

BRONX COMMUNITY BOARD NO. 8

MINUTES OF THE SPECIAL COMMITTEE ON THE HUDSON RIVER GREENWAY MEETING, APRIL 6, 2015 AT THE RIVERDALE YM/YWHA

Attendees:

Committee: Bob Bender, Phil Friedman, Laura Spalter

Other CB8: Dan Padernacht, David Kornbluh, Mike Heller, Robert Press

Community: Andrew Sandler (Councilman Cohen's office), Michael Blaustein (Sen. Klein's office), Jack Lehnert (Friends of the Hudson River Greenway), I-C Levenberg-Engel (Bronx Council on Environmental Quality), Gary Klingsberg (Riverdale-Spuyten Duyvil Coalition), Cliff Stanton, Tracy Shelton (KRVC), Sandy Shalleck (Riverdale Nature Preservancy); Nortrud Spero (LPRA-YGCAC), Suzanne Corber (Save the Putnam Trail), Leah Rollhaus, Judith Gurland, Laura and Danil Liebman, Robert Fass, Linda Hirlehey

Agenda:

The meeting began at 7:33 with unanimous approval of the minutes of the January meeting. (The scheduled March meeting was canceled because of snow.)

Bob Bender and Laura Spalter spoke about the Feb. 25 meeting with Metro-North (MNR) officials to discuss the HRG which they attended along with CB8 vice-chair Rosemary Ginty and representatives of Sen. Klein, Assemblyman Dinowitz, and Councilman Cohen. Please see the attached minutes of that meeting at the end of these minutes.

Laura Spalter then read the following email from MNR, following up on the meeting, sent on March 5 by Mark Mannix of MNR:

Track 6 continues to be needed for storing Metro-North equipment as well as Amtrak and CSX equipment during operational issues. The track is also necessary to support any future expansion of rail service including Amtrak service into and out of Penn Station. The maintenance road to the west of Track 6 is a critical access route for our maintenance forces to access the railroad in this area. North of the Riverdale station the relocation of the track to accommodate a proposed Greenway trail is not an option due to the current elevations still being at risk and the railroad does not want to introduce any more installations to our west which could end up fouling our tracks in the case of a storm and limiting access to the tracks.

However, Metro-North is willing to look at options that would involve stabilizing our embankment along the Hudson River in order to accommodate a trail along the shoreline. As such, Metro-North will draft a scope of work and cost estimate to conduct such a study. We will then provide that information to Community Board No. 8 so that a funding source for such a study can be identified and secured in order to proceed with such a review.

Robert Press, commenting on MNR's concern about Greenway infrastructure washing onto the tracks if the HRG were located between the tracks and the river., observed that no part of the little park behind the Riverdale Metro-North station had washed onto the tracks during Hurricane Sandy.

There was discussion among attendees about the results of the MNR meeting and a positive response to the follow-up email from Metro-North.

Board chair Dan Padernacht informed the meeting that the Bronx Overall Economic Development Corp (BOEDC) had agreed to act as a conduit for funds intended to implement the HRG. BOEDC is part of the Bronx Borough President's office.

Michael Blaustein reported that Sen. Klein has requested \$250,000 for Metro-North (MNR) to perform an engineering study of the Hudson River shoreline "for the development of design alternatives and the selection of a final schematic design" that "would involve stabilizing our [MNR's] embankment along the Hudson River in order to accommodate a trail along the shoreline." \$250,000 is the amount that MNR requested for this purpose. The funds are pending approval by the state legislature.

There was much discussion of this proposed funding. Some speakers urged that there be careful oversight of the project. Bob Bender observed that MNR is part of a state authority (MTA) and the study should be publicly conducted. Mike Heller asked whether MNR will perform the study or hire an outside entity. That information is not known at present. There was general agreement that it will be important to coordinate all studies with Sen. Klein's office.

Other questions raised were whether the engineering study would include the Amtrak swing bridge (not certain but doubtful) and whether the electrical stanchions south of W. 254th St. would be removed (unknown at present but will be brought to MNR's attention).

Cliff Stanton asked whether the community can assist Sen. Klein in securing funding. Michael Blaustein said he would report back if that were the case.

On the subject of outreach to various governmental agencies, the committee reported that NYC DOT responded that there is a Greenway coordinator at DOT. The committee will follow up with that person. Other agencies have not responded to the committee's request for advice, but we are still in an early stage of HRG implementation.

Sen. Schumer's office and Congressman Engel's office have responded to committee outreach and meetings with both will be scheduled for committee members.

Cliff Stanton urged all to attend "Greenway Day" at the extension of Riverdale Park located behind the Riverdale Metro-North station on Sunday, April 19, 1 to 3 pm.

The meeting adjourned at 8:25 pm. The next committee meeting will take place in June.

Appendix: Minutes of the Feb. 25, 2015 Meeting with Metro-North Regarding the HRG

Attending

Community Board 8: Rosemary Ginty, Bob Bender, Laura Spalter

Elected officials reps: Nathan Arnosti (Assemblyman Dinowitz), Michael Blaustein (Senator Klein), Andrew Sandler (Councilman Cohen)

MNRR: Tobey Ritz, Mark Mannix, John Kennard, Terrence McCauley

Tobey Ritz (Capital and Engineering): MNR keywords are now "restoration and resiliency," not "fortification," from the Bronx all the way to Croton-Harmon. Strengthening the riprap is the goal. The right of way is staying as is. Fortification would require filling in the river and would entail extensive regulatory review. There is no plan to build an 8 foot wall or raise the tracks. MNR's damage was mainly electrical. Protecting their substations and electrical systems is now the priority. The electrical work alone could take a year.

John Kennard: Estimates for fortification of the entire Hudson Line would cost billions. The wall, if one were built, would have to be 8' above the water. HRG if built alongside would face a wall.

Toby Ritz: MNR must be sensitive to ACoE concerns about effects on the river elsewhere, which is one of the problems with a wall. Environmental agencies are not urging MNR to take action. Their main source of funding is FEMA money which goes through the Federal Transportation Administration (FTA), which gives it to MTA (not just MNR). This money mainly took the form of restoration grants and resiliency grants. "Like to do" grants were competitive [not sure but I think "like to do" is a synonym for "wish list"].

Extending the riverfront and other green infrastructure projects have been considered. Regulatory agencies might resist extending the riverfront (e.g., living shoreline). Federal funding requires stringent environmental reviews. Extending the shoreline doesn't gain real estate for HRG because this extension is not usable.

Mark Mannix: the Riverdale Station park required multiple permits from regulatory agencies. DEC approval was a challenge.

Tobey Ritz: FTA requires extensive environmental reviews for river front actions to avoid adverse outcomes.

John Kennard: opposition to HRG alongside tracks is that HRG infrastructure (asphalt, fence, lights, etc) would wash onto tracks in a major storm. They have no problems with a path on Mt. St. Vincent's "Point" property. Their concern is the fence separating it from their tracks. Security is their only issue there.

Building HRG on piers in the river might pose risks to MNR. Will investigate and get back to us.

Terry McCauley: Working with our committee, MNR will write letters of support for grant money for HRG studies.

The general consensus from MNRR was that there is little for us to "piggy back" with them re the state surplus money and our request for infrastructure funds from our state officials.

Next steps:

- MNRR will look into feasibility of piers on the river and get back to bob.
- Along with letters of support for our grant applications, they will provide us with contact information for their Development Division.
- The committee will set up a meeting with Congressman Engel re federal funding grants.

Meeting Notes by Bob Bender, Laura Spalter and Rosemary Ginty