

Community Board 12, Manhattan Parks & Cultural Affairs Committee

April 9, 2019 (CB12 Conference Room / 530 W. 166th St., 6th fl.)

Committee Members Present: Elizabeth Lorris Ritter (Chair), Daryl Cochrane (Asst. Chair), Barbara Frazier, Mitchell Glenn, Francisco Lopez; Nobles Crawford & Alexis Marnel (Public Members) **Excused:** Domingo Estevez, Karen Taylor. **Other Board Members:** Chair Richard Lewis, Sally Fisher. **Other Attendees & Guests:** Laura Daigen-Ayala; Lawrence Washington, NYRR; Meghan Alvarez, RowNew York; Amy Cohen, Edem Adika, Genefer Duren, Gabriel Garrera, & Benjamin Jacquez III, CUNY's Sophie Davis School of Biomedical Education; Carmen Kuakel, Pied Piper Children's Theatre; Chris Whittaker, WH Orchestra; Kristen King, Gabe Cummings (NYC Parks Natural Areas Conservancy); Ricardo Hinkel & Rebecca (architect team for Parks), Charlene Edwards (J. Hood Wright Rec. Center), & Jennifer Hoppa (Northern Manhattan Parks Admin), NYC Parks & Recreation; Edith Prentiss, Disability In Action; Arlene Schulman; Evelyn Neal; Shilo Holley; Charlie Reynoso, NYRP; Alex Martinez, Inwood Little League; Peggy Gillen & Frank Price; David Thom; Lisa Ahearn; Adam Fran; Jeanine McCadam, Friends of Bennett Park.

The meeting was called to order at about 6:30pm by the Chair.

1) Introductory remarks, updates, & announcements:

- Introduction of **new Public Member:** Alexis Marnel, Director of Community Outreach at the Morris-Jumel Mansion
- **Moment of Silence** for former NYC Parks Commissioner Harry Stern, who died on 3/27/19 at 83.
- **Happy National Poetry Month**
- The **Waterfront Alliance** gave an extensive presentation on design/improvements of the waterfront edges to Land Use committee; refer to that Committee's March minutes.
- Next Month at PCA Committee meeting, we'll hear a presentation from NYC Soccer Initiative for a **proposed new acrylic mini-soccer field in J. Hood Wright Park**
- Brother Jimmy's proposed restaurant at **La Marina** has been removed from agenda (item #7) since there is **no new news**. Manhattan River Group is up for final determination by SLA of their violations from 2018 which resulted in the suspension of their liquor license. *[Ed. Note: The SLA revoked MRG's license at the 4/10/19 hearing. MRG has 20 days to appeal and then a hearing process would take place.]*

2) Brief Cultural Programming Updates (6:45pm):

- Morris-Jumel Mansion: Shiloh Holley, new ED. Announced programs, including the bimonthly **paranormal investigation** events (3 or 4 left before summer).
- As no one from NoMAA was in attendance, Liz reminded people of the **Uptown Art Stroll**, and if you're an artist, the deadline for being in the printed guide is April 28th, and the online guide would be in the middle of May. This year for the first time, there will be an Art Stroll scavenger hunt. Opening reception will be Wednesday, 5/29 at the United Palace. *[Ed. Note: This subsequently was changed to Tuesday, 5/28.]* Edith Prentiss noted that **accessibility information** for the Art Stroll is not listed on the website; Liz will contact NoMAA to ask that this information be included.
- Friends of Inwood Hill Park: **Earth Day** celebrations on the 27th & 28th; May 4th river sweep.
- **Washington Heights Inwood Food Council:** awarded a 3rd gardening plot in Sherman Creek (behind PS5).
- **Pied Piper Children's Theater:** Involved in fundraising campaign "A Community Thrives", and has raised \$34k from a \$3k goal. Fundraising ends this Friday (4/12). More info: www.PiedPiper.nyc

3) **Lawrence Washington, New York Road Runners re Open Run Program** (6:57pm) This is a partnership between NYRR & NYC Parks to promote community running, walking & fitness, as well as facilitating fitness partners. This community running group does 5k runs and walks in community parks. Meet every Saturday at Inwood Hill Park at 9am. Inwood Hill Park Open Run is turning 3 years old. Handed fliers to share w/neighbors.

4) **Gabe Cummings, NYC Parks Natural Areas Conservancy** (7pm) Presented updates and general information on trail improvements and maintenance, and volunteer opportunities.

- Inwood Hill Park: blazed 4.2 miles of trails and worked on 11.5 miles of paved and unpaved trails as well as historic infrastructure. 1.2 miles of unofficial “social” trails / desire lines are slated to be closed to protect the forest and natural areas. NAC has improved access and navigation throughout the park. In the past year, 323 volunteers have been engaged working with community groups. This fall, there will be ½ of an acre species planting to improve resilience of the natural area. Monthly Volunteer Series (learn to volunteer): 9am - noon, on the 2nd Saturday of every month with Northern Manhattan Parks; meet at Payson Center. For more info visit naturalareasnyc.org/get-outside. For parks stewardship and other events: www.nycparks.org/reg/stewardship.
- Highbridge Park: Similar work as in IHP: 8 miles of paved and unpaved trails, with ¾-mile needing closure in order to protect healthy and vital natural areas. There is historic infrastructure throughout, including from the old Croton Aqueduct. There is much removal not only of invasive species but also of debris from historic dumping and illicit uses. A question came up about tree removal in Highbridge as part of the Anchor Parks capital project. Jennifer relayed that Parks does not take tree removal lightly, and should any tree need to be removed for drainage or other purposes, NYC Parks is required to do restitution the equivalent of tree diameter at breast height. Any tree removal is coordinated with Manhattan Forestry. Collaborating with The GAPP program, a job readiness program with the Parks Department, to improve the section of the Old Croton Aqueduct from 157th to 165th Streets and to teach trail maintenance skills to employees. Future Plans: installation of trail infrastructure and increasing volunteer opportunities.
- For removal of trees, NAC is working with Manhattan’s Forestry Division. Collaborating with The GAPP from historic dumping and illicit uses. (A question came up about tree removal in Highbridge as part of the Anchor Parks capital project. Jennifer Hoppa relayed that Parks does not take tree removal lightly, and should any tree need to be removed for drainage or other purposes, NYC Parks is required to do restitution the equivalent of tree diameter at breast height. Any tree removal is coordinated with Manhattan Forestry.) Collaborating with The GAPP program, a job readiness program with the Parks Dept, to improve the section of the Old Croton Aqueduct from 157th to 165th Streets and to teach trail maintenance skills to employees. Future Plans: installation of trail infrastructure and increasing volunteer opportunities.
- Questions opened to Committee & Public: Invasive species to the native areas discussed. Plans for the Highbridge Master plan details addressed a question from the committee. Questions of accessibility came up as well.

5) (7:21pm) While we waited for AV on the next presentation, students from CUNY’s Sophie Davis School of Biomedical Engineering introduced themselves and spoke briefly about their program. Each group of students from the school was assigned to attend a different CB meeting to learn about health & wellness issues.

6) Presentation of Schematic Design of Inwood Hill Park Ballfield #1 (Ricardo Hinkel) (7:24pm):

- Councilman Rodriguez budgeted \$1.4 million for this .61 acre site located at the Isham St. / Seaman Ave. entrance. The project is a “replacement in kind,” and doesn’t need Public Design Commission approval.
- Main goals of project, derived from 12/4/18 scoping meeting at PS/IS176: Reconstruct ballfield, replace outfield fencing to protect passersby from stray balls, provide ADA access to field and bleachers, add a pitching cage to help direct pitching and catching practice to prevent ongoing fence damage, and address drainage and erosion. Ricardo explained the current state of the ball field and how they sourced their improvement priorities. Towards the end of the presentation, he presented the new design plan that addressed community concerns raised at the scoping meeting and online feedback.
- The ballfield will be regraded 250’ into the outfield. Desire lines on slopes adjacent to the field will be planted and formalized. Catch basins will be checked and cleared. A batting/pitching cage – 12’ wide x 75’ long x 12’ high –will be added. There will be an ADA ramp on the eastern perimeter (Seaman Ave. side). The project also includes two solar-powered “big belly” compacting trash receptacles. Native plants will provide the drainage defense on the adjacent sloped.

- Lighting for the field, which is the subject of some controversy, is not funded; trash can/waste management solutions are still being discussed in regards to location. There was a question as to why \$1.4 million is allocated for a ball field vs. other projects; Parks doesn't have its own capital budget so it can only do the projects that are funded by elected. That said, this ballfield is heavily used and its renovation has a lot of public support. The final drawings of the design to be released this fall, and should be ready for construction in the fall of 2020, which will take a year (or possibly less).
- It was suggested that a smaller mesh or double-fencing would protect the fencing from those who bat against it. Alex Martinez of Inwood Little League suggested that an additional cross bar be added to backstop and perimeter fencing to deter batting practice against the fence. Also a request to ensure path access along Seaman Ave. and at Isham St. entrance is maintained during construction.
- There was a discussion of recycling. Unfortunately due to contamination of recyclables with regular garbage at a rate of more than 10%, Sanitation is not willing to pick up recycling from Inwood Hill Park.
- A resolution supporting the Inwood Ballfield #1 Design passed unanimously by the Committee (7 in favor) and the Public (13 in favor), with one Board Member abstaining. Edith gave kudos to Parks for their attention to accessibility.

7) Jennifer Hoppa's **NYC Parks Report:**

- Working with Community League of the Heights CLOTH/CLIMB to improve the southern end of Highbridge Park through a monthly volunteer day with NYC Parks. They've helped at the Luminaries Lawn and at the John T. Brush Staircase and the park areas between them.
- Announced upcoming events including 4/27 stewardship event in Inwood Hill Park & 4/28 Earth Day event in Ft. Tryon Park, 8 monthly volunteer days at 5 uptown sites, egg hunt season last/this/next weekend, 5/4 Urban Wildlife Festival in Highbridge Park and scores more events.
- Very successful Ft. Tryon Park Trust Member cultivation event, which Ass't Chair Daryl attended.
- Question re accessibility of Morris-Jumel Mansion: the Mansion can be made accessible with a temporary ramp, but there are issues in making it permanently accessible due not only to landmark status but also the structural impediments to making the bathrooms accessible. There is currently a proposed project through Participatory Budgeting for this, so hopefully it will be funded soon. The problem will be more deeply analyzed and solutions proposed once the project is funded and a technical designer/architect is procured and assigned to the project.
- Question re Javits playground: construction is proceeding timely. It's been a mild winter so things are going quickly. Equipment is being fabricated; project completion anticipated in time for summer season.
- Question from Chair regarding off-leash "courtesy" (i.e., relaxed enforcement) in Bennett Park in the early hours (6am-7:30am): there is a lot of thru-traffic at all hours in this park. Lawn was redone in 2002, and quickly degraded. Central Park Conservancy restoration closed the lawn for a year, but it since has been destroyed again due to energetic use. Possible solution is synthetic turf, which is estimated at \$1.4 million, and is not yet funded.

8) Announcements / Mail / New Business

- Jeanine McAdam, Friends of Bennett Park: upcoming clean-up & painting event on 4/13 w/ NYC Parks.
- Dave Thom: Dyckman Boat Marina update. First established the Marina licensing lines and then went in-depth with what the Marina requirements are for a license, as well as the complicated mapping of the current site as to what's the Marina and what's the restaurant concession. Also noteworthy: the parking lot north of the restaurant concession is a park, not part of the jumbled boundaries of the concession. The current Marina site was restored using substantial federal funds which come with use restrictions.
- Edith: In my fantasy I thought accessibility of the Morris-Jumel Mansion was possible; it is disheartening to learn that maybe it is not. Also stated that it behooves Parks to film events that are physically inaccessible e.g., Morris-Jumel Mansion & Dyckman Farmhouse) and put them online, or livestream them. Shiloh Holley of MJM: we are working with the Historic House Trust to address the concerns internally, and figuring out how to do a more comprehensive accessibility plan in the houses. We are also working w/ BMCC students to film events.

- Jennifer noted that the GIS Division and Parks Marketing/Sign Committees have secured Public Design Commission approval for Park maps for wayfinding. Highbridge Anchor Parks was the pilot and approvals were secured. NYC Parks has overhauled its entire signage protocol and is installing the new format of signage in phases, with pools and neighborhood playgrounds installed first and larger parks to come at a later phase.
- Sally asked about lowering fees for tennis courts for the disabled, as is done with fees for rec centers. Edith suggested that she go to Councilmember Diana Ayala to request it. J. Hoppa will also raise with the Tennis Permit office.
- Laura asked if Brother Jimmy's is required to hand in a proposal before they get approved for the concession at La Marina? Liz answered that it is possible for a concession to be assigned to a different licensee under certain circumstances, without CB committee approval/public input, but they would have to conform to all of the provisions of the current license agreement. (This is what happened w/Ft. Tryon Park's New Leaf Café, which was a transfer of an existing license agreement.) In any case, they'd need to apply to the SLA for a new liquor license, which will bring them in front of the Board and the public.
- Peggy: complaint re hooligans in Ft. Tryon Park's ping-pong & volleyball court areas at the lower plaza near the 190th A-train. They've been throwing racquets and equipment over the stone retaining wall.

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

Respectfully submitted: Nobles Crawford & Liz Ritter