

Community Board 12, Manhattan
Parks & Cultural Affairs Committee Meeting: September 4, 2018
Yeshiva University's Furst Hall (535 W. 185th St., NYC 10032)

Committee Members Present: Elizabeth Lorris Ritter (Chair), Mitchell Glenn (Assistant Chair), Daryl Cochrane, Domingo Estevez, Richard Lewis. **Excused:** Barbara Frazier, Karen Taylor. **Other Board Members:** Steve Simon. **Also attending:** Randy Affelbaum & Jon Greenfield, Yeshiva University; Melissa Moschitto, The Anthropologists; Trish Anderton, Inwood Canoe Club; Joanna Castro, NoMAA; Charlie Reynoso, NY Restoration Project; Jennifer Gonzales, Charlene Edwards, ; Jennifer Hoppa, NYC Parks; Allison James, NYC Council; Meghan Alvarez, RowNY; Natalie Espino & Sun-ah Han, MBPO; Brian Cox & Yitzhak Carroll, YU students; Obed Fulcar, Friends of Sherman Creek; Ned Klein.

The meeting was called to order at about 6:10pm in the W. 185th Street Plaza by the Chair. There was a brief intro and welcome from Yeshiva University Director of Government & Community Relations, Jon Greenfield, including an explanation of some of the construction plans at YU and a discussion of how best to use the street plaza area on Amsterdam Ave. which currently is under construction by Con Ed. The meeting adjourned to the seating set up in the W. 185th St. Plaza for general discussions.

1. Announcements opening remarks

- a) The Parks Dept. bridge in Ft. Washington Park south of W. 181st St. over the Amtrak tracks was recently closed for emergency repairs, based on input from DOT, which will take the lead on evaluating it for repairs and effecting same. It is hoped that the bridge will be reopened in time for the Little Red Lighthouse Festival at the end of the month, but the timeline is dependent on DOT & Amtrak. The Parks Department will work on making another path available to access Ft. Washington Park and the Little Red Lighthouse without having to go all the way to the Denny Farrell Bridge or the footbridge at the base of W. 155th St. Liz urged Steve to look into re-opening the bridge for Rosh Hashana so that those living in the 180th – 190th St. area who observe holiday customs would access to the waterfront.
[Update: due to delays from Amtrak the bridge wasn't repaired/reopened until 11/9. In the interim, the Parks Dept. staff made improvements to a footpath just south of the GWB to access FW Park; these improvements were done just prior to Rosh Hashana.]
- b) Melissa Moschitto, Artistic Director of The Anthropologists announced the upcoming production of "This Sinking Island," an interactive family-friendly production on climate change, to be presented free of charge at six different locations throughout CD12 in October. For more information:
www.theanthropologists.org/this-Sinking-Island,
- c) Joanna Castro, ED of the Northern Manhattan Arts Alliance (NoMAA) announced several upcoming programs, including a writing clinic on Sept. 10th; "Sukkawood," an outdoor installation on the theme of habitats in keeping with the upcoming Jewish holiday of *Sukkot*; and "Neighborhood Anthem," a program based on the intersection of humanitarian relief and the arts as they relate to Puerto Rico post-Maria.

At this point the meeting moved indoors for presentations from the Parks Department.

2. **NYC Parks Presentation on the Renovation of the Quisqueya Playground Comfort Station** (Jorge Prado) The comfort station is 400 square feet (20x20). Construction will cost \$1.7 million and will take approximately 18 months; currently the project is in design, and will take about 9 months for procurement prior to construction. The ramps around the building will be removed and the area around the building regarded. The project will also replace the doors, which will open out (rather than in, as currently), and will add windows for better lighting. The issue of gender-neutral and larger family-friendly restrooms was raised again; this also is an issue at the Wright Brothers playground. Although the Committee very much would like to see a resolution of this issue that meets a more modern sensibility with regard to non-gendered bathrooms and ADA considerations, it is understood that public restrooms in parks pose a unique challenge because of homelessness and also use of bathroom facilities by some members of the population for drugs or other illegal purposes. Unless the facility has staffing it is difficult to have non-gendered bathrooms. There was no objection to the design; the item does not require a resolution.

3. **NYC Parks Presentation on the Installation of an HVAC System in the Highbridge Rec Center** The Highbridge Rec Center was built in 1936 and is landmarked. There is no air conditioning as this was not a common technology at the time, and it was never retrofitted for same as the facility was used in the summer for changing rooms for the pool. Since the “Splash House” changing area was built on the pool deck in 2012 for use as a changing area, the Rec Center has reverted to year-round use, but it is incredibly uncomfortable during between May-October. The current project proposes to replace two gas-fired steam boilers and add two hot-water heaters in addition to adding roof chillers. The roof additions are barely visible or not visible from the typical pedestrian and vehicle street view, and it was unanimously believed that this did not impact the historical nature of the view, and that the minimal visual impact was vastly outweighed by the benefit of air conditioning. It was noted that a possible addition to future budget priorities might be better window sealing and weatherization to minimize leakage of heat/cooling. See attached reso, unanimously approved by the Committee (5 members).
4. **NYC Parks Report** (Jennifer Hoppa, NYC Parks Northern Manhattan Parks Administrator) **Capital & Programming updates:** many upcoming events as well as \$206 million for 19 current projects. Of note:
 - a) Waterfront infrastructure to repair balustrades along Harlem River which date back to the 1800’s.
 - b) The carillon for the Highbridge Water Tower is not currently funded.
 - c) Dyckman Rest (northern end of Highbridge Park) received \$5 million through the Inwood Rezoning.
 - d) Basketball courts in Wallenburg Playground will be resealed.
 - e) Javits Playground renovation is in process, having broken ground last month.
 - f) There will be another scoping meeting for Anne Loftus Playground.
 - g) J. Hood Wright fitness area begins construction later this month.
 - h) \$19 million for Hudson River bulkheads and beach.
 - i) 181st St. Step-Street at Pinehurst Avenue is in design.
 - j) Audubon Playground: delayed until Fall due to technical/engineering needs.
 - k) Inwood Hill Park slated for \$9 million upgrade to soccer fields.
 - l) Monsignor Kett Playground will be getting a \$14 million overhaul.
 - m) Morris-Jumel Mansion will be reconstructing the Octagon Room ceiling.
 - n) Progress and status of all projects can be followed online through the Parks Department Capital Projects Tracker: <https://www.nycgovparks.org/planning-and-building/capital-project-tracker>.
 - o) Also announced that there will be an RFP for the restaurant in Fort Tryon Park over the winter. Asking for any comments by October. The current lease is up in January of 2020, and the goal is for there to be a new lease in place (either a renewal of the current concessionaire, or a new concessionaire, depending on how the bids come in) at the conclusion of the current lease.
 - p) No complaints were received about the lights at IHP ballfields for the additional hours this Summer.
 - q) Obed asked about fencing in Highbridge Park along the path from Edgecombe Ave. to the ballfields. Jennifer promised to put in a work request.
 - r) Daryl asked about Gorman Park. Jennifer noted that there was a retaining wall collapse. The project is in design (~12 months), plus nine months for procurement and twelve months for construction.
5. **Capital & Expense Budget Priorities:** materials from last year distributed for consideration and discussion at next month’s Committee meeting.
6. **New Business:** Ned Klein asked what is happening with Juan Pablo Duarte Sq., the triangle between W. 169th & 170th Streets, where Broadway crosses St. Nicholas Ave. The crosswalk has been kept open, but the seating area is closed; it would be nice to have that re-opened. Jennifer explained the long history of problems with illegal drug use in this area; so far the only thing that has worked is to close the seating altogether. Ned was referred to Dana Hockenbury of the WH Gardening Crew, a volunteer organization that for years has been working in and around JPD Square to improve and beautify it.

There being no additional business, **the meeting adjourned at 8:45pm.**

Respectfully submitted: Elizabeth Lorris Ritter