

BRONX COMMUNITY BOARD NO. 8

MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE PARKS & RECREATION COMMITTEE OF FEBRUARY 25, 2015 AT THE FISCHBACH ROOM, MANHATTAN COLLEGE SCHOOL OF ENGINEERING

Attendees:

Committee: Bob Bender (chair), Laura Spalter (vice chair), Sylvia Alexander, Steven Balicer, Rosemary Ginty, Marvin Goodman, Maria Khury, Robert Press, James Rather (CB8); Herb Barret, Thomas Durham, David Gellman, Christina Taylor (community committee members)

DPR: Dennis Burton, Margot Perron, Rakeem Taylor

Community: Councilman Andrew Cohen, Andrew Sandler (Councilman Cohen's office); Leonda Bonilla, Partnerships for Parks; Tricia Mullen, RNH & In-Tech Academy; John Butler, Matthew Melore, Friends of Van Cortlandt Park; I-C L'Engel, BCEQ; Suzanne Corber, Save the Putnam Trail; Catherine O'Brien, John Young, VCP Nature Group

Agenda:

The meeting began at approximately 7:10 pm. Minutes of the December meeting were approved with abstentions for cause by Ms. Alexander and Mr. Balicer. Minutes of the January meeting were approved with abstentions for cause by Ms. Alexander, Mr. Balicer, Ms. Ginty, Mr. Press

Van Cortlandt Park Bioblitz

The chair began the discussion by updating the committee on the bioblitz preparations, noting that several local institutions had agreed to participate, including Lehman College, Manhattan College, and Mount St. Vincent. In addition Wave Hill will participate, and the Bronx Zoo/Wildlife Conservation Society and the New York Botanical Garden indicated tentative approval.

Discussion turned toward local high schools. Bob Fanuzzi made an introduction to the Fieldston School. Committee members indicated that they would do the following outreach:

Sylvia Alexander – RKA and H.S. for American Studies (in cooperation with Tricia Mullen) and New Visions; Laura Spalter – Riverdale Country; Maria Khury – Horace Mann; Bob Bender – JFK; Christina Taylor – SAR; John Butler, FVCP – DeWitt Clinton (and SAR with Ms. Taylor); IC – Bronx Science.

Margot Perron offered to assist with Fordham University, the only institution that has not yet responded to a bioblitz invitation.

Bioblitz information will be sent by the chair to these committee members to assist with their outreach.

The precise area to be surveyed in the bioblitz must be identified. Dennis Burton, Christina Taylor, and Bob Bender will meet in the coming weeks to do this.

There was brief discussion about whether specimens will be taken or whether the bioblitz can be conducted with photography alone. Dennis Burton advised against collecting mammal specimens. He also noted that a coyote study is underway in VCP. The chair observed that Helen Forgione from DPR's Natural Resources Group will attend the March committee meeting to discuss the NRG's surveys in VCP, which may assist in planning the bioblitz.

Margot Perron commended the bioblitz as an opportunity to bring attention to the Forever Wild areas of VCP, which total approximately 600 acres.

Christina Taylor will organize a public tour of the bioblitz during the noon to 3 pm session. This information will be publicized at upcoming CB8 meetings.

All bioblitz activities will be coordinated with Dennis Burton.

Catherine O'Brien suggested that participating schools discuss the bioblitz in their newspapers or other media.

The chair recognized Councilman Cohen, who spoke about the upcoming Bronx Parks Speak-Up (see below) and told the committee that he had just met with new Parks Commissioner Mitchell Silver, who toured Van Cortlandt Park.

The chair thanked Councilman Cohen for his support in restoring funding to the Forest Restoration Group in VCP and asked the committee to formally thank the Councilman. The committee did so by unanimous vote.

Bronx Parks Speak-Up

Christina Taylor spoke about the agenda for the Speak-Up, which was planned to include a panel discussion on waterfront access, a presentation on participatory budgeting by Councilman Cohen, and workshops on the Harlem River BOA and safe routes to parks, among other topics. *(Several committee members attended the Speak-Up, which was held on Saturday, Feb. 28 at Lehman College.)*

Old Business

The chair noted that the skate park design in VCP that was approved at the November, 2014 committee meeting was given preliminary approval by the Public Design Commission.

The chair suggested relocating the barbecue area away from the natural wetland south of the pool. Margot Perron said that there are existing wetlands that require attention and she would rather focus on that matter before attempting to restore the wetland that is now given over to barbecuing. She observed that VC Lake needs regular dredging. This is a topic we should discuss with DPR's NRG. We should put the VC wetlands high on the list of priorities for the NRG.

Laura Spalter urged that strengthening and enhancing wetlands be a priority for the committee.

Christina Taylor said that the head of DPR's NRG testified before the City Council recently, although that group's current focus is on salt-water wetland restoration. FVCP is working on VCP wetlands with volunteers.

Suzanne Corber noted that the Putnam Trail is located in a wetland and she believes that the trail can be improved in a way that will enhance the wetlands.

Follow-up on other Old Business:

*The chair suggested that committee members continue to look for tree-planting opportunities. We will put Fall 2015 tree-planting recommendations on the agenda for the April meeting.

*Mr. Press asked about the blue trailers at the ice rink site and was told that they should be removed once the weather clears and there is no impediment to moving them from snow and ice. Rakeem Taylor said that he is considering what to do with this site in the absence of the ice rink.

*Laura Spalter asked about the ATV problem. Dennis Burton and Margot Perron said that they have not been able to secure front loaders to block access points from Yonkers and that snowmobiles have joined ATV's as problems. Councilman Cohen observed that enforcement is the problem – and the solution. It may be necessary to change state regulations to empower police to take necessary action such as confiscating vehicles.

New Business

Wednesday March 18, BCEQ will hold its annual member meeting at Manhattan College School of Engineering.

Saturday April 25, FVCP will hold its Hike-a-Thon in Van Cortlandt Park.

Laura Spalter asked about planned improvements to the John Kieran nature trail as highlighted on the FVCP website. Christina Taylor responded that Sen. Klein is funding some improvements but specific projects have not been identified yet. Those projects will go through the regular review process for capital projects.

The meeting adjourned at approximately 8:35 pm.

Bob Bender

Chair, Parks & Recreation
Committee