



# BRONX COMMUNITY BOARD #1

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## MUNICIPAL SERVICES

MINUTES  
May 14, 2018

**CEDRIC L. LOFTIN**  
DISTRICT MANAGER

### STREET RENAMING OF 157<sup>TH</sup> STREET AND BROOK AVENUE TO JOSE CHEMA SOTO WAY

**Ms. Desseree Soto** said that I'm going to be speaking about a profound individual Jose Chema Soto better known as Chema. He was born in Liza, Puerto Rico and came to the Bronx at the age of 21. He worked in maintenance, construction and served as a superintendent of several buildings in the Melrose area. He ran meals for children during the summer and became very involved in community affairs. In the mid 70's he cleared an abandoned garbage filled lot on the corner of East 158<sup>th</sup> Street and Brook Avenue. In being far away from home of Puerto Rico he saw the opportunity to bring traditions from the island to the Bronx such as Casita de Chema.

He is known as the man who built Rincon Criollo but also had a hand in most of the other local casitas in the Melrose neighborhood. La Casita de Chema is the leading site on the mainland for Puerto Rican music especially Bomba y Plema. In 1987 the Casita de Chema joined the city's Green Thumb Community Garden Program and created the blueprint for the Gardenhouse Green Thumb Guidebook with step by step instructions on how to build a Casita. In 1990 the Bronx Council on the Arts held a landmark exhibition called "Casitas" where Chema along with others went to build replicas of casitas that showcased at the Smithsonian Institute in Washington, DC, Hostos and the Bronx Museum in tribute to Puerto Rican culture. Rincon Criollo joined with Hostos Community College's Center for the Arts and Culture in establishing the biennial Bomplento Festival in 2000. He is a recipient of the City Lore's People Hall of Fame for nurturing Puerto Rican traditions in an urban oasis. Rincon Criollo continues to play a significant role in the 21<sup>st</sup> century Puerto Rican community and according to ethnomusicologist Roberta Singer and folklorist Elena Martinez Rincon Criollo is the heart of traditional Puerto Rican music in New York City. The landmark he founded Rincon Criollo in the Bronx is known for its art, music and various cultural activities.

### Questions and Comments

### NEW YORK CITY DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION

**Mr. Keith Kalb Deputy Bronx Borough Commissioner** said that we've been here before and many of you know me and Nivardo. We were here for Bruckner and 138, the Randall Island Connector where we had the pedestrian and bicycle safety improvements done. We mentioned at the last Municipal Services Committee Meeting that we would come back with a presentation for a one-way street conversion that our Planning Division has come up with to improve traffic mobility around 138 and Port Morris in general.

**Mr. Matt Lorenz Deputy of Traffic and Planning** said that one of our responsibilities is to look at directional street conversions throughout the city so working in all five boroughs. What we look at largely is two-way streets to one-way streets. The reason we do that is for the purpose of traffic flow efficiency, traffic operations for safety, and a reduction in conflicts. You talk about an intersection that's got four-ways and it's got two-way traffic. That same intersection with one-way traffic reduces the number of conflicts and that's been proven to result in lower accidents and sort of streamline traffic potential. We're looking at two areas sort of west of the Bruckner on Walnut Avenue and Locust Avenue primarily from East 132<sup>nd</sup> Street up to 141<sup>st</sup> Street and then secondarily also Jackson Avenue as it approaches 138<sup>th</sup> Street this intersection right down by the Bruckner. There's a lot of activity and congestion in that area. So we focused on these two areas. The first area the portion East of the Bruckner Expressway what you see in green is the existing streets and the direction of traffic and for the most part they're two-way streets. There's a lot of friction so to speak as drivers try to pass each other particularly on Walnut and Locust. The focus of our initial effort if you're familiar with the area you know that there is very heavy commercial traffic and very narrow streets they're only about 32 to 35 feet wide. It's not only that the trucks passing in opposite directions but the tractor trailers have carved out a large spot of space when they're turning from these streets causing traffic congestion in that regard. You know if it was one or two trucks every hour or so instead of every few minutes it wouldn't be a problem. It's a heavily industrial area so there's more of a problem here than it would be otherwise. Existing BX33 bus route we also looked at which really comes down 138<sup>th</sup> Street comes around this loop and sort of loops back up. So we needed to take that into consideration in our analysis as to whether these street changes would be feasible or not. So the changes we're proposing are shown in these next slides shown in red. The idea here is we would make Walnut and Locust into which we call a one-way pair or one-way couplet you would have Walnut Avenue from the north to the south one-way southbound and Locust Avenue would be its pair going northbound. What it means is you land up with a sort of a circular traffic pattern so you know you're going to have to go around the block. You know if you want to go north on Walnut you wouldn't be able to do that anymore you'd have to come down and go over a block. That's basically what we're trying to establish and how in doing this we're also suggesting converting a few other streets 141<sup>st</sup> street so to complete that circulation going north on Locust, west 141<sup>st</sup> street and then 140<sup>th</sup> street would basically be one-way eastbound and 139<sup>th</sup> street westbound so you end up with an alternate street pattern. So in order to accomplish that we would be re-routing the BX33 bus so obviously it wouldn't go northbound on Walnut anymore it would have to go around and up Locust basically and onto 138<sup>th</sup> so it's sort of pulling the return trip one-block over. We've already talked to MTA about this and they're on board. This is the approximate space where the stops will be located. Currently this is the bus layover for the BX33 it's likely going to switch here so the parking is going to flip flop but there is not going to be any loss of parking spaces. You'll lose some spaces here but you'll get them back it's an even swap. That was the first area we looked at. The second was Bruckner, 138<sup>th</sup> and Jackson Avenue it you're out there it's a commonplace site there's a lot of congestion. Here's 138<sup>th</sup> Street sort of left to right towards the Bruckner on Jackson Avenue where two vehicles are trying to fight their way through there is slight congestion added on top of all that's happening underneath the Bruckner here. So to help alleviate that we're also looking at a potential conversion of Jackson Avenue to make that northbound to 140<sup>th</sup> so you'll still have the ability to go north you just wouldn't be able to go south. This intersection here 138<sup>th</sup> and Jackson is very close to Bruckner and 138<sup>th</sup> so you're probably not going to solve the whole problem but we think that this is something that's going to go a long way towards alleviate conflicts. One of the things with our one-way conversion is that you're able to focus on one lane of traffic and you'll have more flexibility to put a bike lane there.

## **Questions and Comments**

## **NEW YORK CITY DEPARTMENT OF PARKS AND RECREATION**

**Mr. Gus Friadt** said that I'm here together with my colleagues from Parks to present the Willis Playground. We have been to the Community Board and got some feedback and we want to improve the park. So if you haven't been to the park it's located in the Mott Haven area on Willis Avenue and not in the flood zone. We have the school here, public housing and the area in purple belongs to the Public Housing Authority so right now we're still going through them to make sure that it's okay for us to handle this portion. It's NCHA's property but is our playground and we see no reason why they wouldn't want this. So this is the existing condition, this is the basketball court on one side, the comfort station, and two sets of swings here and here. Part of the playground was renovated about two years ago we're not going to touch that portion. So this is a closer look at the park that's the spray shower and we have some drainage issues, that's the comfort station. We're going to plant a lot of new street trees on 140<sup>th</sup> Street right now they're empty tree pits. So this is some of the photos of the site. The spray shower area looking at the playground from the corner, the animal sculpture, two sets of swings, the sitting area, the comfort station and the ally leading up to the playground. That's the view looking at the playground and the parking lot of the Public Housing.

So this is the plan that we're proposing we're keeping the comfort station and not going to touch it, a much larger spray shower area, this part will be the 2 to 5 play area for younger kids and we also have a lower swing to go with that, older kids would play in this area so that's the 5 to 12 play area. We also have ground level here and here for kids in wheelchairs. We also have some sitting areas over here and there are also benches along the perimeter of the spray shower. So proposing to lower the fence along 140<sup>th</sup> Street to a four foot fence which is much lower and make the park more visible. We're putting up a taller fence along the swing area. That's the equipment we want to use for the spray shower area and we have different types of equipment to accommodate kids from different age groups. We're adding a bottle filler, trash receptacles and some additional lights.

### **Questions and Comments**

#### **The Chairman called for a motion for a Letter of Support for street renaming of 157<sup>th</sup> Street and Brook Avenue to Jose Chema Soto Way.**

Motion made to provide a Letter of Support for the street renaming of 157<sup>th</sup> Street and Morris Avenue to Jose Chema Soto Way. Motion duly seconded. Motion called and passed unanimously.

#### **The Chairman called for a motion for a Letter of Support for the New York City Parks and Recreation proposed conversion of several streets in the Port Morris area from two-way to one-way operation in order to improve traffic patterns in the area.**

Motion made to provide a Letter of Support to the New York City Parks and Recreation proposed conversion of several streets in the Port Morris area from two-way to one-way in order to improve traffic patterns in the area. Motion duly seconded. Motion called and passed unanimously.

#### **The Chairman called for a motion to adjourn.**

Motion made to adjourn. Motion duly seconded. Motion called and passed unanimously.

**MEETING ADJOURNED.**