

BRONX COMMUNITY BOARD NO. 8

MINUTES OF THE PARKS & RECREATION COMMITTEE MEETING HELD ON JANUARY 22ND, 2014, AT THE RIVERDALE MENTAL HEALTH ASSOCIATION

Attendees:

Bob Bender (chair), Laura Spalter, Marvin Goodman, Rosemary Ginty, James Rather, Mercedes Zegarra-Soja, Maria Khury, Robert Press, CB8 committee members; Thomas Durham, Christina Taylor (Friends of Van Cortlandt Park), community committee members

Other CB attendees: Robert Fanuzzi

DPR: Rakeem Taylor, VCP

Others:

Marcia Allina, Hilary Baum (FVCP), Matt Turov, Catherine O'Brien, John L. Young, David Gellman, I.C. Levenberg-Engel (BCEQ), Patsy Smyth, Andrew Sandler (Councilman Cohen's office), Councilman Andrew Cohen, Sura Jeselsohn (Along the Hudson Homeowners)

Agenda:

The meeting began at 7:02 pm. Minutes of the November meeting were unanimously approved.

The Chair opened the meeting by asking committee members for their views on audiotaping the meeting. Committee members expressed their views and agreed with the decision made by other committees that whatever happens, all committees should follow the same course of action, i.e., either all committees record meetings or none do. After discussion of the issue the committee voted 7 opposed to recording (M. Khury, M. Goodman, J. Rather, B. Bender, L. Spalter, T. Durham, M. Zegarra-Soja) and 3 no opinion (C. Taylor, R. Press, R. Ginty).

Christina Taylor of FVCP discussed a proposal for a public demonstration in support of a pedestrian bridge over the Major Deegan Expressway in Van Cortlandt Park that will connect east and west sides of the park and connect the broken Old Croton Aqueduct trail (OCA). She, the chair, and Bob Fanuzzi, CB8 chair and past chair of the Croton Filtration Monitoring Committee (CFMC), provided background on the reasons for the pedestrian bridge and why the Department of Environmental Protection should pay for it. The chair will investigate whether a link to the bridge feasibility study done per CFMC request can be posted on the CB8 website.

Christina said that she has applied to DPR for a permit to hold the event in VCP on March 29; Rakeem Taylor said that he will look into the status of the permit. Outreach is underway to CB7 and CB12, which share jurisdiction for VCP with CB8. Outreach has begun to local elected officials, as well. In response to a question, Christina explained that the bridge will be pedestrian only. Bicycles will not be authorized on the bridge. Because the OCA is not ADA accessible, the bridge will not be ADA accessible.

Councilman Andrew Cohen said that he supports the bridge proposal and is now a co-sponsor of the event. He also reported that he is now a member of the City Council parks committee. This news was met with applause from committee members.

Old Business:

Committee vice-chair Laura Spalter said that the May, 2012 CB8 resolution on the Hudson River Greenway (HRG) is being quoted extensively in current discussions of the HRG and that she objects to the portion of the resolution calling for a study of a route through Riverdale Park from W. 232 Street or the nearby DEP sub-station to the Hudson River waterfront. She said she has been told that constructing a ramp through the park to the waterfront would involve heavy equipment.

The chair commented that the resolution simply calls for such a study to be undertaken. No such study has happened, so it's premature to make any judgment about what would be involved in constructing such a ramp.

Board vice-chair and committee member Maria Khury observed that circumstances have changed now that there is a new proposal for the HRG from NYMTC and we have to respond to these circumstances.

Rosemary Ginty asked whether there was any urgency for the committee to act on the NYMTC proposal. The chair responded that Senator Schumer has proposed funding the NYMTC proposal, but in communication with a member of Senator Schumer's staff, the chair received assurance that the Senator is aware that there are local issues still under discussion that must be resolved.

Tom Durham said that there are proposals for spiral ramps such as one that could bridge the Metro-North tracks to the river and that it's possible that funding could be found through other projects. He also observed that it might be possible to use the City Island swing bridge, which will soon be replaced, at Spuyten Duyvil, to permit the HRG to cross the Harlem River there.

Sura Jeselsohn said that she believes that NYMTC has indicated greater support for the project from the public than really exists because people who signed up to attend meetings were recognized as supporters of the NYMTC proposal.

The chair said that there would be a joint meeting of the Traffic & Transportation committee and the Parks & Recreation committee on February 26 at a location to be determined. (*Update: the meeting will take place in the Multi-purpose room at the Riverdale Y.*) There will be public discussion of the NYMTC plan including alternatives proposed by NYMTC in response to comments on the draft final plan discussed at the committee's November meeting. Efforts will be made to provide material to members of both committees ahead of the meeting, for example, NYMTC's updated plan, alternative proposals from the Friends of the Hudson River Greenway, and perhaps position statements from other groups.

The chair updated the committee on the VCP stables concession. DPR reported that there were several interested parties who attended a January 8 walk-through at the site, and an addendum to the RFP responding to questions raised at the walk-through was just issued.

The chair also provided an update on the LG building on the Palisades. Sura Jeselsohn asked whether divestment of LG stock has been proposed yet as a strategy and the chair said he was not aware of such a proposal but would discuss it with the Protect the Palisades coalition. The question was asked whether the city of Yonkers opposes the LG construction. The chair will investigate and report back.

A question was asked about daylighting Tibbetts Brook. Christina Taylor said that there is a proposal for a study of this topic at DPR now.

Rosemary Ginty discussed a bill proposed in the City Council to require the NYPD to provide crime data for all parks and playgrounds one acre or greater in size. The bill passed the City Council but was vetoed by Mayor Bloomberg on December 27. (*Subsequent to the meeting Rosemary reported that the veto will be brought before the new City Council for a possible override.*)

Rosemary observed that VCP crime data has been available since 2005 but no one on the committee has seen it. Rakeem Taylor responded that it can be found on a parks advocacy website, www.nycparkadvocates.org, but he will try to find the official DPR data.

Questions were raised about who originates parks crime statistics and whether there is a disincentive for parks managers and administrators to report serious crimes because it might reflect poorly on the park or park management. Andrew Sandler said that he will discuss this matter with Councilman Cohen.

Sura Jeselsohn complained that when dogs are off leash in city parks, no one wants to issue a summons. Rakeem Taylor said it is the responsibility of DPR to enforce such regulations.

Patsy Smyth discussed maintenance problems in the lower portion of Brust Park, and said that there is a local volunteer group prepared to help and even fund some improvements. Recommendations were made for her group to communicate with Manhattan College, which has a green student group, and to ask Officer Mindy Ramos of the 50 Pct. for help from the Explorers group. Another suggestion was to contact the City Parks Foundation for assistance. Tom Durham, who lives next door to the park, said he would discuss the matter further with Ms. Smyth.

The chair reminded everyone of the Bronx Parks Speak-Up on Feb. 22 at Lehman College. He also urged committee members to begin thinking of locations for "It's My Park" Day activities in May.

The meeting adjourned at 9 pm.

Bob Bender, Chair
Parks & Recreation Committee