should study the reconfiguring of traffic lanes on the lower level of the Henry Hudson Bridge to make possible a more usable pedestrian and bicycle pathway across the bridge;

That until a Spuyten Duyvil Greenway connection can be implemented, local streets only (and not the Riverdale Park right of way) should be used for Greenway bicycle connections between

the Henry Hudson Bridge and West 254th Street, under the regulation of the New York City Department of Transportation (NYC DOT);

That this resolution supersedes a resolution passed in May 2012 in which the community board called for improved pedestrian and bicycle access on the Henry Hudson bridge by reconfiguring traffic lanes on the lower level and also for consideration of a Greenway route from Palisade Avenue and West 232 Street via a bridge over the Metro-North tracks to the riverfront at the southern edge of Riverdale Park or at the DEP station located slightly farther north in the park;

That further consideration of an all-river Greenway route should continue under the auspices of Bronx Community Board 8 in cooperation with local residents, community groups, and appropriate government agencies.

In favor: 15, H. Young, H. Barret, M. Heller, M. Donato, B. Bender, I.W. Stone, M. Khury, A. Creaney, S. Balicer, M. Goodman, D. Gellman, J. Rather, T. Durham, M. Zegarra-Soja, K. Pesce

Opposed: 5, R. Ginty, L. Spalter, D. Padernacht, R. Press, A. Feldmeier

Abstain: 1, S. Alexander

Following a brief pause in the meeting so that those who were attending for the Hudson River Greenway discussion could leave, the meeting resumed as a regular meeting of the Parks & Recreation Committee.

#### Van Cortlandt Park Master Plan

Charles McKinney of DPR presented an overview of the Van Cortlandt Park Master Plan. He observed that half the park is Forever Wild. He explained that the master plan is a planning document, which means that it must reconcile different ideas in pursuit of a single goal. He has been meeting with various VCP stakeholders over the past two years to solicit ideas about what they would like to see in the park.

Among his observations: the park has two golf courses that occupy prime portions of the park; there are highways that divide the park; invasive trees and vines have grown in the openings provided by the highways, most notably Norway maples, which shade out other plants and are proliferating throughout the park; the plan should improve the appearance of entrances to the park as well as pathways and trails throughout; the park perimeter does not seem park-like, in part because of highway entrances and exits; there is ample space for recreation but there is need for covered venues for children to play in.

Mr. McKinney noted that Van Cortlandt Park contains the largest urban forest in New York City.

Mr. McKinney helped to create the master plan for Riverside Park and found that a master plan helped with fund-raising for that park. He hopes the VCP Master Plan will do the same.

The Master Plan has already begun to succeed. An especially narrow and unsightly path on the John Muir trail between the Van Cortlandt golf course and the Mosholu Parkway extension is being relocated.

Tibbetts Brook offers opportunities to restore the natural beauty of the park. Right now it drains into Van Cortlandt Lake, which drains into a sewage treatment plant on Randalls Island. The brook and the lake might someday be channeled into the Harlem River, as once was the case. DEP has a mandate to reduce storm water overflow into the sewage treatment system and this project could assist in meeting that mandate.

Other projects include a new playground for pre-schoolers in the northwest corner of the park (North Riverdale); pedestrian bridges, including the bridge proposed over the Major Deegan Expressway that DEP is supposed to fund; and general improvement in east-west access throughout the park.

Enhancing the park and making it more attractive will bring more people to the park, and some of those people will volunteer to help maintain and beautify the park, said Mr. McKinney.

Mr. McKinney agreed that because of the lateness of the hour he would return for further discussion at the April meeting, where the committee will vote on the Master Plan.

#### Old Business

Robert Press reported on a conversation with Ron Kraut, operator of the VC Ice Rink. Mr. Kraut cited weather, problems with the chillers, and concerns over the shooting at the Bryant Park ice rink as reasons for a drop in attendance at the VC ice rink. According to Mr. Press, Mr. Kraut would like to return for a third season but may need to re-negotiate his terms with DPR.

Bob Bender mentioned a free tree giveaway on March 29 for anyone who was interested in knowing more. He said that "It's My Park Day" would be held on Saturday, May 17 at Marble Hill Playground. He and vice chair Laura Spalter will reach out to community organizations to provide volunteers for the event. This project will be discussed in detail at the committee's April meeting.

#### New Business

Suzanne Corber and others from Save the Putnam Trail mentioned a letter from the Audubon Society regarding the Putnam Trail that was sent to DPR but which DPR said it did not receive. She distributed copies of the letter to members of the committee.

John Ludemann and Roberta Strugger of FIDO – Fort Independence Dog Owners – spoke about the sudden closing of Ft. Independence Park. Notice of the closing was posted on Friday, March 28, effective Monday, March 31. They complained about the closure of the park, the lack of notice, and the fact that there are no dog runs anywhere in the vicinity of the park.

Bob Bender said that the lack of notice of the closing was inexcusable. He had raised the issue with the Parks Department, which agreed that the notice should have been made sooner. DPR

said that the closing of the park is necessary for safety and security reasons. Discussions are continuing to see what modifications, if any, can be made to the park closing.

Dan Padernacht said that although he is not a member of the Parks & Recreation Committee, he felt that a resolution expressing the committee's unhappiness with the lack of notice, closing of the park, and absence of a timeline for the work was appropriate. Committee members agreed. Bob Bender promised to draft a resolution for discussion at the Executive Committee.

The meeting adjourned at 10:40.

Thanks to Laura Spalter for assistance with the minutes.

Bob Bender, Chair  
Parks & Recreation Committee