

BRONX COMMUNITY BOARD NO. 8

Minutes of the Parks & Recreation Committee Meeting Held on September 30th, at Manhattanville Health Care Center

Attendees

Committee Members: Bob Bender, Laura Spalter, Sylvia Alexander, Steven Balicer, Michael Heller, Marvin Goodman, Maria Khury, Robert Press (CB8); Thomas Durham. *Other CB8:* Robert Fanuzzi

DPR: Andrew Penzi, Rita Coelho, Margot Perron, Dennis Burton, Tannise Palmer

Others: Lawrence Moiatto, Memorial Grove; Councilman Koppell, Andrew Sandler, Councilman Koppell's office; Sarina Trangle, Riverdale Press; John Dougherty, Elizabeth Dougherty, J. Gran, Catherine O'Brien, Paul DiMauro, Ginny Fox, Adele Finer, Morgan McCabe, Harry Stevens, Suzanne Corber, Christine Dufresne, Stephen Farrell; James Collins, Mike Depasali, Manhattan College

Agenda

The meeting began at 7:05 PM. Minutes of the June 26 meeting were unanimously approved.

Ewen Park Design

Andrew Penzi and Rita Coelho presented a revised design for renovations to Ewen Park in response to comments made at the original presentation in April, 2013. Major changes include a reduction in basketball courts from two to one, and the addition of drainage swales near the proposed "tot lot." There will also be improved access to the main pedestrian walkway from W. 232 that will permit handicapped access. A drinking fountain and bike rack will be placed near the tot lot.

Following the presentation, there were numerous questions from committee members and neighbors. DPR indicated that fixing the heavily weeded northern area of the park near W. 232 St. is not possible with the current funding. DPR believes that the 4' high fence around the tot lot will offer sufficient protection against dogs using the nearby dog run. Neighbors complained that young people hang out in the park, sleep on the benches, and that the police do not respond when called. Others complained that the dog run is in disrepair, that the fence is too low and potentially dangerous to users of the tot lot. A neighbor said that because of an underground stream, the soil in the park is often soft and trucks will not be able to do the necessary construction work on the basketball court and tot lot. DPR said it is the contractor's responsibility to determine how to do the work within the existing conditions in the park.

In response to several complaints that the dog run should be given priority over the proposed projects, Councilman Koppell indicated that he provided funds for the purpose of the tot lot and basketball court renovation in response to requests at a scoping meeting. He observed that repairing the dog run could cost \$250,000 or more and that neighbors should ask his successor for funding to do this work. He urged that the proposed work go forward and not be delayed because of concerns over the dog run. Renovations to the dog run could take several years from funding request to completion of the work, he said.

A suggestion was made that the tot lot be locked at night, in part to prevent vandalism. Tannise Palmer, parks manager, observed that this would require staff to add this request to the current list of parks that are locked. She did not know of any playground that was locked separately from the rest of a park. Councilman Koppell said that he is unaware of any playground in his district that has been vandalized, and he believes that locking the playground is unnecessary.

Other concerns were voiced, including lack of a police presence in the park, inadequate trash pick-up, possible dust or noise caused by the construction. DPR said that the contractor will be required to abate noise and dust in accordance with existing regulations and that trash cans will be added.

The next step in the process will be for DPR to present the design to the NYC Public Design Commission (PDC). It will then take a number of months for a contract to be awarded and additional time for work to begin.

Following the DPR presentation, Heather Butts of H.E.A.L.T.H. for Youths described a \$2,000 grant her group had just been awarded for work on the dog run. She exchanged information with the dog owners at the meeting and offered to meet with them to discuss what to do with the money. The committee thanked Ms. Butts for her initiative in securing the grant and for her willingness to work with neighbors (she is a neighbor of the park, too).

Old/New Business

Chair Bob Bender reported on the current status of the proposed LG Building in Englewood Cliffs. It appears that a significant public demonstration of opposition will be necessary because LG is moving forward with its plans.

Margot Perron and Dennis Burton discussed the permitting process at the Van Cortlandt Parade Grounds. Permitting is not done in VCP, but two VCP staff workers check permits on the PG. DPR discourages unauthorized groups on the PG because if there is damage, no one knows who is responsible. If a permit holder causes damage, then DPR knows whom to blame and pursue for remediation. Permits are free for youth leagues, but not for adult leagues. If permit holders repeatedly fail to show up, they can lose their permits.

Soccer fields are being rotated so that the grass can recover from heavy use. Touch (flag) football is permitted on the PG.

Suzanne Corber of Save the Putnam Trail asked that DPR expedite her group's plan to fill a boggy area on the Putnam Trail. She said she has had no response since June. Margot Perron indicated that DPR is reluctant to authorize work on the trail while the proposed major renovation is pending, but that it will evaluate the proposal.

In response to a question about the fence at Cooney Grauer Field (Kingsbridge Little League), Tannise Palmer suggested that this subject could be addressed at the District Service Cabinet meeting or Borough Consultation Meeting on October 4.

Ms. Palmer explained the process for inspecting trees. Parks managers are supposed to report trees in or near playgrounds that might pose a hazard – for example, dead branches or trees that are leaning or “hanging” – and trees near pathways in parks that also appear potentially hazardous. Trees in forested areas are not inspected. Parks managers rate tree hazards according to certain categories; those believed to present an imminent danger are addressed as quickly as possible. Tree pruning is done on a regular cycle by the forestry division. The chair

noted that the forestry division has been asked for a schedule for tree pruning but has not yet responded. This matter will be put on the agenda for the Borough Consultation meeting.

A question was raised about the condition of the street tree on Corlear Avenue between West 230 and 231 Streets, which may be the oldest tree in the Bronx. The matter will be pursued with DPR.

Questions were raised regarding the status of the proposed skateboard park in VCP, and the Greenstreets proposals, notably the one at W. 236 St. and Riverdale Avenue. The former will be brought up in Borough Consultation meetings; the latter with the Traffic & Transportation committee because DOT establishes the Greenstreets. DPR maintains them once established.

The meeting adjourned at 8:55. The next committee meeting will take place on Wednesday, October 23 at the Van Cortlandt Park Golf House. The main agenda item will be a discussion of the proposed Van Cortlandt Park master plan by Charles McKinney of DPR.

Bob Bender
Chair
Parks & Recreation Committee