

COMMUNITY BOARD NO. 8 BRONX

**MINUTES OF THE PARKS & RECREATION COMMITTEE MEETING
HELD ON JANUARY 8, 2009
AT THE COMMUNITY BOARD 8 OFFICE**

**Presentation of the NYC Parks Department Plan for
Jerome Park Reservoir and Ft. Independence Park**

Attendees:

Committee members and CB8 members:

Bob Bender, Committee Chair
Anthony Perez Cassino
Tom Durham
Ari Goldman
Damian McShane
James Plaza
Evelyn Tucker
Herb Young

Parks Department

Hector Aponte, Bronx Parks Commissioner
Faisal Choudhury
Leon Fendley
LaShawn Wiggins
Shirley Echevarria
Anthony Parziale, MKW & Associates
Allen Juba, MKW & Associates

Karen Argenti, FIPNA
Richard Barr
Herb Barret, Memorial Grove, VCP
John Braut
Thomas Casey
Joseph Cohen, Mutual Housing
Assemblyman Jeffrey Dinowitz
Adam Dubin, Rep. Councilman Koppell
Glenn Fleischman
Anne Marie Garti, Jerome Park
Ezra B. Glaser
Joseph Gordon
Margaret Groarke, FIPNA
Beth Haase, Riverdale Nature Preservancy
Nick Judd, Riverdale Press
Robert Kornfeld, JPC/FOCA
I-C Levenberg, BCEQ
Michele A. Panossian, Mutual Housing
Lynn Schwarz, FIPNA
Conservancy
Nicole Torres, DEP
Ed Yaker

Parks Committee Chair Bob Bender began the meeting shortly after 7 pm. He introduced Bronx Parks Commissioner Hector Aponte.

Commissioner Aponte began the presentation by explaining that the project is being funded by \$4.5 million from the Croton mitigation funds. He observed that the Parks Department controls limited property around the reservoir.

Faisal Choudhury of the Parks Department explained the history of the project. It began with March, 2007 scoping meeting, followed by meetings with DEP and Lehman College. Because of DEP's ongoing work on the Goulden Avenue (eastern) side of the reservoir, no work is currently planned for that area. To install a running path around the entire perimeter of the reservoir would cost approximately \$8-\$9 million. Aside from DEP, Lehman has not granted access to its property. Ft. Independence Park is included in place of the eastern side of the reservoir. The project is conceived in two phases. Phase I is the area on the western side of the reservoir and Ft. Independence Park. The area to the south (Reservoir Avenue) is too

narrow to include a running path, as is the paved sidewalk outside Ft. Independence Park on Sedgwick Avenue. Phase II is the area on the southern and eastern sides of the reservoir. Alan Juba from MKW Landscaping, the project contractor, began his presentation. Mr. Juba remarked on the broad lawn strip on Sedgwick Avenue and the good condition of the trees there. He explained that the current configuration will be maintained, with some repair to the sidewalk where needed (in a concrete that will match the existing concrete). He continued his description through Ft. Independence Park, noting the area of poor drainage in the park that will have to be addressed. He commented that the running path will follow an old jogging trail in the park, and he observed that the dog run would be reduced in size and moved from the hill in the park. Wherever possible the running path will be positioned close to the reservoir. There will be a ¼-mile loop to the path in the park. New exercise equipment will be installed near the basketball and handball courts. Asphalt pavers and running symbols will be used in the park to identify the running trail. New trees will be planted at the northeastern exit from the park. Mr. Juba concluded his presentation.

Commissioner Aponte commented that the running path will come as close as possible to the reservoir. There will be a relatively soft running surface to the path. There will be a higher fence installed in the park behind 3850 Sedgwick Avenue, and the dog run will be moved.

Nicole Torres from the DEP commented that the DEP is reevaluating public access to the reservoir. She expects that this reevaluation will take approximately 9 months.

John Braut of AECOM said that 5 reservoir gatehouses will be restored. He showed designs of the proposed restoration and said there would be no negative impact from the work. The cost will be included in the filtration plant costs. The designs were generally well received without comment.

Questions

Anne Marie Garti of the Jerome Park Conservancy: Drop the running track; let's have access to the reservoir with an overlook. How much is the running track? Spend the money saved to fix up the Goulden Avenue side.

Commissioner Aponte: the legislation authorizing the project was very general. It authorizes a path, not beautification of Goulden Avenue. The goal is to give the community an amenity, which is the pathway, and to try to satisfy the largest number of people.

Faisal Choudury: The running track will cost around \$700,000. We cannot work on Goulden Avenue because the DEP is using it as a staging area and will continue to use it for perhaps 3 years.

Lynn Schwarz, FIPNA: The higher fence in Ft. Independence Park is essential. The current seating area in the park is in good shape and does not require renovation as the plan shows. Will the park be closed while the work is being done? The Giles Place entrance does not require renovation.

Commissioner Aponte: Higher fence will happen. Benches in the seating area will be repaired. The park will not be closed except that small areas of the park may be closed off at times. Agree that Giles Place entrance is OK as is.

Joseph Cohen, Mutual Housing (3850 Sedgwick): The dog run is a problem. It has destroyed the quality of life for people in 3850 Sedgwick. Why can't it be moved farther from the building?

Commissioner: This is the first presentation of the plan to the public. The space for the dog run has been reduced. People will bring their dogs to the park whether or not there is a dog run. Parks policy allows dogs off leash in parks from 9 pm to 9 am. (However, all parks close at 1 AM and some close at dusk.) The dog run gives the dog owners a place to go and better controls the dogs in the park.

Joseph Cohen: Can't the park be locked and closed?

Commissioner: The park closes at night, like all parks. Locking the gates is a community issue. The Commissioner thought that the community would resolve this conflict.

Richard Barr, Bronx Science Parents' Association: Will the Gatehouse 5 area be fixed when DEP is done there?

Commissioner: DEP is obligated to restore the area. The Parks Department wants the area restored to the best possible condition.

Dart Westphal: The meeting room is too small. The dog run takes up too much of the park; the space is needed for children. This is the only green space between Van Cortlandt Park and Harris Field. There is no reason for a loop in the running trail in the park. DEP must give up its land to the Parks Department.

Commissioner: There is no large area in the park to use for sports. This is not the last word on the dog run; there will be changes, but there are a lot of people who use the dog run.

Tom Casey, formerly VC Track Club: The DEP should take down the fences around the reservoir that keep the public out. Why can't the running track extend behind Lehman's parking lots?

Commissioner: There is only 6 to 8 feet to work with behind the Lehman parking lots. Lehman will not permit the soft running area there.

Robert Kornfeld: The meeting is bogging down in local issues. There must be a guiding overall plan for the reservoir. The park and reservoir are all one park. The pathway should follow the contour of the reservoir and not be shoehorned into other areas.

Commissioner: Phase I is a working plan. Ft. Four Park might even be considered as part of this plan. There is a need to spend the mitigation money now, while it is available.

Karen Argenti, FIPNA: This is a great design. At last we are getting a running track. What about the chess tables on Sedgwick Avenue that have become a hangout?

Commissioner: We are getting rid of the chess tables for this reason.

K. Argenti: Who will maintain this work when it is completed?

Commissioner: Parks is responsible for maintenance in park areas, not for DEP areas.

Assemblyman Jeffrey Dinowitz: Why not expand this plan to Reservoir Avenue where it is two-way? Why not create a broad Greenstreet there, at the south end of the reservoir? How do we expand the parkland around the reservoir? Are we getting capital funding for parks from sources other than the Croton mitigation fund? The Parks Department should be investing more heavily in the northwest Bronx.

Commissioner: Parks gets money only if the mayor and city council provide funding. We are getting \$100 million from PlaNYC over three to four years. The problem with Reservoir Avenue is that it is too narrow to support the running track. Expanding the sidewalk is a complicated process that requires DOT participation and approval.

Ed Yaker: Why is Parks spending money on sidewalk repair when that is already a city responsibility? Can't infrastructure funds be used? Can the City get money from the new federal stimulus package? Can we see these plans somewhere?

Commissioner: Everyone wants the stimulus money. Parks puts plans on its website only when they are final, and this project is not yet final. However, the plans can be posted on the Bronx Community Board No. 8 Website [Note: the plans are currently posted there].

Tony Cassino, CB8: Why is path looped as it is, bisecting the dog run?

Commissioner: The goal was to provide access to an overlook of the reservoir on the hill.

R. Kornfeld: How will you address the erosion? Can the dog run be part of the solution?

Commissioner: Where we install the dog run will require careful examination.

A.M. Garti: The parkland was not intended for dogs. Dog-walkers just took it over.

Karen Argenti: Agree with this point.

Ezra Glaser: The issue is maintenance. People don't use this park as much as they should because it isn't properly taken care of. If the park is maintained, it will be used.

Commissioner: We live in a different world now. The park is cleaned every day. We try to make it safe. Over the next five years things will get worse because we will have less money.

Margaret Groarke, FIPNA: The dog run can be smaller but the community wants some sort of dog run. Include us in the discussion about the park. Can we get more opinions on whether we need the exercise equipment and where to put it? Please pay more attention to drainage – and to maintenance.

Commissioner: We can eliminate the part of the running path that bisects the dog run. We will work with the community on the plans for the park. We can reconsider the exercise equipment if the community wants to, but there are very few places to put it. We will keep the park clean.

Joseph Cohen: Will there be new lighting in the park?

Commissioner: Yes, along the pathways.

Joseph Cohen: What happens after tonight?

Commissioner: We will revise the design. We intend to present only one design for approval, after it has been revised.

Karen Argenti: Can we continue the discussion about erosion? We don't want to use Belgian blocks or stones.

Commissioner: Yes, we want to avoid stones for safety reasons.

The meeting adjourned at approximately 9 pm.

Thanks to Ari Goldman for his assistance with the minutes.

Submitted by,

Bob Bender
Chairman
Parks and Recreation Committee

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