

PARKS AND CULTURAL AFFAIRS COMMITTEE – MEETING MINUTES

June 2nd, 2015

Committee members Present

Mitch Glenn, Chair
Osi Kaminer, Asst. Chair
Domingo Estevez
Barbara Frazier
Richard Lewis
Elizabeth Lorris-Ritter
Juan Mejia

Committee Members Absent

Kelley Boyd

Board Members Present

Mary Anderson

Public Member

Public Member Absent

Patti Jacobs

Guests

Shakara Petteway (NYRP), Paul Kittas (Coogan's Bluff), Lindsay Pressman, Pat Courtney, Trish Avdabor (Inwood Canoe Club), Daniel Mercado (DPR Manager), Karen Jolicoeur (Creative Art Works), Joel Yoffie, Chris Whitney (Friends of Inwood Hill Park), Danica Doroski (Partnership for Parks), Christophe Lobry Boulanger, Eileen Merle-Rao, Sara A. Fisher (Friends of Inwood Hill Park)

The meeting was called to order at 7:10pm

1. Update from Danny Mercado Northern Manhattan Parks:

Highbridge will be open on June 9th at 10:30. The ceremony will take place on the bridge and will be open to the public. On July 25th the Highbridge Festival will open, running for a month with music and other activities. DPR is working on funding to get the tower repaired, especially the roof.

Drums Along the Hudson will take place in June 14th

Highbridge Park pool will be open on June 27th

The Ring Garden's *Art in the Garden* is scheduled for June 6th, 2015 from 10:30am to 6:00pm (Rain date June 13th).

There was a question asked about the scheduled dates and number of events that are permitted for LaMarina. PCA Chair indicated that at the May meeting DPR representative David Cerron was given a number of questions to address for the next meeting in June. He

was unable to come to this meeting and is still working on the reply to our questions from May. PCA Chair sent DPR representative David Cerron a series of emails that he only responded to the day prior to our June meeting. In a phone call Cerron stated that he is working on the response and some of the issues need to go through DPR's legal division in order for him to talk about it. Mr. Cerron was not ready to come back with replies to our questions; therefore, he is not present at this meeting. He promised to give us a full response and to be available in the future. PCA Chair emphasized to Mr. Cerron that we want to be partners and that we hope that this will be one of a series of meetings that we can work on together.

Community member asked about permits process in the parks: a party of twenty (20) people or more require a permit that must be submitted twenty-one (21) days in advance of the event. If amplified music included in the event than the party need to request two (2) permits: gathering permit from DPR and a sound permit from the NYPD. DPR will also need to approve the sound permit from the NYPD. Alcohol, smoking, plants, flowers, and camera tripods are not permitted and sound emitting from the party can only be permitted for four (4) hours a day total for all permitted events taking place at the same location.

There was a concern about Inwood Hill Park littering. There are four (4) Parks Enforcement staff serving all Northern Manhattan parks. Mr. Mercado stated that it will be most helpful to complain to the elected officials and the precincts in our area to patrol the parks.

Committee Member indicated that Raul Wallenberg Basketball court has some unused court hours. In addition, some individuals take up permit spaces but don't use them.

Committee member asked how to solve the problem of people drinking alcohol in the park. Mr. Mercado indicated that the Precincts need to enforce that. Ms. Frazier indicated that at the last 34th Precinct meeting DI Morello explained that he had been giving extra time and over time to officers and even had them conduct bicycle patrols in the parks but because of a lot of the chaos with the strip of restaurants and LaMarina he had to assign these officers on late night duty to monitor the restaurants and they were pulled off parks duty. If officers were not pulled off their intended duty then we would have had six (6) officers patrolling our parks. Basically, it was said, the restaurants are getting free security services at the expense of the parks. Four PEP officers are not enough to cover the issues in the parks in our district.

Mr. Mercado stated that there is overtime in the budget that is used for cleaning the parks but maintenance staff cannot be everywhere to clean every corner at all times.

Committee member stated that the Wright Brothers Playground on 156th street is overcrowded and overused and that there are no Parks people there on a long-term basis to deal with the population. Mr. Lewis stated that he warned that there would be problems and the previous week there was a shooting in the playground. There is no one around there to patrol.

Committee member addressed the issue of geese being killed by teens on May 29th in Inwood Hill Park. DPR has an education program available but since the Nature Center is closed education programs are running from Payson House. DPR is not actively visiting schools to

run education programs. Committee member stated that DPR and schools should partner up to educate teens.

Committee member indicated that the fact that the Nature Center is closed has a lot to do with teen mayhem in the parks. Without the Nature Center no education is coming out from the peninsula with no real structure at that end of the park for years now. At this point there is no timetable to open the Nature Center since the money from FEMA has been delayed. It was pointed out, though, that education from the Nature Center was stopped prior to Sandy.

Committee member asked for an update about Isham Park water service, as the work was stopped over 90 days ago and there's been no notification about what's going on. The contractor failed to meet his contractual obligation and cannot afford to pay his employee. DPR stopped the money until the contractor finishes his job obligation per the contract. Ms. Courtney then asked when grass will be planted on the patches that are now uncovered and when the hundreds of invasive sapling trees growing all over will be removed. Mr. Mercado said that these issues will be addressed.

2. Friends of Inwood Hill Park

This is a new group started by Sara Fisher and Chris Whitney. The goal of the group is to increase stewardship opportunities in Inwood Hill Park. The first event took place on May 16th, where thirty-five (35) families came to the event and the group picked up litter, had free chess lessons and hiked in the park. They also planted 25 kinds of native plants and weeded some invasive species. The idea was to bring the old group back and come up with a strategic plan and apply for a grant to fund the group. They have a Facebook page and website to follow. www.inwoodhillparktrustnyc.com

There will be another cleaning event on July 16th and it will be run by Dichter Pharmacy. The plan is to run events year round. Chris also worked in an after school program and he took kids to the park for planting and weeding and learning about the natural environment. The group got accepted to the Partnership Academy Fellowship to come up with a strategic plan and also apply for grants funding.

3. Paul Kittas talked about Highbridge Aqueduct iPhone apps

For the opening of the Highbridge, Paul is preparing two apps that will include the historic area in Highbridge that was not included in DPR maps: *Finding the Highbridge Aqueduct* and *On Coogan's Bluff* apps. The application is for individual use on smartphones. A physical map for people without a cell phone was suggested.

4. Arts and culture announcements

- The People Storm the Palace: a non-profit people's theater group that presents 'theater of the oppressed' as opposed to well-known produced plays. There are two (2) plays

that work with kids and adults on Saturday June 6th. This year the Theater honors Zabryna Guevara & Monica Klehr. And the event will be co-hosted by Michael (Juan Bago) Diaz & Mino Lora.

- Washington Heights and Inwood Food Council in conjunction with City Harvest are meeting to talk about how to improve food access and local supermarket food quality. The issue to address is why people are going to other neighborhoods for food shopping. Food Forum will take place on June 16th at Isabella where food quality will be discussed.
- Jenny Morales ran a research study with Fordham University in conjunction with DFTA that funds senior centers to do programs and the heads of the centers decide what programming will go on in the centers. They are calling and speaking to seniors themselves in a 30 minute phone conversation and the seniors receive \$20 for completing the survey.
- Art Stroll started on Friday night and will continue for a month with plenty of events. Listing is available on the NoMMA website <http://www.artstroll.com/>
- Ring Garden 'Art in the Garden 2015' will take place starting on June 6th where different artists will be presented
- United Palace free screening of Selma on June 9th
- Dyckman House will reopen on Thursday June 4th

5. Old business: Concessions

Committee member indicated that since we have so many needs and requirements a resolution about concessions in the parks should include the total number of special events, a limit of the number of events and hours of operation and a provision for community input. It was expressed that it is disappointing that Mr. Cerron did not come back this month with answers to the questions presented at the May meeting. Committee Chair indicated that Mr. Cerron should be a partner with us so we both gain from this learning process. The special permits issued were asked of Mr. Mercado, who agreed to provide them at the end of every month from here on as a start. Unfortunately, these permits do not include concession special permits which are only available from Parks Revenue.

Committee Member indicated that we should look into soliciting specific vendors to run concessions in our parks by the request of our community not decided solely by DPR but solicited by DPR per the community's request.

Community member stated that she proposes a resolution that LaMarina report back to the Committee and that the Committee requests that DPR follow State and Federal laws and make sure that concessions or the DPR notify us of special events in advance. Additionally, the public is supposed to have access to the beach area at La Marina. Currently, this access is

limited to Saturday afternoons. There was some conversation among committee members that the committee propose a resolution asking DPR for access to concession special permits, as this is meant to be part of the public record. This resolution will be considered in the fall.

A Committee member expressed frustration that LaMarina owners feel that once patrons leave the premises it is not a La Marina problem; that its the NYPD's problem. But, in fact, the public suffers because officers had to be removed from park patrol to deal with the La Marina customers leaving.

Several Committee members stated a desire to have a meeting on July 7. The Chair felt a July meeting was unwarranted.

The meeting adjourned at 9:55pm