

## **Minutes of the Parks & Recreation Committee Meeting, May 23, 2018 at the Riverdale Y**

### **Attendees:**

Committee: Bob Bender (chair), Eric Bell, Robert Fanuzzi, David Gellman, Marvin Goodman, Tao Moran, Laura Spalter (all CB8); Christina Taylor (community committee member)

Absent: Daris Jackson (CB8), Herb Barret (community committee member)

Other CB8: Rosemary Ginty, chair

DPR: Iris Rodriguez-Rosa, Bronx Parks Commissioner; Margot Perron, Stephanie Thayer, Joseph Magneri

Elected Official: Andrew Cohen, Council member

Community: Karen Argenti, Jodie Colon, Deirdre Burke, Rob Spalter

### **Agenda:**

The meeting was called to order at 7:15 pm. Minutes of the April committee meeting were unanimously approved.

#### Discussion of the Parks Capital Projects Process

Bob Bender introduced Councilman Cohen and Commissioner Rodriguez-Rosa, thanking them for attending to speak to the issue.

Capital projects in the Department of Parks & Recreation (DPR) are defined as any project with a budget of \$35,000 or greater that is expected to last five years or longer, for example, a playground. DPR currently has 549 active capital projects a 38% increase from January 2015.

The chair noted that certain projects in the community that were discussed in scoping meetings as far back as 2015 have not been built yet. In fact, in some instances, such as the tot lot proposed for the Broadway and Mosholu entrance to Van Cortlandt Park, ground has not even been broken.

The chair then introduced Commissioner Rodriguez-Rosa, who described the capital process. She provided a hand-out that explains the major steps in the process: project initiation, design, procurement, and construction. The total estimated time for the process can range from 30 to 45 months.

The capital process is initiated when a council member or other elected official offers a proposal and provides funding. Some projects can be initiated by the mayor. The project begins with a scoping meeting, where community members can discuss what they would like to see in the project. Depending on the outcome of this meeting, the project may go to design or may go back to whoever funded it for additional funding or other modification. Once the design is 80% complete, it will be presented to the community for comment. Again, it may proceed as is or may go back for additional funding or modification. The length of the design phase often depends on how big the

project is. During the procurement phase the project is put out to bid by contractors. The lowest qualified bidder gets the project, by law. If all bids exceed 10% over the budgeted cost of the project, then the project is halted for additional funding or re-design.

A question was asked about whether the contractor can get a completion bond to prevent defaulting on the project, as has recently happened with the skate park in Van Cortlandt Park. The commissioner explained that a project must be budgeted at greater than \$1 million to qualify for a completion bond. The skate park was budgeted at approximately \$750,000 and did not qualify. In this case, however, the commissioner is arranging with the equipment manufacturer to complete the installation.

In response to another question, the commissioner said that the operations personnel in the capital division are funded by the capital division, not local maintenance and operations.

There was an extensive discussion of the capital process among those in attendance. What follows is a summary of the questions and answers.

One questioner compared the budgets and personnel in DPR with DDC and said that by DDC standards, DPR has insufficient personnel compared to its budget, which is one reason for delays in DPR capital projects. Councilman Cohen agreed, saying that even though he is in his fifth year in office, not one DPR project that he has funded is now complete. He read a list of the many steps that DPR capital projects must go through in review and said that DPR's capital division is underfunded and understaffed.

Councilman Cohen has introduced a Parks Construction Authority (PCA), modeled on the School Construction Authority (SCA), to address what he calls the broken DPR capital process. Some members of the audience criticized the SCA as a model. The councilman replied that SCA projects initiated since he came to office have been completed, which is not the case for parks projects.

A question was raised about why DPR does not keep contractors on retainer. Commissioner Rodriguez-Rosa said that contractors are selected for individual projects, but DPR can do some limited "in-house" projects with its staff of plumbers, masons, and electricians, particularly with renovations of existing structures.

It was observed that much of the delay in DPR projects is the result of extensive interagency reviews involving, for example, OMB and the city's law department. Simplifying the review process would shorten the time frame. Also, scoping could be scheduled to coincide with the availability of funds, rather than being scheduled afterwards, another way to shorten the timeframe.

The commissioner observed that competition among contractors is difficult now because there is so much demand for contractors due to the building boom that has been underway in New York City.

There were questions about how the proposed PCA will shorten the process, and whether some of the time savings would come at the expense of public review. The councilman replied that public review will remain intact. But the PCA will be a comprehensive solution to delays in the capital process rather than a piecemeal solution, which he does not believe can work. The community scoping meeting and the community board review will remain under the PCA, he said.

There was discussion about whether the DPR capital process, specifically the extensive interagency review, could be brought to the attention of the charter revision commission. Councilman Cohen agreed that this opportunity ought to be investigated. He is open to solutions to the problem other than PCA, but he noted that colleagues on the City Council did not have confidence that charter revision will solve the lengthy capital review process. He believes that the PCA will definitely make the process faster.

He also noted that DPR is not unique in its delays; capital projects are often delayed in other agencies.

Could the authority for these projects be decentralized to the boroughs, one questioner asked. Wouldn't boroughs and perhaps even local community boards be able to expedite the process? Councilman Cohen said he is open to suggestions and willing to consider solutions other than PCA.

A committee member said that the delays in the DPR capital process seem to be in design and procurement, so why not focus on better management in those specific areas.

Councilman Cohen said that when the time comes to propose a solution, there will be a bill drafted by legislative experts after consultation with DPR and the mayor's office.

Board chair Rosemary Ginty said that with regard to PCA or any other solution, we should always be aware of unintended consequences and tread carefully.

The chair summarized the discussion by noting that there was agreement that the current DPR capital projects process takes too long and needs to be fixed. While Councilman Cohen's preferred option for fixing the delays in the process is the PCA, he is open to other solutions.

The discussion concluded at 9 pm.

### Old Business

There was no old business.

### New Business

Deirdre Burke asked whether a Playground for All Children exists in the Bronx. Margot Perron said that there is one in Pelham Bay Park. This is a playground intended especially for children suffering from disabilities of various kinds.

The chair said that this topic should be explored further at a future meeting.

David Gellman and Jodie Colon both mentioned a sinkhole that has opened at the Spaulding Lane parking lot in Riverdale Park. Parks manager Joseph Magneri said he would investigate.

The meeting adjourned at 9:10 pm.