

COMMUNITY BOARD NO. 8 BRONX

MINUTES OF THE PARKS & RECREATION COMMITTEE MEETING HELD JANUARY 23, 2008 AT THE COMMUNITY BOARD 8 OFFICE

PRESENT

Robert Bender
Maria Khury
Evelyn Tossas Tucker
Hector Aponte

Thomas Aheda
Robert Alonzo

Robert Annunziata
Herb Barret
Mike Botti
Sam Burroughs
John Butz
Bob Byrnes
Steve Des Noyer
Stu Eber
Marliese Fath
Leon Fendley
Gustavo Frindt
Anne Marie Garti
Thomas Grayner
Manny Grossman
Jeannie Heinsohn
Ian Hobson
Michael Holoszyk
Bob Hughes
Kevin Leighton
Milfred Lewis
Lesly Lowe
Arelis Morillo
Angela Murdock
Margot Perron
Marvin Roberts
Bruce Silverman
Jill Staats
Don Tannen
Christine Taylor
Sara Vergote

Dellan Walsh
Michael West
Don Yearwood
Phil Zodda

AFFILIATION

CB #8 Committee Chair
CB #8
CB #8
Commissioner, Bronx Department
of Parks and Recreation

Mexicas Soccer League
Internal Soccer League
Horace Mann School
Memorial Grove Group
Manhattan Cross Country Meet
Iona College
Abel Bainsont Butz
Athletic Director Manhattan College
Parks Capital
North Riverdale Baseball League
Bronx Irish Soccer League
Department of Parks and Recreation
Department of Parks and Recreation
Jerome Park Conservancy
New York Celtics
Riverdale Press
Bronx Irish Soccer League
USDA Softball League Manager
Riverdale Soccer League
Fieldston School
Manhattan College Baseball Coach
New York Cricket League
Common Wealth Cricket League

Cross Country
Administrator, Van Cortlandt Park
Commissioner, USDA Softball League
Riverdale Soccer Club
Van Cortlandt Track Club (Race Dir.)
Memorial Grove
Friends of Van Cortlandt Park
Manhattan College, Cross Country
Track Coach
A.D. Riverdale Country School
HRA Running Club
Twin Boros Football Program
Footlocker Cross Country

The Jan. 23 Parks & Recreation Committee meeting was devoted entirely to discussion of the proposed renovation of the Van Cortlandt Park Parade Grounds.

The meeting began with a presentation on the renovation by John Butz of Abel Bainson Butz, the landscape architectural firm hired by the Parks Department to do the renovation. Mr. Butz stressed that the purpose of the renovation was to reorganize the layout of the athletic fields and improve the orientation of some of the fields, most notably the cricket fields. The renovation will also improve the field conditions. It is intended to minimize any impact on the renowned cross-country course, although portions of the perimeter track around the Parade Grounds will be reconstructed with a new cinder track. The field in Van Cortlandt Stadium will be reconstructed using a synthetic surface so that some of the athletic events (e.g., soccer) can be moved there during the first phase of the Parade Grounds renovation.

There will also be new fitness stations installed on the perimeter of the Parade Grounds. And there will be a new comfort station created at the north end, close to Broadway, near a current entrance to the Parade Grounds from Broadway. (Although it was not discussed at the meeting, the Parks Dept has separately confirmed that the restroom will meet ADA requirements, i.e., it will be handicapped accessible.)

At the present time, Mr. Butz said, there are 13 cricket pitches on the Parade Grounds, although not all are usable. Some are too close to each other.

The dog run adjacent to the Parade Grounds will remain as is.

Mr. Butz said that the baseball/softball fields are being moved to the north end mainly because the backstops interfere with a sweeping view of the Parade Grounds (they are currently located in the middle of the Parade Grounds). The proposed layout of the athletic fields will be organized by sport and "visual obstruction" (which is why the baseball fields are being moved north). Cricket will be at the south end, soccer in the middle.

The gradual slope down from Broadway to the Parade Grounds will remain as is.

The drainage in the Parade Grounds is poor, according to Mr. Butz, but the soil quality is high and so drainage is better than it might otherwise be. The plan is to use existing drainpipes to channel run-off from the Parade Grounds into Van Cortlandt Lake. However, there will be new surface and subsurface drains leading to the existing drainpipes. These new drains will not interfere with any of the playing surfaces. To improve the drainage, a complete re-surfacing will take place. Cricket pitches will be slightly crowned and soccer and baseball fields appropriately pitched. There will be some subsurface drainage in the soccer fields. The soil will be improved with "amendments." There will be hydrants around the perimeter and water cannons with a capability of spraying 150-160 feet (similar to those used on golf courses).

There will be a slight realignment of the cross-country starting line for 5K and 5-mile races (more on this below). There will be a second loop around the outside of the running track, and the running track will be slightly shortened at the north end, reducing the overall distance from 1 ½ miles to 1 ¼ miles.

The work will be done in two phases with two separate contracts. In Phase One the Van Cortlandt Stadium renovation will take place and the baseball/softball fields will be moved to the north end. (Evidently the drainage work will take place during this phase, too.) In Phase Two the reconstruction of the cricket pitches and soccer fields will take place.

The work is anticipated to begin this summer (more on this below). The contract for Phase One is estimated at \$10.5 million and for Phase Two at \$2 million.

Following the formal presentation, Mr. Butz and Bronx Parks Commissioner Hector Aponte took questions from the audience. A brief summary of some of the questions and answers is below.

A question was asked about extending the baseball/softball fences to minimize the balls that cross from one field to another. Mr. Butz and Mr. Aponte said they would look into this, although Mr. Aponte believed that it was unlikely the fences could be extended far.

Several people, especially representative of cross-country, observed that the new arrangement would require some cross-country races to cross the soccer fields at a time when these fields could be in use. At first Mr. Butz and Mr. Aponte did not think this would be a problem, but the questioners believe that the interference between the sports will be significant.

Another cross-country official asked that as much work as possible be done during the summer so as not to interfere with the heavy fall cross-country schedule.

A question about the water cannons elicited the answer that while the hydrants will be permanent, the water cannons will be removable.

Bruce Silverman, representing the Riverdale Soccer League, expressed concern that the number of soccer fields is being reduced from 7 to 6, and that there are no youth-dimension fields. Mr. Aponte observed that the southeast corner of the Parade Ground might not be cricket only but might be multiple use. During the phased construction, the number of available soccer fields will be 3 or 4.

A softball league official asked whether there will be fewer permits (i.e., less space available) for softball and baseball, and Mr. Aponte replied, "Yes. It's going to be a trying 2 or 3 years."

Committee member Evelyn Tossas Tucker asked about the synthetic surface in Van Cortlandt Stadium. These surfaces have been reported to be possibly carcinogenic. Mr. Butz said he is knowledgeable on this issue and there is no definitive study on this

subject. Mr. Aponte concurred. The specific type of synthetic surface has not been decided yet, they said.

A cricket-league official emphasized how important the Parade Grounds cricket pitches are, saying that cricket has been played in Van Cortlandt "for 100 years." Commissioner Aponte pointed out that cricket pitches have recently opened in Ferry Point Park.

A questioner who identified herself only as a mother asked whether it might be possible to include some playground equipment or a play area for young children whose older siblings are playing sports on the athletic fields. Both Mr. Butz and Mr. Aponte thought this was a good suggestion and promised to look into it. The suggestion was made to locate this equipment on the slope from Broadway to the Parade Grounds.

The president of the Bronx Irish Soccer League observed that early notification of the dates of the work and availability of permits is imperative so that sports leagues can make arrangements to relocate or cancel games and matches as necessary. Other coaches and league officials echoed this sentiment.

In response to a question, Mr. Butz said that staging areas in the construction phases will be self-contained, i.e., Phase Two areas will not be used as staging areas during Phase One work.

The Athletic Director of Manhattan College, Bob Byrnes, suggested doing as much work as possible during the winter, when the Parade Grounds fields are little used. Mr. Butz said that he hoped the construction companies would do this, to the extent that weather permits.

In response to a question from Manny Grossman of the *Riverdale Press*, Commissioner Aponte observed that the synthetic field in the Stadium, the comfort station, and the phased construction work are all ideas that resulted from suggestions made in the scoping process.

Commissioner Aponte said, in response to a question, that he would investigate whether the private schools that use the Parade Grounds might be willing to make their own athletic fields available to local sports leagues. He said that Kelly Field in Van Cortlandt might be useful with some additional work but that Caryl Field would most likely require expensive work to be useful.

Responding to a question from Ann Marie Garti of the Jerome Park Conservancy, Mr. Aponte said that this meeting was standard procedure and that the plans were still "conceptual." He said that he expected that there would be at least one more meeting with the Community Board before everything is finalized.

In response to a question from the committee chair, Mr. Butz and Mr. Aponte said that they believed there was a reasonably high probability that the work would begin this

summer, although Mr. Aponte said he thought it unlikely that work would begin before mid-August.

Respectfully submitted,

Bob Bender
Chairman
Parks & Recreation

BB:db
January 31, 2008