

BRONX COMMUNITY BOARD NO. 8

**MINUTES OF THE ENVIRONMENT & SANITATION AND PARKS & RECREATION JOINT
COMMITTEE MEETING AT FORT INDEPENDENCE HOUSES COMMUNITY CENTER
ON JANUARY 28TH, 2015**

Attendees:

Committee Members: Robert Fanuzzi, Laura Spalter, Bob Bender (E&S); Bob Bender, Laura Spalter, Marvin Goodman, Maria Khury (CB8), Christina Taylor, David Gellman (Community committee members) (Parks)

Others: Dan Padernacht, CB8; Marit Larson, Margot Perron, DPR; Ibrahim Abdul-Matin, DEP; Dominick Lopez, Sara Kempton, FVCP; Suzanne Corber, Matt Turov, Debbi Dolan, Save the Putnam Trail; Jodie Colon, Friends of Spuyten Duyvil; Thomas Bird, BCEQ; Sherral Law

Agenda:

The meeting commenced at approximately 7:15.

E&S chair Bob Fanuzzi explained the evening's program, which contains items of interest to both committees. He then introduced the first speaker.

DEP Long-Term Control Plan for Combined Sewer Overflow and Green Infrastructure Program

Ibrahim Abdul-Matin of DEP discussed DEP's plan to mitigate Combined Sewer Overflow (CSO). He began by explaining what CSO's are and when they occur. When storms release more water than the landscape can contain, the excess flows into storm drains and then into the sewer system, sometimes overwhelming the treatment facilities and causing discharge of untreated sewage into the waterways to which the sewage-treatment facilities drain. Green infrastructure, which is water-absorbing landscape that can lessen the water flowing into the storm drains, can mitigate CSO's. (Green infrastructure contrasts with "gray" infrastructure, which are man-made structures, as opposed to natural landscape.) DEP is expanding the use of green infrastructure because the city is under a consent agreement with the DEC (state) and EPA (federal) to bring the water quality of local waters to a higher standard.

E&S chair Bob Fanuzzi explained the toolkit of green infrastructure that can be used to combat the CSO problem, including for example, more green streetscapes, green rooftops, etc. He stressed that the implementation of a green infrastructure will require collaboration between both city agencies and Community Board committees, as it uses building codes, zoning laws, and right of way in city streets. He also noted that according to DEP, Marble Hill has a 50% CSO rate, and for that reason, Community Board 8 should have green infrastructure.

Mr. Abdul-Matin said that DEP is trying to work with other city agencies such as DDC, DOT, and EDC to incorporate more green infrastructure. There are no current plans for new green infrastructure in CB8 for 2015 but he invited E and S committee members to forward their technical questions about CSO, sewer capacity and history, local topography, and water quality to DEP.

R. Fanuzzi also asked about the DEP Green Infrastructure private property grant program. He noted that several private streets and homes have runoff programs and offered to bring the program to the attention of the Land Use committee. Mr. Abdul-Matin confirmed that schools are eligible for the program and to date, no private institution in Bx CB8 has applied for a green infrastructure grant.

Hudson and Harlem River Water Quality

Christina Taylor, representing the Bronx Council for Environmental Quality, discussed water quality concerns in local waterways, including the Harlem River. She mentioned that the Harlem River Working Group, an advocacy group within BCEQ, has been engaging DEP in an effort to the water quality of that waterway for a long time.

Broadway, which contains a large sewer line, is the low point in the community, only 26 feet above sea level. The Broadway sewer backed up and flooded into Van Cortlandt Park during Superstorm Sandy because of massive CSO. Ordinarily, this sewer releases 1.45 million gallons of water from Van Cortlandt Lake into the Wards Island treatment facility every day. (Broadway's storm sewers north of Van Cortlandt Lake drain into the lake itself.) During a CSO all this water goes untreated. The overflow from the Broadway sewer contributes 50% of the CSO into the Harlem river. It costs \$2million a year to treat this water.

Questions were asked about the water quality of the Harlem River and about "infiltration and inflow" maps to show where storm water flows back into the sewer system so we might be able to identify the places where green infrastructure is most needed. Mr. Abdul-Matin said he will provide this information.

Mention was made of 311 as a source of information about areas of excess runoff. Laura Spalter asked whether areas of runoff that aren't reported to 311 can be identified and reported to DEP. Mr. Abdul-Matin said that such information independent of the 311 system is helpful to DEP in identifying problem areas.

Ms. Taylor showed photographs of bioswales, which are often built into sidewalks and streets, to show how they can help to capture storm water runoff as an example of green infrastructure.

In answer to questions about possible sites for green infrastructure in Bx CB8, Mr. Abdul-Matin invited E and S committee members to bring areas of high runoff, particularly in areas contiguous to highways and other asphalted areas of the community district, to the attention of DEP and offered to conduct walk throughs with E and S members. The committee will pursue.

Thomas Bird discussed Raoul Wallenberg Park (or Forest) as a possible location for green absorption. He observed that it can absorb runoff from Douglass Ave and West 235th/236th

Streets. He mentioned that the park contains a sign with inaccurate information that will be the subject of a *Riverdale Press* story.

Discussion of Daylighting Tibbetts Brook

Marit Larson of DPR discussed daylighting Tibbetts Brook. Her primary focus was on the area south of Van Cortlandt Park, where the old Putnam rail line runs alongside the Major Deegan Expressway south to W. 230th St. The Natural Areas Group of DPR has been awarded a grant to study daylighting Tibbetts Brook in Van Cortlandt Park. That study will take place from June 2015 to June 2017. The ultimate goal is to try to bypass the Broadway sewer and find other outflows for Tibbetts Brook and Van Cortlandt Lake, such as along the disused Putnam line south of VCP. This would aid in improving water quality in the Harlem River because this water would reach the river independently of the sewer system, preventing CSO.

Ms. Larson was asked to distinguish this effort from a DEP program called "bluebelting." She said that bluebelting often tries to make greater use of an existing watershed by raising or lowering the water level. Rather than bluebelting, Ms. Larson focuses on water management by redirecting Van Cortlandt Lake from the sewer and directly into the Harlem River. DPR estimates that it would cost \$40million to do this, independently of the cost of purchasing the old Putnam Line right of way from CSX, which owns it. Until that happens, restoring historic wetlands in VCP is an important interim goal. These waters would eventually reach the Broadway sewer via a different route, but the hope is that less water would reach the sewer because the wetlands would hold some of the water.

Suzanne Corber said that she believes it's important to leave current wetlands undisturbed.

Wetlands Management in Van Cortlandt Park

Margot Perron, VCP Administrator, spoke about wetlands plans for VCP. The Natural Areas Management Group, which is funded by Croton mitigation money, is working to enhance wetlands management. Right now pesticides and herbicides enter Tibbetts Brook from the VC golf course and also from Yonkers' Dunwoodie golf course. DEP has proposed lowering levels of VC Lake as a management tool but DPR opposes this plan because it will cause phragmites, an invasive plant, to spread. Another invasive, water chestnuts, enters VC Lake via Tibbetts Brook from Yonkers.

In response to a question, Ms. Larson said that the level of water flow in Tibbetts Brook is not a problem at present. Answering another question, she said that introducing different plants into Tibbetts Brook to absorb water is not necessary because the brook is adequately vegetated. In response to a question about addressing the phragmites problem, Ms. Taylor said that FVCP is addressing the problem of (lack of) biodiversity in the area.

Jodie Colon asked whether anyone knows how much water is flowing into Spuyten Duyvil from the various water sources in CB8. Evidently no one has that information. Bob Fanuzzi suggested that a site visit to inspect sources of water overflow might be appropriate.

New Business

Christina Taylor spoke about a grant that FVCP is trying to obtain for wetlands studies and asked for the committees' support. Because of the lack of a quorum for the Parks & Recreation Committee, which is the relevant committee, no action could be taken at this time.

The minutes of the December E&S committee meeting were approved. Parks & Recreation Committee December minutes will have to be deferred for approval until the February meeting.

The meeting adjourned shortly at approximately 8:45 pm.