

Minutes of the Parks & Recreation Committee Meeting
November 1, 2022
Via Zoom
(Pending Committee Approval)

Attendees

Committee:

Present: Bob Bender, David Gellman, Rob Jacklosky, Scott Krompinger, Deb Travis (Chair), Leona Teten,

Absent: Ramdat Singh

Other Board Members:, Laura Spalter, Rob Spalter

DPR: Stephanie Ehrlich (Van Cortlandt Park Administrator/Executive Director of Van Cortlandt Park Alliance); Captain Domingo Sanchez (Commanding Officer, South Bronx Parks Enforcement Patrol) and Captain Juan Bayron (Commanding Officer, North Bronx Parks Enforcement Patrol)

Community: Frederic Klein and Ned Klein (Assembly Member Jeffrey Dinowitz's office), Oded Holzinger (Climate Resilience Manager, Groundworks Hudson Valley), Karen Argenti (Bronx Council of Environmental Quality)

The meeting commenced at 7:02pm

A quorum being present, the September 28, 2022 Committee Meeting minutes were unanimously approved.

Chair's Report

New Chair: The new committee chair, Deb Travis, introduced herself. She has been a member of the Parks and Recreation Committee all four years she has been on Community Board 8 and has run a volunteer park stewardship group since 2017 called Jerome Park Friends & Neighbors which takes care of the horticultural beds around the Jerome Park Reservoir. She looks forward to being the new Parks Committee chair.

Pickleball Update: The proposed pickleball site discussed at the September 28th committee meeting no longer seems feasible. Michael Ortiz (DPR) has spoken to the principal of PS 24 and they have indicated that they use the proposed space for the children as a recreational space. Other sites are now being considered.

Memorial Grove Veteran's Day Ceremony: There will be a ceremony in Memorial Grove in Van Cortlandt Park in honor of Veteran's Day on Sunday, November 6th at noon. All are invited to attend. There will be a volunteer led event on Friday, November 4th starting at 9am to prepare the grove for the ceremony. Van Cortlandt Park Alliance and Community Board 8 are hosting these events.

CSX Purchase Hearing: There will be a hearing on the purchase of the CSX Property by the City of New York on Wednesday, November 9th at 10am. This purchase will make possible the daylighting of Tibbett's Brook, a new linear park and DEP CSO project. The hearing is open to the public and will take place by conference call.

- Conference Call: 1-646-992- 2010, Access Code 717 876 299
- You can submit written comments 2 days before the Real Property Hearing on 11/9. Please send your comments directly to Jacqueline Galory at jackie.galory@mocs.nyc.gov.
- If you decide to submit written comments, you must mention that the comments are related to the Real Property Public Hearing, Calendar#3 on November 9, 2022.

Groundworks Hudson Valley Presentation of their Feasibility Study for Linking the Yonkers Greenway to Van Cortlandt Park and the 242 Street MTA

Oded Holzinger of Groundworks Hudson Valley presented the findings of their feasibility study to provide connections between the planned Yonkers Greenway, Van Cortlandt Park trails and 242nd street subway station. For background, the project to develop the Yonkers Greenway along the abandoned railroad from Getty Square to Van Cortlandt Park started in 2019 with a grant from NYS Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation Office. In May 2019 GHV presented the project to this committee and came back again in September 2021 with an updated presentation to receive community feedback on further connections to NYC transit.

Oded Holzinger stated they have worked closely with New York City Parks, Van Cortlandt Parks Alliance and MKM Landscape Architects to create the feasibility study.

The goals of the study were to determine who uses the park, how they enter and why; examine the feasibility of bicycle connections through the park or on the surface roads to Broadway and West 242nd Street; to determine how and where people with disabilities could have better access to the Northwest Forest; to determine whether park goers would like better signage and mapping; and to assess the physical conditions of the paths and any outstanding safety issues.

The main findings of the feasibility study are:

- There is no feasible bikeable connection through Van Cortlandt Park through the Northwest Forest
- The Broadway bike lane is the best bicycle connection between the Yonkers Greenway and the West 242nd Street MTA station
- Park signage and mapping should direct pedestrians to use the Bridle Trail as the main pedestrian connection between Yonkers and the VCP amenities south of Mosholu Avenue
- There is a desire for an improved pedestrian connection along the Yonkers side of the Northwest Forest with the Van Cortlandt Park Avenue entrance the most fitting for improvement
- Short ADA compliant access to the Northwest Forest is only feasible near Kelly Field

- If Van Cortlandt Park Avenue became the entrance it would need a better connection to the bridle path which is the best main pathway through the forest. This would require stairs to be installed. Feedback was provided to keep hardscaping to a minimum and to emphasize the rustic conditions and permeable materials appropriate to a Forever Wild area. A ramp would be necessary for ADA access if that was sought which would require the removal of trees, however, ADA access is not mandatory as the rest of the trail is not accessible without restoring the original bridging over Mosholu Avenue near the stables. This would be an option that Parks could consider however there are other ADA trail alternatives.
- There is a strong desire from residents in Yonkers and New York City to improve the conditions along the border to prevent unwanted ATV access, prevent cyclists from using trails not designated for bicycle use, improve feeling of safety through design and enforcement, improve the area's cleanliness, provide better signage and maps including information on Forever Wild Urban Forests and address invasive species and support native habitat

It was noted by those attending that the biggest trash problem for the entire park is along the fence line in this area of Yonkers and better access might reduce this by creating a greater sense of ownership by users and the community. It was also noted that there could be unintended consequences from making the borders more open such as more littering by users and atv and bike use on the trails. Holzinger stated that there are already many unintended consequences from the current poor condition such as dumping and other detrimental uses that discourage positive uses because people avoid the entrances. Derelict conditions are also encouraging people to sneak motorbikes and bikes into the parks.

Oded Holzinger provided an update on the Yonkers Greenway Project. It is currently in the design and construction phase which will need approval from New York State DOT. It will consist of an offstreet path along the abandoned railbed to Getty Square from Van Cortlandt Park. The greenway as currently designed will end at the north end of the Caryl Avenue parking lot in Yonkers which will create a block and a half gap just north of Van Cortlandt Park. Signage will be needed to direct users to the park. The expectation is that bicyclists will primarily use the bike lanes on South Broadway which will be expanded to connect Getty Square to the existing Broadway bike lanes in New York City. As currently designed, the South Broadway bike lanes will not be protected bike lanes. Implementation is expected in 2024. Maclean Avenue will serve as the main point of connection between the Yonkers Greenway and Broadway.

The chair thanked Groundworks Hudson Valley for listening to the community's feedback regarding in particular the use of park trails by bikes. She also urged GHV to continue identifying points of connection between Broadway, the Yonkers Greenway, the South County Trail / Putnam Trail, the Old Croton Aqueduct Trail and the future Henry Hudson Greenway to create a proper system of trails for pedestrians and bicyclists.

The next steps for GHV are to work with Van Cortlandt Park Alliance to meet with the Parks Department to present the report and determine next steps based on Parks input, priorities and funding. They do not have a meeting scheduled at this time, but they are looking to do this some time in the winter. Anyone who has additional comments can send them directly to GHV. Their contact information is available in the study.

Discussion of a Dedicated Parks Enforcement Patrol Command in Van Cortlandt Park

On October 17th, the office of Assembly Member Jeffrey Dinowitz and Council Member Eric Dinowitz sent a letter to Margaret Nelson, the Deputy Commissioner of the Urban Park Service, to request a dedicated Parks Enforcement Patrol (PEP) Command to be stationed in Van Cortlandt Park (VCP). The committee requested their representative and Parks to attend to discuss the rationale for this and what would be needed to support and advocate for it.

According to the PEP Commanding officers, Captain Domingo Sanchez and Captain Juan Bayron, there are 51 PEP officers for the whole borough of the Bronx to cover all shifts seven days a week. They cannot be in all places they are needed and are seeing more issues in Van Cortlandt Park from loud noise and bbqing to shootings at Shandler Field, a stabbing near the Mobile Station on Broadway, break-ins at both the Mosholu and Van Cortlandt golf houses and assaults on Parks staff.

Officer Sanchez would like to have more NYPD and PEP in the park and having a dedicated PEP command would make it easier for the 50th Precinct to collaborate and coordinate with them on more serious crimes. The commanders were asked to explain the differences between PEP and the NYPD. NYPD can process arrests and have a holding cell and their shifts cover all 24 hours. PEP enforcement generally stops at 11pm and they cannot process arrests. PEP's focus is on quality of life issues like drinking, noise, illegal bbqing, unleashed dogs and other Parks rules violations. NYPD focuses on crime and violence. PEP can issue all summons including parking violations and could assist with issues like double-parking on Broadway and ATV's on the park trails. According to Captain Bayron, having a dedicated PEP command made a lot of difference in Central Park in reducing negative park behavior and better coordination with the police.

A dedicated PEP command would have 11-12 officers per shift on-site in VCP focused exclusively on Van Cortlandt Park and other parks nearby. This would reduce response time drastically because currently it takes 15-20 minutes for officers to get from Pelham Bay where they are currently stationed to Van Cortlandt Park. It takes them longer to get to parks further away and travel time is a serious factor in determining which parks they respond to when there are competing requests of different severity. A command in VCP would also extend coverage entirely to 11pm because officers wouldn't need to go back to Pelham Bay to close out their day.

The North Bronx Command covers some large, active parks in addition to Van Cortlandt Park such as Pelham Bay Park, Seton Park and Orchard Beach. They do this with just three supervisors and seven officers for both shifts. With limited resources they are not able to respond to the needs of all of the parks and often focus on other parks. They used to have 10

officers per shifts but lack of Parks funding in the Mayor's operational budget prevents PEP from being the size that is required.

The proposed VCP specific PEP command would be net new officers which would need to be recruited and trained at the academy. Officers would need a facility with locker rooms, places to process paperwork and respond to email, meeting rooms, parking, break rooms and secure bathrooms. Assembly Member Dinowitz's office has requested an inventory of possible spaces where the command could be located within Van Cortlandt Park. Examples of possible locations include setting up a trailer near the gas station off of the Major Deegan Expressway or the former Mosholu Golf House near Jerome Avenue. Vehicles would be needed to transport detainees and confiscated equipment. Officers could use bikes and atv's to cover the park.

Currently PEP only works until 11pm, however, they could work 24 hours if needed with additional hiring for a third shift. According to Frederick Klein, 95% of the complaints they receive regarding Van Cortlandt Park occur between dusk and dawn. Commander Bayron said the overnight issues are generally related to parties and loud music along Broadway and near Shandler Field after 11pm and drinking, cars doing burnouts, and early morning "car shows" near the Woodlawn Cemetery.

To start the process of approvals, the Parks Department would make the determination of need and would also require the support of the city council and the mayor for the funding. The next steps are to get support from the Parks Department, take an inventory of existing assets to support this, determine timing to staff it and advocate for money in the budget for the FY24 budgeting cycle which would start in July. Advocating for that budgeting and approval from Parks would need to start immediately.

The commanders said one additional headwind that this would face is related to the biggest problem they face in general which is attrition of PEP officers to NYPD, the Department of Corrections and the Department of Sanitation because the pay is better. They do outreach to youth, colleges and job fairs to recruit, but it cannot keep up with attrition. Both commanders asked for any assistance the committee can provide. Stephanie Ehrlich added that this is true for all Parks staff. Good staff members leave to other city agencies due to low pay and it is straining the agency.

The Parks Committee agreed to send a letter of support for this. Everyone is encouraged to voice their support to Parks of the need for a dedicated PEP command and more Parks funding. The Mayor campaigned on allocating 1% of the city operating budget to the Parks Department and that has not happened.

Old Business

Chair asked Parks if there has been any progress in reducing the number of atv's in Van Cortlandt Park. Captain Bayron said that five scooters and dirt bikes had been seized and many summons were issued over the summer. The Van Cortlandt Park Alliance is talking to the Parks Department about reconfiguring the Putnam Greenway to block motorized vehicles.

New Business

Jodie Colon announced that Stewards of Henry Hudson Park would be hosting Leaf Crunch on Saturday, November 19th from 9am to noon. There will be daffodil bulb planting, raking, composting and crafts.

Community Board 8 Vice Chair, Bob Bender, reminded everyone to learn more about the Environmental Bond Act and to make sure to vote!

David Gellman has some questions regarding budget issues for Parks to answer. Chair Travis asked him to send the questions to her and she would follow up.

The meeting adjourned at 9:07pm

Minutes submitted by Deb Travis

Link to recording: <https://youtu.be/cZjcekO5MR8>

[Feasibility Study for Linking The Yonkers Greenway To Van Cortlandt Park and The 242 Street MTA](#)