



CITY OF NEW YORK  
**MANHATTAN COMMUNITY BOARD 10**  
215 West 125<sup>th</sup> Street, 4<sup>th</sup> Floor—New York, NY 10027  
T: 212-749-3105 F: 212-662-4215

**BRIAN A. BENJAMIN**  
Chairperson

**ANDREW LASSALLE**  
District Manager

**PARKS AND RECREATION COMMITTEE MINUTES**  
Wednesday, May 10th, 2017, 6:30pm  
**Hon. Karen Horry, Chair**

Meeting began at 6:45 pm and was held in the 4<sup>th</sup> Floor Conference room. The meeting was chaired by Hon. Karen Horry, Chair.

**Committee Members in attendance:** Chair Karen Horry, Troy Gethers, Crystal Shipp, Derrick Graham and Henrietta Lyle

**Committee Members Excused:** Maurice Sessoms and Kevin Bitterman  
Committee

**Members Absent:** Arian Punter, Mark Bones and Leevert Holmes

**Guests in attendance:** Kieishsha Garnes (District Manager CB 10- NYC Parks), Marlene Masson (Candidate - District Office/Community Liaison), Robert Ramsey (Studio Director - Central Park Conservancy), Sandra Huber (Associate Vice President for Program Management - Central Park Conservancy), Dr. Leonard Jeffries (Drs. Jeffries Foundation), Reggie Mabry (Drs. Jeffries Foundation) and Judynell Johnson (130th Street.....)

## **PRESENTATIONS**

The following privately funded projects A and B are part of the Conservancy's effort to work in the sixteen playgrounds that have not been comprehensively rebuilt in the last decade, in order to raise all of Central Park's playgrounds to the same standard of excellence at the same time, as outlined in "*Plan for Play: A Framework for Rebuilding and Managing Central Park's Playgrounds*". Grounded in the Conservancy's experience renovating and rebuilding the Park's playgrounds over the last thirty-five years, the "*Plan for Play*" identifies seven overarching design goals:

- Improve the relationship between the playgrounds and the Park
- Enhance the quality and variety of play experiences
- Maximize user accessibility
- Ensure compliance with current safety standards
- Preserve unique and successful aspects of existing designs
- Practice sustainable design and construction
- Design innovative solutions

## **A. Reconstruction of the East 67th Street/Billy Johnson Park - Central Park Conservancy**

### Existing Conditions

- The water feature—intended to originate from the amphitheater and flow under the stone bridge—never functioned as originally planned; instead, a standard spray bollard was added in the vicinity of the bridge.
- The large sand area near the entrance lacks play value—the original wood play features deteriorated and were removed in recent years.
- The space at the bottom of the granite slide is extremely tight relative to the amount of activity that occurs in this spot; in addition, the slide is not accessible, and the entrance to it is constricted and does not comply with current standards.
- The existing swing area is not compliant with current safety standards that require a larger clear zone around swings and fewer swings per bay.
- Existing pavements throughout the playground are not accessible.
- Rustic features, including timber-edged paths, arbors, and the existing gazebo, are deteriorating and missing elements.
- Limited planting exists between the playground and perimeter wall, and the composition of the plantings within the playground require attention.

### Proposed Scope of Work

- Establish a water feature at the amphitheater as originally intended; reactivate the runnel and flow of water to the stone bridge that was part of the original design concept; install spray jets throughout the amphitheater stage and area around the bridge, replacing the existing spray bollard with a user-active spray feature that is interactive and conserves water.
- Introduce a net-climbing experience in the existing sand area.
- Create a second granite embankment slide to provide an accessible slide as well as accommodate the younger age group in the playground.
- Replace current bucket swings to comply with current safety standards, and introduce a tire swing for greater variety. Expand upon the existing rustic arbors at the entrances to the play area with a more extensive rustic pergola and benches that provide seating for caregivers while better integrating the swing area into the character of the larger design.
- Replace deteriorated timber edges of paths and roof of existing pergola.
- Regrade and repave the playground for accessibility. Regrade the path leading to the playground from Fifth Avenue for accessibility.
- Enhance and diversify plantings throughout the playground.

## **B. Reconstruction of the East 108th Street Bernard Playground - Central Park Conservancy**

### Existing Conditions

While the existing playground is generally successful, focused opportunities exist for improvement, and aspects of the playground are not compliant with current safety and accessibility standards.

- The play value of the existing water spray feature is limited by its continued reliance on the original infrastructure of the 1930s playground, and the spray bollard is an inefficient use of water. The play equipment in the central area is not compliant with current safety standards, which require larger clear zones; additionally the color and character of the equipment impacts unnecessarily on views from the Park landscape and Fifth Avenue.
- The swings are not compliant with current safety standards, which require larger clear zones and fewer swings per bay.
- Granite block borders in the pavement of the playground are not compliant with accessibility standards.

#### Proposed Scope of Work

- Reconfigure the swing area and replace existing swings to comply with current safety standards; this will require enlarging the elliptical space occupied by the swings, rotating it parallel to the perimeter to accommodate the six existing bucket swings and one adaptive (accessible) swing.
- Replace existing post-and-platform climber / composite play equipment with a new version that provides similar play experiences but is configured to comply with current clear zone requirements and designed to be less visually impactful from the Park and perimeter.
- Replace the existing sandbox, incorporating an accessible sand table and introducing a water source for additional play value.
- Replace the existing spray bollard with a user-active spray feature that is interactive and conserves water.
- Repave playground for accessibility.
- Replace the existing four foot steel panel fence.
- Replace existing wood and concrete benches with new ones.
- Enhance landscape plantings between the playground and the perimeter wall.

### **C. Reconstruction of the Belvedere Castle - Central Park Conservancy**

Located on the west side of Central Park, just north of the 79th Street transverse road, the Belvedere is one of the most visited destinations in the Park and the visitor center with by far the highest volume of foot traffic. Conceived as a lookout point on some of the highest ground in the Park, it offers sweeping views across the Great Lawn to the north. The views and the Belvedere's context are dramatically changed from what they were in the original construction of the Park as a result of the filling of the old Croton Reservoir and creation of the Great Lawn in the 1930s.

#### Project Goals

- Implement a comprehensive core and shell restoration of the existing historic structure.
- Modernize mechanical systems and supporting utilities.

- Address the accessibility of the facility.

### Existing Conditions

The Belvedere today exhibits a number of building envelope issues resulting both from decline in the decades since previous restoration efforts and areas that have never been thoroughly addressed. These include:

- Poor drainage resulting in standing water on the esplanade and upper terraces have contributed to deterioration of the parapet walls as well as water infiltration into the structure.
- Inadequate exterior drainage has resulted in iron oxide staining on exterior masonry.
- The wood pavilions on the esplanade and upper terraces are showing signs of deterioration.
- Pavements on the esplanade and upper terraces and stairs leading to them are deteriorating.

### Scope of Work: Belvedere Restoration

- Restore parapet walls and terraces with effective drainage and waterproofing systems.
- Replace missing portion of original coping on parapet of second floor terrace.
- Clean and repaint exterior masonry.
- Restore the wood pavilions, and recreate the decorative wood tower at the northwest corner that was not included in the scope when the pavilions were recreated in the 1980s.
- Replace existing pavements in esplanade and upper terrace and restore stairs. Hexagonal asphalt pavers installed in the 1980s will be replaced with square bluestone pavers of contrasting tones in a checkered pattern, as per the original design executed in 1871.
- Replace existing windows, main entrance door, and upper terrace doors with clear-pane glass to evoke the original character of the structure as an open-air pavilion.
- Replace interior finishes including bluestone ceiling and floor panels, modernizing mechanical systems, and upgrading utility services.
- Creation of an accessible route from the East Drive, the design of which draws on aspects of the history of the site; evoking the precedent for: (1) a strong linear progression to the Belvedere from the east side; (2) the Belvedere's originally integral relationship to the reservoir's retaining wall; and (3) the experience of broad views from the elevated vantage point of the promenade along the reservoir wall.

The scope of the proposed design for this aspect includes:

- Regrading and realigning the existing park paths between the East Drive and the Belvedere to create an accessible route across the total elevation change of 25 feet.

- To accomplish the required grade change, the path south of Turtle Pond (in the vicinity of the old reservoir and promenade) will require a retaining wall and parapet in order to raise the elevation.
- While located roughly along the route of the existing path (to minimize impact on existing trees and connect with current park circulation), the path will be straightened to recreate the linear progression of Lovers' Lane and the reservoir wall and the experience of approaching the Belvedere from the elevated promenade on the reservoir wall.
- The design of the wall will be based on an existing retaining and parapet wall constructed in the 1930s at the northeast corner of the Belvedere to resolve the change in relationship between the Belvedere and its surroundings when the reservoir was removed.
- Viewed from the park landscape to the north across Turtle Pond, stretches of the wall visible in the winter will evoke the historic relationship between the Belvedere and the reservoir wall. Denser vegetation in the warmer seasons will obscure the path to a greater extent, resulting in stippled views of the wall.
- The new grade at the east side (rear) of the building will be approximately six feet higher than the existing grade, creating at-grade access to the staff touch-down space and restroom on this level. (The existing stairs—which were added along with the service door by the U.S. Weather Bureau in 1919—will be removed).

The project will be privately funded. The Community suggested that signage be included to commemorate the famed African American Seneca Village spanning the 18<sup>th</sup> to 19<sup>th</sup> centuries.

**Outcome:** Committee sentiment is in favor of the projects and recommends issuing a Letter of Support for all three. This will be conveyed to the Executive Committee.

## **DISCUSSIONS**

### **A. African American Burial Ground**

In partnership with New York City Council Speaker Melissa Mark-Viverito, the Harlem African Burial Ground Task Force, and the East 126th Street Bus Depot Task Force, New York City Economic Development Corporation (NYCEDC) launched a community-based planning process for the redevelopment of the former East 126th Street MTA Bus Depot. The project proposes to honor the history of the site and meet the needs of the community through a new memorial and mixed-use, mixed-income development.

The East 126th Street Bus Depot site has had many uses over the years. It once sat within the Dutch village of Nieuw Haarlem, which was then a sparsely populated agricultural area far removed from the densely developed settlement of New Amsterdam at the southern tip of Manhattan. Over 350 years ago, the Reformed Low Dutch Church of Harlem and its associated cemeteries were located in this Dutch settlement, with the first church building on or near a

portion of the bus depot site and near the shore of the Harlem River. The Harlem River was wider at that time and extended through the northeastern corner of the bus depot lot. Over time, the shoreline was filled into the east, expanding the block to its current dimensions. The site was developed into an amusement park at one point and casino at another, and later into a film studio. The property's historical development culminated with the construction of the existing bus depot in the 1930's.

Adjoining the Reformed Low Dutch Church of Harlem was a plot of land identified as the "African Burying Ground at Harlem," now known as the Harlem African Burial Ground, which had stayed active until at least 1856. The church, however, was relocated in 1825 and the burial ground was sold in 1853, thus marking the beginning of a succession of sales, different uses, and adjustments to the burial ground site. Unfortunately, the decades of neglect, construction, and subsurface disruptions resulted in the altering of the original Harlem African Burial Ground.

The Metropolitan Transportation Authority (MTA) is currently in the process of vacating the bus depot and returning the site to the City. Acknowledging the immense historical significance of the site, the City has begun its work in partnership with the speaker of the New York City council's office, elected officials, and community stakeholders to develop a transformative mixed-use project at the site, centered on a new Harlem African Burial Ground memorial and cultural center to honor the significance of the site and its descendant community.

### Archaeological Findings

In the early 2000s, an intensive documentary study found the potential for a historic cemetery in the vicinity of the East 126th Street Bus Depot site, requiring archaeological monitoring for proposed construction. MTA completed a Phase 1A archaeological assessment in 2011, and NYCEDC commissioned a Phase 1B archaeological assessment in 2015.

Learn more about the Phase 1B and its archaeological findings from the video below.

The former MTA bus depot in East Harlem was once the site of an African burial ground dating back to the seventeenth century. The 126th Street Harlem African Burial Ground Memorial and Mixed-Use Project proposes to preserve this essential piece of Harlem and New York City history. At the heart of the project is the creation of a living memorial and cultural center to acknowledge the historical significance of the site. The project plans to include a mixed-use development component with housing, commercial uses, and public open space that meet the needs of the East Harlem community.

Since early 2015, NYCEDC has worked in partnership with the Speaker's Office on a community-based planning process for the redevelopment of the site. The

Harlem African Burial Ground Task Force (HABGTF) and Bus Depot Task Force (BDTF) were formed to help determine the best uses for the site.

On February 21, 2017, the project entered the City's Uniform Land Use Review Procedure (ULURP). Prior to this, the project underwent an environmental review with a public scoping meeting held on Tuesday, September 27, 2016. The Final Scope of Work, which includes a Response to Scoping Comments, as well as the full Draft Generic Environmental Impact Statement (DGEIS), can be found on the Mayor's Office of Environmental Coordination.

Recently, in response to the East Harlem Neighborhood Plan's call for deep affordability, the City committed 20 percent of the site's residential units to be affordable to families earning no more than 30% of Area Median Income (AMI). As the project advances through public review, the affordability program will continue to be refined through community input. Over the course of ULURP, NYCEDC presented on the proposed set of land use actions at a series of public meetings:

- **Wednesday, March 8, 2017** - Community Board 11 Land Use Committee Meeting, 7 East 116th Street, 6:00pm, NYCEDC presentation
- **Tuesday, March 21, 2017** - Community Board 11 Full Board and Public Hearing, Museum of the City of New York, 1220 Fifth Avenue, 6:30pm, NYCEDC presentation and opportunity for public comment
- **Tuesday, April 11, 2017** - Community Board 11 Economic Development Committee Meeting, 7 East 116th Street, 6:00pm, NYCEDC presentation
- **Wednesday, April 12, 2017** - Community Board 11 Land Use Committee Meeting, 7 East 116th Street, 6:00pm, NYCEDC presentation and CB 11 Land Use Committee resolution
- **Tuesday, April 18, 2017** - Community Board 11 Full Board Vote, Location TBD, 6:30pm

#### Harlem African Burial Ground Task Force

In 2009, the Harlem African Burial Ground Task Force was created, co-chaired by Speaker Melissa Mark-Viverito and Rev. Dr. Patricia A. Singletary, the pastor of the Elmendorf Church.

This task force was instrumental in guiding the historical research and discovery of the African Burial Ground site. In 2011, Community Board 11 designated the Harlem African Burial Ground Task Force as the organization representing the interest of the historic colonial cemetery.

#### Bus Depot Task Force

In 2015, after the MTA moved much of their operation off-site, the Speaker's office convened the East 126th Street Bus Depot Task Force, a group of elected officials, City agencies, and community stakeholders including the Harlem African Burial Ground Task Force, to discuss the goals for the site.

After many meetings, it was determined that the future of the site should have the following goals:

- Develop a living memorial and cultural center to honor and commemorate the significant social, economic, and cultural history of the cemetery and its descendant community
- Create a mixed-use, mixed-income development program
- Enhance site connectivity to the neighborhood
- Realize a financially feasible program to support project uses
- Maximize job creation

#### News & Updates

*African Burial Ground Project Will Have Some Units for Extremely Low Income Families*

March 09, 2017 | Source: City Limits

*Harlem bus depot will give way to affordable housing, African Burial Ground memorial*

March 09, 2017 | Source: Curbed

UNIFORM LAND USE REVIEW PROCEDURE (ULURP) 2017 - FALL 2017:  
On February 21, 2017, the project entered the City's Uniform Land Use Review Procedure (ULURP). Prior to this, the project underwent an environmental review with a public scoping meeting. The ULURP clock runs for approximately 7 months. Required reviews include:

Community Board 11 - 60 days

Borough President 30 days

City Planning Commission -60 days

City Council 60 days

In 2018, after ULURP approvals, a Request for Proposals will be released to select a development team to redevelop the site and meet the public goals established by the Task Forces, community, and elected officials.

**Outcome:** Committee sentiment is in favor of advising the CB 10 community of the progress of the project and issuing a position statement.

#### **Announcements**

244 Signatures and letters of support were submitted on behalf of the park renaming initiative for "St. Nicholas Playground North" to "Byrd's Classic Park" in honor of William A. Byrd, Sr. The park (M211B – Playground 103) is located at West 130th Street and Adam Clayton Powell, Jr. Blvd. The park was named after St. Nicholas, the patron saint of Amsterdam whose likeness adorned one of the ships that brought the first Dutch settlers to New Amsterdam. Parks Commissioner Samuel Parsons designed the park

himself. The park next expanded in 1909, when the park's southern boundary was extended to 128th Street. In 1931, a playground opened along 129th Street. A new playground was erected on this site in 1965.

The playground is currently undergoing renovation construction under the Parks Department's Mayoral Community Parks Initiative. It is 28% complete and a Letter of Support to the Executive Committee for its consideration.

### **Community Gardens**

A public forum hosted by the Parks & Recreation and Housing Committees was scheduled to be held on June 5th.

The Committee **did not have quorum**. Five of the ten standing members were not in attendance. The Committee strongly suggests that members attend to achieve quorum for all future meetings.

**Meeting was adjourned at 11:00 pm.**

***~Respectfully submitted by Parks and Recreation Chair, Karen Horry~***