

Minutes of the Parks & Recreation Committee Meeting, October 22, 2015 at the Church of the Mediator

Attendees:

Committee: B. Bender (chair), D. Gellman, M. Goodman, A. Guzman, A. J. Robateau (CB8), H. Barret (community committee member)

DPR: Kristen King, Director of Forest Restoration, Marechal Brown, Director of Horticulture, Nick Simpson, Government Relations, Daniel Reynolds, Senior Horticulture Manager for the Bronx, Patricia Ferguson

Guests: Councilman Andrew Cohen, Andrew Sandler, Councilman Cohen's office; Catherine O'Brien, John Young, Debbi Dolan, Van Cortlandt Park Nature Group; Suzanne Corber, Save the Putnam Trail; I-C, BCEQ; Ann Rauch, Riverdale Nature Preservancy; Sura Jeselsohn, Alan Pimentel

Agenda:

The meeting was called to order at 7:40 pm.

Discussion of Pesticide Use in Area Parks

Representatives of the Parks Department were introduced to speak on the topic.

Marechal Brown, Director of Horticulture, began the discussion by noting that DPR has 100 full time and 50 seasonal (part time) gardeners. Parks property has expanded over the last several years and there has also been an increase in weeds in the parks. Most of the weeding in the parks is done by gardeners.

Pesticides are regulated. All pesticide use must be reported to the Department of Health and to the NY State Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC). This means every application of pesticides. In addition the applicators themselves must be licensed by the DEC. New York City's requirements are stricter than those of the state. The local regulation of pesticides is contained in Local Law 37, "Pesticide Use by New York City Agencies."

Spraying pesticides is one tool for managing weeds. Volunteers are helpful and needed. Mulching, mowing, weed whacking are additional tools used to manage weeds. Biological controls are sometimes used in place of pesticides, but they must first be

tested academically and are also regulated. Examples are insects that are used to attack certain kinds of weeds.

Poison ivy is removed from local parks. In natural areas it is removed from trails or places where the public is likely to encounter it, but not from other areas because it is a native plant.

Daniel Reynolds said that DPR is aware of declining wildlife in the parks and is sensitive to this issue when spraying. He said that woody invasive vines are the biggest problem in our parks. Even if DPR had enough manpower, there would still be some weeds best treated by the application of pesticides. He noted that pesticide protocols are currently being updated.

Councilman Cohen noted that while everyone would like to avoid spraying pesticides, not spraying is not a practical strategy for managing the parks. He noted that the protocols for using pesticides could be better disseminated to the public and he has introduced a bill (No. 833) to the City Council to clarify the regulations for notifying the public.

DPR representatives then answered a number of questions from committee members and guests, beginning with a discussion of the current protocols for public notification of spraying. Locations to be sprayed must be identified with signs no more than 50 feet apart at least 24 hours in advance. Signs must remain in place for at least 48 hours after spraying has occurred. Signs must indicate exact location and type of pesticide used.

It was noted that golf courses and concessions do not have to follow the same protocols as parks. They are exempt from Local Law 37, but they must report to the NYC Department of Health and the NYS DEC.

Pesticides are not used in wetlands. If they are used within 100 feet of freshwater wetlands or 150 feet of saltwater wetlands, a special permit must be obtained from DEC. Pesticides are used in Forever Wild areas. It was noted by DPR representatives that the DEC wetland regulations are stronger than federal EPA regulations for these areas.

When an applicator sprays pesticides, a supervisor must be available within 30 minutes in case of a problem.

New York City has particular pesticide problems because it is a major commercial hub and so new pests are sometimes introduced here (e.g., the Asian long-horned beetle). For this reason it is unlikely that NYC will ever abandon chemical pesticides.

The Chair thanked the DPR representatives for their presentation and responsiveness to questions.

Minutes of the September meeting were approved unanimously.

There was discussion of the committee's initiative to assess the condition of local parks. Patricia Ferguson said that DPR will accept the information that committee members provide. The Chair handed out the New Yorkers for Parks report on City Council District 11 parks, noting that this council district includes communities outside CB8, such as Bedford Park, Norwood, and Woodlawn. There was agreement that committee members should try to talk to park users in making assessments of the local parks when possible.

The Chair mentioned a discussion at the most recent board meeting about thanking LG Corp. for reducing the height of its headquarters building near the Palisades and introduced a letter doing so. The letter was approved unanimously.

There was a brief discussion of an October 19 scoping meeting held by DPR to discuss the renovation of the basketball and handball courts in Henry Hudson Park. There will be a follow-up meeting in the near future.

Herb Barret mentioned that this year's Veterans Day ceremony at the Memorial Grove will take place on Sunday, Nov. 15 at noon.

The next committee meeting will take place on November 18.

The meeting adjourned at 9:20 pm.