

**COMMUNITY BOARD NO. 8 BRONX**

**MINUTES OF THE PARKS & RECREATION COMMITTEE MEETING  
HELD SEPTEMBER 24, 2008  
AT THE COMMUNITY BOARD 8 OFFICE**

PRESENT

AFFILIATION

Robert Bender	CB #8 Committee Chair
Thomas Durham	CB #8
Ari Goldman	CB #8
Evelyn Tossas Tucker	CB #8 Committee Vice Chair
R. Ackerson	
Joram Aris	
Herb Barret	Memorial Grove
Bill Carroll	
Mary Carroll	
Joseph Cohen	
Eileen Connolly	Department of Parks and Recreation
Jerry Cordero	Department of Parks and Recreation
James A. Donaldson	Friends of Van Cortlandt Stadium
Margaret Groarke	Ft. Independence Park Neighborhood Association
Charlie Guglielmo	
Neil Iodice	Friends of Van Cortlandt Stadium
Danna Liebert	
Mary Lufidio	
Karen Moody	
Rebecca Patt	
Margot Perron	Administrator, Van Cortlandt Park
Charles Reich	
Det. Luis Rodriguez	50 <sup>th</sup> Police Precinct
Lynn Schwarz	Ft. Independence Park Neighborhood Association
Nat Solomon	
Terry Stoeth	
Donald Tannen	Memorial Grove
Christine Taylor	Friends of Van Cortlandt Park

The meeting was called to order at 7:05 PM.

Minutes of the May 28 Committee meeting were approved.

Chair Bob Bender announced that Evelyn Tucker has been appointed Vice Chair of the Committee.

**Old Business**

The Chair reported on some parks developments over the summer:

Complaints were received about late night noise in two parks in particular, the park behind MS/HS 141, RKA, and Ft. Independence Park. Summonses were issued in both parks. (Further discussion of Ft. Independence Park followed later in the meeting.)

Complaints about the cutting of trees for a new parking lot at Frances Schervier were discussed at a recent Land Use meeting and will be further discussed at a future Land Use meeting.

Four mature street trees will be removed as part of the Kappock Street underpass construction. The Parks Department has promised to replace these trees with new plantings.

The restoration of the Henry Hudson monument in Henry Hudson Park was discussed by Eileen Connolly of the Parks Department. Equipment will be brought into the park to examine the structure in the first week of October and construction work is anticipated to begin in the spring. The goal is to finish the restoration in time for the 400th anniversary in September, 2009. A scope meeting will be scheduled soon.

The Memorial Grove was discussed. A scope meeting is expected soon. Tom Durham asked that this work be moved expeditiously in light of the loss of World War II veterans every day. Everyone agreed.

### **New Business**

Danna Liebert, a Riverdale mother, discussed her online petition concerning the installation of gates at McLaughlin playground on Greystone Avenue north of West 238th Street. Mothers of young children are concerned that it is too easy for toddlers to leave the playground. Eileen Connolly said that it should be possible to extend the fence and add gates appropriately. She wants the full community board's endorsement of the gates, and says the commissioner will approve the work if CB8 endorses it. The Chair promised to bring this matter to the attention of the board.

Sgt. Jerry Cordero of the Parks Enforcement Patrol (PEP) reported on PEP staffing levels. He explained that there are 80 PEP officers in the Bronx in the summer; 48 of these officers are seasonal. Most of those officers are assigned to borough pools; most of the others are assigned to recreation centers. Winter officer totals are considerably lower. Between January and August, 140 summonses were issued in CB8 and 12. Sixteen summonses were issued in Ft. Independence Park between May 3 and September 11, 2008.

Det. Luis Rodriguez of the 50th Precinct said that according to his records, criminal activity in Ft. Independence Park has decreased in the past year. He took no position on the issue of whether the park should be locked. He said that 29 summonses were issued in the last two months in this park, which is more than in the same period in the previous year. Det. Rodriguez said that the park is patrolled at night. The park closes at dusk, as do other parks in CB8, and anyone found in the park after that time may be issued a summons.

Margaret Groarke spoke on behalf of the Ft. Independence Park Neighborhood Association (FIPNA) to explain why FIPNA asked the Parks Committee last October to leave Ft. Independence Park permanently unlocked. She explained that locking the gates to the park makes the park inaccessible to most users, and that the gates are sometimes locked too early in the evening. People with criminal intent can easily climb into the park even when locked, she said.

Joseph Cohen of 3850 Sedgwick Avenue explained why the neighbors in his building object to leaving the park unlocked. He said that “a message is sent” when the park is not locked. He was joined by Nat Solomon of 3850 Sedgwick, who said that neighbors of the park have experienced a decline in their quality of life in the past year. He cited three specific incidents, one of which, in June 2007, took place when the park was still being locked at night. He also provided a copy of a letter written to him by Capt. D’Adamo of the 50th Precinct, in which Capt. D’Adamo said that it was his understanding that Ft. Independence Park would remain unlocked until a decision was made by the community and conveyed to the Parks Department by the Community Board. He also said that he was instructing his officers to “continuously monitor the Park, especially during the off hours.”

Each group – FIPNA and 3850 Sedgwick Avenue – had already submitted petitions with numerous signatures to CB8 in support of their position on whether to lock the park gates at night.

Det. Rodriguez said that it is impractical to expect police officers to carry keys to unlock the park if they need to gain entry. Some of the 3850 Sedgwick residents complained that the 50<sup>th</sup> does not respond to noise complaints. Detective Rodriguez said that response time depends on other demands on police officers.

Terry Stoeth, a Giles Place resident, urged both sides to find a compromise. All agreed that public safety and quality of life are significant issues that must be addressed, whatever decision is made about the gates.

Eileen Connolly of the Parks Department said that it is possible for a group of residents to take responsibility for locking the park at night. Opening it can be done by the park attendant in the morning, but that attendant leaves in the late afternoon, earlier than most residents want to see the park locked. She suggested that some of the park’s neighbors might want to form a group to lock the park. There was some discussion of risks and liabilities for individuals who choose to do this. The Parks Department can provide these people with identification and vests. There was agreement that volunteers should not try to insist that anyone leave the park but should instead report anyone who is in the park after it closes.

Both sides agreed to continue the dialogue outside the Committee.

James Donaldson and Neil Lodice of the Friends of Van Cortlandt Stadium made specific requests about the handball courts. They asked that the lights on the stadium above the handball courts be adjusted to come on earlier as daylight diminishes. They reported that the

wall between courts 1 and 2 is buckling. They said that the bathroom soap dispensers are always out of soap. And they complained that the meters along Broadway north of Van Cortlandt Park South (West 240th Street) up to the bus stop on the side adjacent to the park run until 10 PM. These meters run later even than the meters on Fordham Road, they said. They would like to see these meters end at the same time as the meters across Broadway. The Chair promised to bring this matter to the attention of the Traffic and Transportation Committee.

Herb Barret and Don Tannen of the Memorial Grove Restoration Group asked that the Committee stay involved and try to move forward the process of restoring the grove. They said that the \$250,000 provided by Councilman Koppell will be sufficient only to start the work that is needed. The Committee indicated its strong interest in seeing this work begin soon.

Joram Aris complained about a tree on the east side of Independence Avenue just below 246th Street that grows at a severe angle and badly damaged his back window. Because parking here is back-in angle parking, he says that the tree often causes damage to cars. The Chair promised to bring this matter to the attention of the Parks Department for inspection.

Robert Ackerson asked that new soil be brought into Phyllis Post Goodman Park when work on the Kappock Street underpass is completed. The Chair reported that this park is to be renovated when the work is completed and promised to monitor the restoration work for maximum effect.

The meeting adjourned at 9:05 PM.

Submitted by,

Bob Bender  
Chairman  
Parks and Recreation Committee

BB:db (September 30, 2008)