

PARKS AND CULTURAL AFFAIRS COMMITTEE – MEETING MINUTES

January 6th, 2015 – Payson Playground Building

Committee members Present

Mitch Glenn, Chair
Osi Kaminer, Asst. Chair
Kelley Boyd
Juan Mejia
Elizabeth Lorris-Ritter

Committee Members Absent

James Berlin
Richard Lewis

Board Members Present

Arlene Schulman
Gloria Vanterpool

Public Member

Public Member Absent

Patti Jacobs

Guests

Nina Koenigsbeg, Jennifer Hoppa (DPR), Nancy Preston, Sandra García-Betancourt (NoMAA), Adrian Cabreja, (Manhattan Times), Aaron Scott, Bruce's Garden, Lindsay Armstrong (DNAinfo), Pat Courtney & Tim Frasca (Volunteers for Isham Park), Trish Anderson (Inwood Canoe Club), Peggy Gitler, France Price, Kathleen O'Sullivan, Sarah Sally Fisher.

The meeting was called to order at 7:10pm by the Committee Chair Mitchell Glenn with introductions and welcome.

1. Sandra Garcia-Betancourt, Executive Director of the Northern Manhattan Arts Alliance (NoMAA), gave an overview of her organization. In the seven years since its formation, NoMAA has brought a lot of attention to the arts sector in northern Manhattan. They put on three shows annually, including one in March for Women's History Month, and a show featuring the work of NoMAA grantees. The organization also provides technical assistance to and workshops for artists, as well as sponsoring and coordinating the annual ArtStroll.

NoMAA's latest proposed collaboration is with the MTA, DoT and the Washington Heights Development Corporation to place the ArtStroll poster in the subway and bus shelters. This would provide maximum exposure for the artist with the winning design, as well as advertising the Stroll to the public transit riding public in the neighborhood and throughout four of the five boroughs. This would be a year 'round project, not just for the month of the ArtStroll. Ms. Garcia-Betancourt noted several other upcoming projects, including a technical training institute for artists, and a seminar on arts advocacy and social change. Finally she spoke of uniting Community Boards 12 & 9 to expand arts awareness between West Harlem and Washington Heights/Inwood. She also thanked CB12 and the Department of Parks & Recreation for their ongoing support and partnership in many arts projects.

2. Bennett Park Renovation Nina Koenigsberg, community resident, spoke about issues regarding the Bennett Park renovation, primarily that the park no longer serves as a convenient thoroughfare for residents of Pinehurst Avenue. The northern side of the park has a clear pathway which curves from the stairs at Ft. Washington Ave to the northern exit on Pinehurst Ave. at W. 185th St. The southern side has no such clearly demarcated path, as the circular dirt area around the trees are tangential to each other. In the previous design of the park, the tree pits were smaller, and there was a clear path between and around them as one travelled through the park between Ft. Washington & Pinehurst Avenues. She asserted that this is an inconvenience for some, and a potential hazard for others, particularly the elderly. She also stated that the benches currently lining the southern perimeter of the park and scattered throughout the park are inadequate to meet the needs of the elderly; specifically, the loss of the curved benches which had lined the former path is an impediment to community building among the elderly who used to use said benches. She shared a petition requesting replacement of the benches and the path.

Jennifer Hoppa, the Northern Manhattan Parks Administrator, stated that the latest renovation of the Park was done with \$1.2million, \$600k each from the then-Councilmember and Borough President. There were many meetings with various community groups including seniors (in collaboration with CB12 Aging Committee Chair Gloria Vanterpool), families with young children, dog owners, etc. There was significant outreach to and participation of residents of the buildings around the park, including Hudson View Gardens. The Committee was involved in many of these meetings, and reviewed the plans before recommending them to the full Board.

There are many, often competing, demands on the park, which needed more than the allocated funds could cover, so DPR came up with a conceptual plan and a 2-phase implantation. Only Phase I was funded. The project sought to tell the story of the park, including its Revolutionary War history; to highlight the presence of the highest natural point in Manhattan – previously this site marker was obscured by fencing; to make the lawn smaller (and NOT a dog run!); and to add adequate space for games and other gross motor movement. Phase II will renovate the playground and northern sitting area, and move the comfort station towards the center and out of the playground. When the Public Design Commission reviewed the plan, they made recommendations which would amplify the historic design, including the addition of the cannon, and to add more porous surfaces to increase rainwater recapture. (This is why the tree pits are so much larger.) DoT approved the lighting plan, which is within the standard for foot-candles. Phase II, which would renovate the playground and seating areas at the northern end of the park and relocate the comfort station outside of the playground, has yet to be funded. (Unfortunately, it has fallen in CB12's overall capital priority ranking, and was not included for the current fiscal funding cycle.)

Ms. Hoppa stated that since Phase I was a publicly funded capital project with a useful life of more than ten years, it will not be ripped up and redone. She agreed that benches around the trees would be a good idea, and that might not need to wait for a new capital project to implement. She assured that any empty tree pits would be filled under the current tree contract, but that this work is seasonal and wouldn't happen until spring. Many of the other needs identified by the petition would be addressed by the Phase II renovation when/if funded.

After much discussion, it was suggested that DPR install some signage, e.g., "children's play area" to guide children towards the playground and southern plaza, and away from the paths, and minimize conflicts with seniors. It also was suggested that those signing the petition advocate for funding of Phase II during the fall budget ranking process.

Parks Department Update: Jennifer Hoppa

A. Inwood Hill Park Mapping Project:

- In order to make Inwood Hill Park more navigable, NYC Parks has been developing a trail marking system. Two long trails have been trail blazed to date.
- In order to facilitate use of the interior of the Forest and to highlight the park's amenities, we developed a brochure of the park.
- This work was all done in consultation with NYPD's IT/911 division. The destinations on the map will be coupled with on site signage at those destinations. The destinations have a GPS point connected to them, so that if a park patron has a problem or sees one, there are several other markers in the park that they can use to say that they are near, etc.
- When the ground warms up, we'll be installing the signage and will be doing large scale maps with "You are here" at the park entrances. There was some discussion of the possibility of adding "QR" codes so that park visitors with smartphones could learn more about each area, and can access maps and other information about the park. Roof repairs to the restaurant in Ft. Tryon Park; concessionaire temporarily closed. Restrooms still available; ADA-compliant portable toilet will be used during the asbestos abatement.

B. Capital Projects

- NYC Parks, through corporate funding through IAMS and funding from Inwoof, has installed new fencing along the entire perimeter of Homer's Run in Inwood. It looks stunning.
- Isham Park water service project is advancing
- Fort Tryon Park's pathway job progressing, likely finish early Spring

- New Leaf Restaurant's roof is being restored. Contractor to begin tomorrow. Work is expected to be complete by Spring, when the new operator of New Leaf will reopen the site to the public.
- MTA will be doing drain cleaning in Inwood Hill Park around the bridge to improve drainage and prevent further erosion along its outfalls. When the weather warms up they'll resume the pathway repaving work they are doing adjacent to their parking facility and under the bridge. Again, the goal being to minimize their trucks through the parks' pedestrian paths in the long-term. With the pathway adjacent to their parking lot paved, their bridge maintenance trucks don't have to enter the park and disrupt the park and its visitors from Indian Road/218th all the way up to the toll plaza
- Eco Dock: Received its DEC permits. We are awaiting a few more federal and state ones. (US Army Corps of Engineering has been verifying/ok'ing our specific location of the Eco Dock)
- The High Bridge continues to advance. I hope everyone saw the NBC News broadcast on the Bridge's Reopening. Please tentatively mark your calendars for a community planning meeting on the reopening of the High Bridge. We will be postponing this planning meeting, since our Partnerships Division is working to develop a framework and identify partnership opportunities for both the opening festivities and for the months leading up to and following the reopening. Community Planning meeting will likely be February.

C. New Leaf Restaurant: NYRP assigned their existing agreement, which had approx. 4 years remaining on the term, to a new operator. Parks reviewed the assignment agreement, vetted the new operator, and subsequently gave their approval. Therefore, a new RFP was not required. In accordance with the City's concession rules, public hearings are required for new significant concession agreements which are awarded through an RFP. This is not a new agreement. The same parameters for New Leaf's operation will apply to Coffeed. A "significant" concession is defined as being 10 or more years and/or \$100k or more in fee payments to the City per year. That new concessionaire is Coffeed, which currently operates several concessions at other parks throughout the City, including their flagship operation in Long Island City. Several people, including Committee members, expressed sadness over the loss of the New Leaf Café as the community has come to know and love it, as well as concern with the lack of public input. Osi Kaminer asked why the Committee wasn't advised of the issues/changes as they happened, before the DPR vetting process of potential vendors? Ms. Hoppa stated that since the terms of the concession are unchanged the process is consistent with NYC guidelines and regulations for franchise operations. She also stated that Coffeed has a good reputation for running quality restaurants and for giving a portion of their operations to the betterment of community organizations; in addition, this vendor will offer a greater selection at a lower price-point, which has been an ongoing concern with the New Leaf Café. Coffeed also is looking into the possibility of offering a weekday breakfast operation, instead of just lunch & dinner, and weekend brunch.

D. Concessions, Licensing & Events: This segued into a brief discussion of the need for an understanding of, and a presentation on, event permitting. Although there have been many presentations over the years by various people in the DPR Revenue Division, the City Council's Franchise & Concession Review Committee (FCRC) and the Mayor's Office of Contracts, these have generally been specific to a particular project being presented to and reviewed by the Community Board. In addition, changing personnel at the Committee level means that newer members would not have had the benefit of these presentations. Liz Ritter suggested that the Borough President's Office, which already offers a number of introductory training workshops (e.g., land use, budgeting, parliamentary procedure, etc.) could offer a session on contracting. Mitch Glenn will follow up with the DM and the MBPO.

E. Upcoming Programs /Activities

- Dyckman Farmhouse in Miniature: Don Rice of Inwood constructed a miniature version of the historic Dyckman Farmhouse in Lego. The Dyckman Farmhouse is the oldest Farmhouse in Manhattan. Photos of Don's model and possibly his model, are going to be on display at the Indian Road Café, from January 11th through February 13th.
- In an effort to inventory the rich ecology of Inwood Hill Park's natural areas, and to develop a framework for its ongoing management and care, NYC Parks' Natural Resources Group and the Natural Areas Conservancy are Mapping Inwood Ecology. A community meeting was held on Thursday December 18th, NYC Parks' Natural Resources Group and our Natural Areas Conservancy gave a presentation on the progress of their mapping of Inwood's ecology as well as some of the social survey data they've collected to date from Park visitors using Inwood Hill Park. We've asked them to have a presentation in February, in the evening, so that more people can

be informed about results to date and provide input on them, etc. Look for a mid February Date on the Natural Areas Conservancy Website and I'll ask the Community Board to help get the word out as well.

- MULCHFEST: January 10th & 11th, 10am – 2 pm, at: Bennett Park at 185th/Fort Wash; Highbridge Park at 173rd/Amsterdam; J. Hood Wright at 173rd/Haven; Inwood Hill Park at Seaman/Isham (Volunteers Joan Keaner and Martin Collins will be on site at this station giving out hot cider from the Farmer's Market.)

F. Wifi Parameters (in response to a question from Committee Member Richard Lewis last month, here are some basic facts about the WiFi at each site:

- Range is typically 250-300 feet from the access point for best coverage (circular coverage area from access point)
- For J Hood Wright, once complete, the WiFi should cover the playground area, the main lawn and dog run, and the baseball/multi-purpose field. In addition, indoor WiFi should cover the multi-purpose room and the Computer Resource Center
- For Highbridge, we propose coverage for the area around the watertower, at Raoul Wallenberg Playground (most of playground) and at Juan Bosch Plaza (seating area)
- Time Warner Cable will be providing the WiFi and it can be accessed in three different ways:
 - a. Three, free 10 minute sessions per month per device (can be used separately or all at once)
 - b. If free thirty minutes have been exhausted and user is a Time Warner Cable or Optimum wireless broadband subscriber already, they may log in to the system for unlimited browsing.
 - c. If free thirty minutes have been exhausted and user does not have wireless broadband subscription, they may purchase a day pass for \$.99

G. Mural on wall of 4986 Broadway adjacent to southern perimeter of Isham Park A supporting resolution was tabled by the full Board at the December meeting, several members having requested proof from the landlord that he approves of having a mural installed on his private property. That written documentation having been obtained, it was proposed that fourth whereas be amended as follows: "Whereas: The owner of the building has written to Community Board 12 to inform the community that Girl Scout Troop 3210 and CAW have received permission to undertake this project; and" The amended resolution was approved by the Committee 4-0-1-0, and will go to the full Board on Jan. 27th. (One Board member also voted in favor. The public vote was 2-3-0-0; there remain concerns that the Board should not weigh in at all on any expression of public free speech on private property.)

New Business Osi Kaminer suggested an official template for the Minutes, all were in favor.

Announcements Pat Courtney introduced Tim Prescott, who will be assuming leadership responsibility and the public face for Volunteers for Isham Park (VIP). Sally Sara Fisher is facilitating the Parks & Environment Committee for C/M Rodriguez' participatory budgeting. Next meeting is Friday Jan. 9th at 6:30; info: sfishernyc@gmail.com.

There being no mail and no further business, the meeting was adjourned by acclamation at 9:05, with thanks to the Parks Department for hosting at this off-site venue.

Respectfully submitted: Elizabeth Lorris Ritter