

BRONX COMMUNITY BOARD NO. 8

MINUTES OF THE JOINT MEETING OF THE TRAFFIC & TRANSPORTATION AND PARKS & RECREATION COMMITTEE'S HELD ON FEBRUARY 26TH, 2014, AT THE RIVERDALE YM/YWHA

Attendees:

CB 8: Bob Bender (chair, Parks), Dan Padernacht (chair, T&T), Maria Khury, Robert Press, Laura Spalter, Margaret Donato, James Rather, Sylvia Alexander, Mercedes Zegarra-Soja, Anthony Fella, Rosemary Ginty, Steven Balicer, Martin Galvin, Herb Young

Other CB8: Robert Fanuzzi, Joyce Pilsner

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

Elected officials: Assemblyman Jeffrey Dinowitz, Councilman Andrew Cohen

Speakers: Gerry Bogacz, NYMTC; Paul Elston, FHRG; Frank Anelante, Riverdale-Spuyten Duyvil Coalition; Sherida Paulsen, Riverdale Nature Preservancy; Jennifer Klein, Riverdale Community Coalition

More than 90 others signed attendance sheets, which are available in the CB8 office.

Agenda:

A quorum was present and the meeting was called to order at 7:17 PM by Parks & Recreation Committee Chair Bob Bender and Traffic & Transportation Chair Dan Padernacht.

Three separate SAPO applications were presented to the Committee.

SAPO Application # 1 – Israeli Independence Day. The event is scheduled for May 5th and to be held on Netherland Avenue between West 236th Street and the service road of the Henry Hudson Parkway which will be closed for the event. Bronx Borough President Ruben Diaz Jr. is a co-sponsor of the event and Marisol Halpern of his office was present to discuss the application. This event has been held in the past. Hearing no comment, T&T Chair Padernacht called for a vote on the SAPO application which was unanimous in favor.

In favor 9 – 0 – 0 from T&T members: S. Alexander, B. Bender, M. Donato, A. Fella, M. Khury, D. Padernacht, R. Press, J. Rather, and M. Zegarra-Soto.

SAPO Application # 2 – Lag B'omer Picnic. This event is to take place on May 5th on West 235th Street between Independence and Douglas Avenues. The applicant Rabbi Shemtov was present to discuss the application. This event has been held in the past. Hearing no comment, T&T Chair Padernacht called for a vote on the SAPO application which was unanimous in favor.

In favor 9 – 0 – 0 from T&T members: S. Alexander, B. Bender, M. Donato, A. Fella, M. Khury, D. Padernacht, R. Press, J. Rather, and M. Zegarra-Soto.

SAPO Application # 3 – Amalgamated Spring Fest. No representative appeared and the matter was moved to next month's agenda.

The meeting was then turned over to Parks Committee Chairman Bob Bender to begin the joint agenda item.

The Parks & Recreation portion of the agenda began with approval of the January committee minutes (one committee member abstained because he had not attended the meeting).

Committee chair Bob Bender mentioned the recent closing of the Van Cortlandt ice rink, which the CB8 office is inquiring into with DPR, and recent developments with the LG building, notably the decision by the Palisades Interstate Commission to oppose the building and by mayors of towns in Bergen County to do the same. There was brief mention of the venue for this year's "It's My Park" Day: the Marble Hill playground. This subject will be discussed further at the March committee meeting.

Hudson River Greenway Presentations and Discussion

Gerry Bogacz of NYMTC presented an overview of the Greenway preferred route and alternative routes identified in response to concerns raised about the preferred route at earlier meetings and discussions. He emphasized that the design is conceptual and no engineering studies have been conducted. He said that the key principles of the preferred route were to locate it as close to the water as possible because the community has repeatedly stressed its desire for a waterfront route, to choose a safe route, and to impose the least impact on the community while remaining as close as possible to the river. The conceptual plan envisions three stages over 10+ years and would cost in the neighborhood of \$75 million to implement. There is no funding and no sponsor (no city or state agency) to implement the conceptual plan at the present time.

Paul Elston of the Friends of the Hudson River Greenway (FHRG) commented on the NYMTC plan. He began by presenting a petition for a riverfront greenway signed by more than 500 people at the Riverdale RiverFest. He advocated staying focused on the riverfront and avoiding distraction over portions of the route elsewhere. In place of a cantilever bikeway/pedestrian pathway addition to the Henry Hudson Bridge, he recommended reconfiguring the southbound traffic lanes to allow for a single breakdown lane on the easternmost lane, two lanes of southbound traffic, and a westernmost lane for bicycles and pedestrians to replace the current narrow walkway. He also urged crossing Spuyten Duyvil with an addition to the Amtrak swing bridge or a freestanding bridge. He offered a proposal for the Greenway from Spuyten Duyvil to West 254 Street that he said would be less costly than the NYMTC Stage Three Greenway plan for the waterfront south of West 254 Street.

Jennifer Klein read a brief statement from the Riverdale Community Coalition urging that the Greenway stay on the river and minimize the use of local streets.

Frank Anelante of the Riverdale-Spuyten Duyvil Coalition objected to the NYMTC plan in part because the study is inadequate. His group recommends using a route east of the Henry Hudson Bridge that crosses the Metro-North tracks at West 254th Street by using local streets without alteration to those streets and without encroaching on Riverdale Park. He believes a committee should be established to study the matter further. (Approximately 35 emails were received by the community board office endorsing the viewpoints expressed by Mr. Anelante.)

Sherida Paulsen spoke on behalf of the Riverdale Nature Preservancy. She urged support for a riverfront Greenway by using local streets from the Henry Hudson Bridge to West 254th Street under the supervision of the NYC DOT, crossing the Metro-North tracks at West 254th Street, and no encroachment on Riverdale Park, which she said would lose its character if there were a bike path from Spaulding Lane to West 254th Street as proposed in the preferred route. She urged leaving natural areas in the community untouched. She further urged that funding be provided to study the connection to the waterfront in greater detail.

All speakers except for Ms. Klein had provided their statements and proposals that were emailed to all committee members prior to the meeting.

Assemblyman Dinowitz spoke in favor of keeping the Greenway along the waterfront and opposed taking any parkland for the HRG.

Councilman Cohen said that the current study and discussion was an important step in the process of locating the Greenway and also urged that the waterfront route remain preferable.

Michael Blaustein spoke on behalf of Senator Jeffrey Klein and said that the senator stands with the community and the community board in the process of recommending a route for the Greenway.

The floor was then opened to questions and comments. Following are brief summaries of some of those questions and comments.

David Fisher said that he believed that the Greenway was a giveaway to the Hebrew Home's building plan.

An unidentified speaker said that the funding for the Greenway should be used to provide better service on Metro-North.

John Benfatti said that the NYMTC plan is a study that is not ready yet for implementation.

Sura Jeselsohn said that the intersection of Kappock and Palisade has a lot of traffic that should be of concern to planners.

Rita Freed objected to privileges for bicycles and said that if the Greenway were built the Hudson River shoreline would be developed.

Yael Levy stated that the thousands of people who attend the Riverdale RiverFest (of which she is an organizer) are evidence of the community's desire to have waterfront access.

Tara McMaster said that the Greenway must preserve the character of Riverdale Park.

Gerald Lefcourt (?) questioned how many cyclists and pedestrians would use the Henry Hudson Bridge and recommended the swing bridge instead as the Greenway route. Gerry Bogacz observed that the swing bridge cannot be used because engineering constraints prevent attaching a walkway/bikeway to one side of the bridge.

Linda Dunbar urged that everyone think incrementally and focus on the riverfront. She is concerned that "interim" approaches can become permanent.

Dr. Gary Klingsberg read a statement that he provided to the committee in which he urged that the character of the community be respected, that Riverdale Park remain unaltered, that the Greenway cross the river at Spuyten Duyvil and stay on the waterfront. In the meantime, he urges a route via the Broadway bridge rather than across the Henry Hudson bridge.

Committee members then asked questions:

Tom Durham observed that City Island residents object to the proposed new bridge to their community and wondered whether the money allocated for the replacement bridge could be re-directed to the Greenway Bridge across Spuyten Duyvil. Gerry Bogacz replied that there was sure to be a fight over where these funds should be spent if not on the replacement City Island Bridge. Mr. Durham asked whether the existing City Island Bridge could serve as the bridge at Spuyten Duyvil. Mr. Bogacz said it would have to be a swing bridge, but Mr. Durham said it is a swing bridge that has been locked. Mr. Bogacz commented that this suggestion was worth exploring further.

Herb Barret asked whether the Greenway can be built in increments. Mr. Bogacz replied affirmatively.

Robert Press asked about using the Henry Hudson Bridge service road as a Greenway route but Mr. Bogacz said that he thought this road had too much traffic for that purpose.

Rosemary Ginty asked what the next step in the process is. Mr. Bogacz said that NYMTC is waiting for the community board's official response.

Maria Khury said that she sensed that the community wants a riverfront route and asked about the timeline for further study. Mr. Bogacz responded that the study is completed and awaits only the community board's response.

Robert Fanuzzi asked about the proposed bridge through Riverdale Park at West 232 Street identified in the preferred route and Mr. Bogacz said that the proposed bridge is part of Stage Three implementation (10+ years away).

Steve Balicer asked, given the lateness of the hour, whether a second meeting might be called. Mr. Bender responded negatively to the suggestion out of concern that the current meeting would be too difficult to repeat.

Anthony Fella asked if there is financing in place for implementing the Greenway and Mr. Bogacz said no.

James Rather asked how the details of the Greenway street route would be implemented as opposed to how they were expressed in the NYMTC plan. Mr. Bogacz explained that because the plan is only conceptual, the implementation would require traffic and engineering studies done for NYC DOT.

With the questions concluded, the chair distributed a draft resolution for discussion. However, because the room had to be vacated and because of the length of the resolution, it was agreed that the resolution would be tabled to be introduced and discussed at the March committee meeting.

The meeting adjourned at approximately 9:30 pm.

Thanks to Tom Durham for his assistance with the minutes.

Bob Bender
Chair
Parks & Recreation Committee