

**Community Board 12, Manhattan**  
**Parks & Cultural Affairs Committee Meeting: December 12, 2017**  
**CB12 Conference Room (530 W. 166<sup>th</sup> St., 6<sup>th</sup> fl., NYC 10032)**

Committee Members Present: Elizabeth Lorris Ritter (Chair), Mitchell Glenn (Ass't Chair), Daryl Cochrane, Natalie Espino, Domingo Estevez, Barbara Frazier, Richard Lewis. Board Members Present: Richard Allman. Staff: Ely Silvestre. Also attending: Chris Hansen-Nelson; Asta Hansen-Nelson; Claire Dudley; Steve DesNoyer; Brad Conover; Shiela O'Byne; Trish Anderton, Inwood Canoe Club; Ann Hartenstein; Robert Cox; Marlene Kofman; Michael Fuhrman, RowNY; Patricia Gurty; Keisy Duran; Wesley Hamilton & Charlene Edwards, NYC Parks; Ilya Kharkover; Mike Herman; Wade Trefethen; Matthew Wemple; Mark Posey; Jan D. van Cort; Anneke van Cort; Deborah Barrett; Lester Carpenter; Andrew Goldstein; Edna Fernandez.

**Meeting called to order at 6:35pm.**

1. 6:35pm **Welcome, Opening Remarks & Announcements** (Mitchell Glenn, Assistant Chair as Liz Ritter arrived a few minutes late.)
2. 6:40pm **NYC Parks Report** (Wesley Hamilton, NYC Parks) See full report in separate document.
  - In the process of getting bids for the Amtrak bridge project, along the path from the W. 181<sup>st</sup> Street pedestrian bridge to the Little Red Lighthouse area. Parks would look for an alternate path for folks that travel north of that area, most likely incorporating the path at the top of the stairs of the comfort station located at the south end of the tennis courts.
  - In the bidding process for the Dyckman Farmhouse upgrades (ADA accessibility, roof repair).
  - Steps to the south of the Ann Loftus playground to be completed by Spring 2018.
  - Audubon Playground is in the design stage.
  - Morris-Jumel House - working on getting ADA accessibility.
  - Inwood trails upgrade is in process.
  - Trails cleanup day was December 8<sup>th</sup>.
  - Q (Daryl): progress of the Javits playground; Wesley indicated that it's temporarily stalled as bids came in at approximately \$600,000 over bid. The Committee and public wanted to know what is the plan to fund the gap; Wesley will have Parks report back on that.
  - Q (Daryl): update on Pinehurst steps terraced garden? A: waiting on agreement from DoT.
  - Domingo asked about the Wallenburg Playground renovation. Wesley did not know but will get back to the Committee. Note: see discussion re safety issues in Wallenburg at end of meeting.
  - Question from the public about the re-opening of Gorman Park, following a sudden closing due to safety concerns following a mudslide. No answer as to when it will be re-opened.
3. 7:10pm **Announcements**
  - Wesley: Mulch Fest will take place at the Ann Loftus Playground January 6 & 7, 2018, 10am-2pm. Trees will be chipped and turned into mulch which you can take home for your garden. Several other parks in CD12 are available as Christmas tree drop-off sites, including Bennett, J. Hood Wright, Sherman Creek, and Inwood Hill Parks.
  - Liz announced a then-upcoming Klezmer concert.
4. 7:15pm **Bennett Park Proposed Dog Run** Presentation by Brad Conover & Matthew Wemple. Bennett Park is between Ft. Washington & Pinehurst Ave., btw. W. 183<sup>rd</sup> & W/ 185<sup>th</sup> Streets. Liz began the discussion by noting that this issue has come up several times in the past and while previously it has been decided to not put a dog run in Bennett Park, it is always good to re-evaluate how our parks are used in light of what may be changing needs. This discussion will begin with a presentation by the neighbors who would like to see a dog run in Bennett Park, and will be followed by a Q&A discussion; everyone who would like to speak will have the opportunity to do so by show of hands. Let's keep it civil; people can disagree without being disagreeable.

Presentation: Dog runs provide much needed socialization both for dogs as well as their owners. The presence of dog runs helps to reduce crime, and keeps the park cleaner. The neighborhood has two well-used runs, in Ft. Tryon and H. Hood Wright Parks, but we need something close as those are too far to walk during the week. It would be cleaner as there would be a single area for dogs, and owners are required to clean up after their dogs, even in dog runs. Additionally, we will have signs for barking dogs to help reduce noise from barking. Proposed run would be outside of the current fence perimeter on the southern end. New fencing of 100' and 30' would be required. No trees to be removed. Area is approximately 30' x 100' (3,000 sq. ft). 250 have signed a petition in favor of the dog run, approximately 200 of whom are from the neighborhood. Opponents have a petition of only 110 signatures. Perhaps there's room for compromise; we could have a trial run.

Wesley: est. J. Hood Wright Park dog run construction cost was ~ \$173k, excluding maintenance.

#### Questions from the Committee:

- Liz: A dog run generally requires a dog owners' group or friends-of organization that takes responsibility for the area's maintenance and upkeep. A Facebook group is a good start, but 30 active volunteers who have expressed interest but don't have an established mechanism to support a dog run may not be enough. Also, where would the money for this project come from? There are many pressing capital priorities that are as yet unfunded. Matthew: what about private funding, is that okay. A: As long as no corporate names are used, it could be possible. Domingo suggested they look into Partnership for Parks for potential collaboration.
- Natalie: Did they do any research on the crime statistics that was cited in their presentation? A: this is general information from the Human Society. Liz: it is widely accepted that activating a park with usage helps make the park safer. That said, crime in Bennett Park at this point is negligible so this is moot. Natalie: re cleanliness issue, will having a dog run keep dogs from toileting outside the dog run or will this keep it contained to the dog run? A: It won't stop a dog from doing its business in other areas.
- Richard Lewis: Has there been a dog census, i.e. an analysis of how many dogs live in the surrounding community and would have a need for a dog run? A: Don't know. There are a lot of dogs. Richard: cleanliness and sanitation are two different things. Also noted that there is a public law to pick up feces of one's dog. A: While they didn't seem fully aware of all the techniques to ensure both cleanliness and sanitation, they indicated they had no plan for removal of dog urine. They said they would likely use the same standards as any other dog run.
- Barbara: Questioned the park size; this proposed dog run is too small, and unhealthy to dogs. It was later clarified that such size guidelines was for dog parks, not dog runs, which can be fairly small. Barbara also questioned the topography of the area, noting that it seemed to be on a hill and that may be an additional challenge for drainage and the construction of a flat area.
- Mitchell: No question; indicated that he'd like all of us to walk out of the meeting happy.
- Daryl: I live just two blocks away from Bennett Park. How close would the southern fence be to the park's boundary wall's edge? A: Don't know. Q: Where is the gate? A: NW corner. Q: Where do dog owners go now, as there are dog runs to the north at Ft. Tryon Park and to the south at J. Hood Wright Park. A: Don't know; some will travel to either of those, while others just keep to the streets or inside the current confines of the Park. Q: would large dogs be allowed, given the small proposed area. A: Yes, but aggressive dogs would be prohibited.
- Domingo: We need more facts, but the Presenters are on the right path.

#### Questions & Comments from the Public

- Claire Dudley: Lives across the street from the park. Thinks the proposal should be denied because of size of the park. The area is too small and the infrastructure needed for a dog run would fill in a significant part of this already small space. A significant layer of chips and soil is needed, as well as a curb for drainage. There's a habitat there on the southern end of Bennett Park, with woodpeckers and hawks. That would disappear with the constant presence of dogs. (People subsequently brought up that the significant rat population. While some think the

presence of dogs would help ameliorate that situation, others are skeptical. Several people observed that rats are more likely caused by people feeding the pigeons.

- Ilya Kharkover: The perimeter of the park is a useless piece of land currently; a dog run would be of community benefit.
- Chris Hansen-Nelson: Applauds the effort and community activism, but opposes the dog run. Lives across the street from the park. Despite the area being beyond the current fence of Bennett Park, it's still utilized by kids in the area who play among the trees there and it makes it feel like an actual park. Dogs are welcome in the current regular area of the park: in the open area south of the cannon, the notable bedrock, and along the sides and perimeter. Concerned about the denuding of the trees in the area, mainly caused by dog urine. Despite the proposed assurances that "no trees would be removed", the presence of dog urine would kill them anyway, having the same impact as removal. Also, dogs playing in a confined area will be very loud.
- Patricia Gurty: Lives 30' from the proposed area. Drainage is a big issue and that the current drainage after storms is already bad, as can be witnessed on the south boundary wall of the park. Without proper drainage there is flooding and the area becomes muddy. This would be exacerbated by the presence of hundreds of dogs each week. Also concerned about denuding.
- Kasey Duran: The area is already overcrowded. There are more and more kids in the neighborhood. We need \$174k to be invested in the kids, for whom there is an obesity epidemic, rather than dogs.
- Richard Allman: Applauds the proposal as a good presentation. There are trade-offs with the proposal versus the status quo. We need a community study to look at the larger picture and see what residents want in Bennett Park, what amenities are needed overall, and how this best incorporates to the broader needs of this particular section of Washington Heights.
- Daryl: When was the recent renovation of Bennett Park. A study was already likely done at that time. Questions the need for another study about Bennett Park, but would like to see the results from it. A (Wesley): a few years ago. *[Note: the renovation was completed in 2012.]*
- Steve DesNoyer: retired landscape architect from the NYC Parks. In my experience wood chips don't work well as they are not hygienic and need to be replaced often. Rats are attracted by the food for pigeons and will not be deterred by dogs. 9pm-9am courtesy hours were omitted from Bennett to preserve the central lawn.
- Andrew Goldstein: We need clarification of the leash law. It does not seem to be enforced properly. There was a discussion about off-leash courtesy hours and what are the rules. Dog owners currently getting ticketed if they're in the park after hours with dogs off leash. Liz clarified that it NYC Department of Health regulations require that dogs be kept on leash. The Parks Commissioner can grant off-leash courtesy, typically 9pm-9am and his/her discretion, but that this is not granted in small parks, in playgrounds, or in parks where there already is a dog run. Bennett Park does not have courtesy hours, though enforcement of leash laws often is lax.
- Marlene Kofman: A place is needed for dogs to gather in our community. Not having a dog run is a huge hole in the fabric of socialization for dogs and their owners. We need healthy dogs who get exercise so they can be well-behaved. A dog run would also be good for elderly, as some cannot physically travel to the other nearby dog runs.
- Mark Posey: How does existing signage in the Park ("Park closes at dusk.") impact this proposal? Would this leave people open to fines? A (Liz): there is a difference in parks after hours between using the park as a walk-thru from the subway, and congregating. Will ask Parks for clarification. Mark suggested an alternative location for a dog run: the old bocci ball courts, next to the volleyball courts behind the 190th Street A train entrance at Ft. Washington Ave. Several commented that it would not be a viable alternative, as it is still about 7 blocks away, more than a quarter mile and the steps to get there would not make it accessible. Also there already is a dog run in Ft. Tryon Park.
- Domingo: We need a needs assessment for the project.
- Barbara: Convenience seems to be the strongest issue here.
- Asta Hansen-Nelson: Would the presence of a dog run attract more people to the park? Without one, dog owners either utilize the nearby dog runs or the existing Bennett Park, while other

simply utilize the streets and sidewalks. Would this then draw people who don't normally come to the park?

- Ilya: I haven't seen children play in that southern section of Bennett Park in the proposed area. Why not use it as a dog run. Children can play in the wooded area at the western perimeter of the park. Dog owners tend to be out earlier and late at night. Perhaps changing the leash laws or suspending them for this park would be a compromise.
- Lester Carpenter: Dog owners just want a place to take their animals. I'm like an uncle to a dog, I don't have children. I see lots of wildlife in the park and don't think the presence of dogs would be a concern. A dog run would have benefits for everyone in the community.
- Chris: I see a community of dog owners in the Park already, even without a dog run. All welcome.

Liz read a summary of comments that came in by email: a petition with 115 signatures and 81 negative comments, as well as emails, 3 in favor and 16 opposed.

A vote was taken on the idea of a dog run in the southern perimeter of Bennett Park.

- Opposed to the dog run: Board 2, Public 10
- In favor: Board 0, Public 6
- Needs for further study as to actual need, costs and feasibility, adverse impacts, possible alternative locations: Board 6, Public 3.

Liz summarized that she would reach out to NYC Parks and share the minutes of this meeting, the PowerPoint® presentation and supporting petition, the opposing petition, all of the pro/con emails received [*Note: 3 additional emails in favor were received in the days following the meeting*], and would ask Parks to respond with what is/are:

- involved to construct a dog run generally?
- the structural requirements and costs for a dog run in this proposed location?
- the ongoing maintenance requirements and costs?
- the organizational requirements and maintenance commitments of a Dog Owners Group?
- other possible alternatives in Bennett Park or elsewhere nearby for a dog run?

5. 8:50pm **New Business** Issues at Highbridge Park's Raoul Wallenburg Playground, raised by area resident Deborah Barrett. There is constant congregating of people to the park, often more than 25 people (the maximum number allowed without a permit) at a time. Deborah has witnessed either doing drugs, selling drugs, drinking, possessing guns, playing loud music to the point where nearby windows tremble, and burning trash. This occurs after 10pm, through to dawn. She has been working with the 34<sup>th</sup> Precinct (Troutman & Rodriguez), but they haven't been able to resolve the issue, as they do not witness it themselves in many cases.
- Domingo: Part of the problem is that people scatter when the police go through, so they don't see it and then people come back. Also, this seems to be less of a problem than in the past.
  - Liz: although the Community Board works with the Precinct to identify "hot spots" and problem areas that people bring to our attention, this is fundamentally an enforcement issue. It is wrong for the NYPD to refer it to the Community Board for enforcement.
  - Barbara: helpful to work with the Precinct Community Council (of which she is chair) and attend those meetings. (Next PCC meeting is tomorrow.) Deborah said she's already worked with NYPD and they have referred her to the Community Board.
  - Daryl: also urged Deborah to work with Council Member Rodriguez's office.

There being no additional business, **the meeting adjourned at 9:15pm.**