

Minutes of the Parks & Recreation Committee Meeting of January 25, 2017

At the Manhattan College School of Engineering, 3825 Corlear Avenue

Attendees:

Committee: Bob Bender (chair), Eric Bell, Robert Fanuzzi, David Kornbluh, Tao Moran, Laura Spalter (CB8); Herb Barret, Christina Taylor (Committee Community Members)

Absent: Sylvia Alexander, David Gellman, Marvin Goodman, Amy Joy Robateau

DPR: Iris Rodriguez-Rosa, Bronx Commissioner; Margot Perron, Dennis Burton, Will Harris, David McConnell, Jennifer Nemecek, Marisa Berry, Leenda Bonilla, Patricia Ferguson, Henri Bonner, Tony Rosa

Community: D.I. O'Toole, 50th Precinct; Anna Dolgov, Riverdale Press; Daniel Reynolds and Mark Mason, Stewards of Henry Hudson Park; Robert Press, Bronx Voice; Michael Schnall, New York Road Runners; Viv Carter, Councilman Cohen's Office; Matt Turov and Suzanne Corber, Save the Putnam Trail; Julian DeLaRosa, Sarah Stone, Maria Nieto, Manhattan College; Sara Kempton, Friends of Van Cortlandt Park; Susan Brenner, CitiBike; John Young, Catherine O'Brien, Arelis Morillo, Margarita Eremeyev, Kevin Daloia

Agenda:

The meeting was called to order at 7:07 pm. The chair introduced Bronx Parks Commissioner Rodriguez-Rosa and thanked her for attending. He then introduced Margot Perron, VCP Administrator, who in turn introduced Patricia Ferguson and Henri Bonner, DPR employees newly assigned to VCP. She also informed every one of the passing of former Bronx Parks Commissioner Hector Aponte.

Henry Hudson Park Volunteer Efforts

The chair introduced Dan Reynolds, who heads the Stewards of Henry Hudson Park. Mr. Reynolds presented a Powerpoint showing the horticultural transformation of the park by the volunteers, which drew applause from the audience. They work every Saturday, rain or shine, from 8 am to noon. They have received grants from the Partnership for Parks and other city sources, as well as assistance from DPR parks manager Tony Rosa. The group began with Mr. Reynolds, soon joined by Mr. Mason and then a few others. They now have shirts, a website, a Facebook page, etc. The group also posts notices on the fence surrounding the park, which helps attract additional volunteers.

Suggestions were made about posting notices in area stores and about approaching ARC (Association of Riverdale Coops) to attract additional volunteers.

The chair thanked Mr. Reynolds for his inspirational work and mentioned that this group is a model for the “friends of” volunteers that have been a goal of the committee for the past several years.

A quorum of the committee now being present, the minutes of the November meeting were approved unanimously.

Presentation of an Initial Design for Parks without Borders in Van Cortlandt Park

Will Harris of the Parks Capital Projects Group showed a design for the Parks without Border project at Broadway and West 242nd Street.

He began by reviewing basic information about the project. The total area of the project is 3 ½ acres and it is budgeted at \$4.2 million. Goals include making the entrance at this location look more like a formal entrance to the park, and unifying the border of the park along Broadway. Creating an accessible entrance to the park and within the boundary of the project is both a requirement and a goal. The initial scoping meeting revealed that most people want passive recreation in the area – benches with plantings, for example. (This was the most popular request at the scoping meeting.) Also among the requests at the scoping meeting were enhanced lighting and security cameras. Scoping meeting participants unanimously requested that the former ice rink/tennis courts be “greened” to the maximum extent possible.

The initial design will introduce seating and lighting, and no fence or a low fence. Pathways will be consolidated and made ADA accessible. The ice rink/tennis court will become an “events plaza.” There will be a redesigned passive-use lawn. The barbecue area could be enhanced to become a picnic area as well. There may be a small pond or water component introduced into the BBQ area. The chillers from the disused ice rink will be removed, but the power bank will remain, most likely screened with plantings. The area under the subway, particularly a narrow and steep staircase, will be improved and made more attractive.

In the subsequent discussion, double parking and automobile access to the BBQ area were frequently mentioned, along with numerous other comments, which the designers noted.

Mr. Harris thanked everyone for their comments and said that he will return with a final design at the committee’s March meeting. The chair asked that he share the initial design with the committee and he sent it the next day to the CB8 office, which distributed it to all committee members.

Tibbetts Brook CSO Reduction and Daylighting

Jamie Ong from DPR’s Natural Resources Group (NRG) showed a PowerPoint presentation about the planned Tibbetts Brook daylighting. She emphasized that this was Phase I, a design stage, and that there is no funding yet for anything beyond the design stage.

The goal is to improve the ecology and hydrological functioning of the brook within VCP. The NRG has studied the historical wetland in the park and notes that the Harlem River was once tidal all the way to the park. She also noted that the area of study and design overlaps with the Parks without Borders boundaries and so she is coordinating with those designers.

Tibbetts Brook flows into Van Cortlandt Lake, which, as has been noted many times, flows into the city sewer system. It introduces a vast quantity of fresh water into the sewage treatment plants, which in a heavy rainstorm are overwhelmed and cannot properly treat all sewage. Keeping this freshwater out of the sewer system would reduce the amount of excess waterflow or combined sewage overflow, CSO, into local rivers. While the ultimate goal is to restore the historic flow into the Harlem River, that goal is not achievable in the near future. Thus, distributing more water into enhanced – or more accurately, reclaimed – wetlands in the park is an interim step in reducing both volume and frequency of overflow until a way can be found to keep the water out of the sewer system.

Ms. Ong stressed that what she showed is a conceptual design. She promised to return to the committee in March with a more complete design. NRG hopes to have a final design by June.

There was a thorough discussion of the issue by those in attendance, which included questions about the Broadway sewer connection, the Putnam Trail renovation project, whether the design presentation in March will be able to quantify the amount of groundwater stored in the park, and so forth. Ms. Ong said that she is working with DEP on this matter, as well as with the VC Conservancy. It was suggested that DEP should help finance the project beyond the design stage.

This matter will most likely be on the agenda of the joint Parks & Recreation/Environment & Sanitation committee meeting planned for April.

Update on Putnam Trail SWPPP

The chair noted that DPR has submitted its SWPPP (Stormwater Pollution Prevention Plan) to DEC and that DEC has requested additional information. As soon as an amended SWPPP is available, it will be shared with the committee and the public.

In response to a question, the chair explained that the SWPPP applies only to the construction phase of the Putnam Trail project. DPR has promised to provide the committee with a site-management plan to care for the area after construction.

Old Business

The chair reported that the final phase of tree planting to compensate for the removal of trees at Jerome Park reservoir has just concluded. A list of those trees will be made available to the board office and to committee members. In addition, the chair is requesting a complete list of all tree planting locations. It was noted that in the final phase, all of the trees were planted in CB8.

A new cable has been installed in VCP to connect to the stables. This should make 911 service available in the stables area.

Construction should begin on the new skate park in VCP in the coming weeks.

The chair recently issued a District Resource Statement for DPR. The chair isolated the Bronx and CB8 elements in the citywide document and mentioned that the ice-skating rink in VCP is included, even though it has been out of service for at least two years. In addition, he noted that the document reported a high incidence of vandalism in VCP. Margot Perron said that there is more vandalism on the east side of the park than on the west side. Commissioner Rodriguez-Rosa said that the destination parks do have the highest levels of vandalism among city parks.

The chair reminded everyone of the Bronx Parks Speak-Up on February 25 and urged all to attend.

New Business

There was no new business. The meeting adjourned at 9:07 pm.