

BROOKLYN COMMUNITY BOARD 9
890 Nostrand Avenue
Brooklyn, New York 11225

Parks, Recreation & Culture Committee Meeting Minutes
May 14, 2026

Attendance (Board Members): Nicolas Almonor; Abigail Timm

Absent (Board Members): None

Attendance (Resident Members): Courtenay Loiselle; Lillian Swain; David Romeo; Brenda Pagan; Gloria Briggs; T. Billi Martin

Absent (Resident Members): MC Alexander; Yoni Ronn; Shomari Ramsay

Guests: Bill Elliston, Curator of Education - Wildlife Conservation Society/ Prospect Park Zoo; R. Thrasher

CB9 Staff: Mia N. Hilton, Assistant District Manager

1) Call to Order

- ☐ Nicolas Almonor called the meeting to order at 7:17 PM.

2) Welcome, Greetings and Introductions

3) Presentation: Prospect Park Zoo Educational Programming by Bill Elliston, Curator of Education at Prospect Park Zoo

- ☐ Provided the committee with a comprehensive presentation on the zoo's educational initiatives and community engagement efforts.
- ☐ Overview of the Zoo and Education Department
- ☐ Mr. Elliston explained that the zoo is operated by the Wildlife Conservation Society and is one of five WCS parks in New York City. The education department includes:
 - ☐ 8 year-round staff positions
 - ☐ Approximately 12 seasonal staff
 - ☐ Interns and volunteers throughout the year
- ☐ The department's goals include:
 - ☐ Increasing scientific literacy
 - ☐ Strengthening community connections to wildlife and nature
 - ☐ Expanding STEM learning opportunities
 - ☐ Supporting pathways into STEM careers

- ☐ School and Youth Programming
- ☐ School Outreach
- ☐ Mr. Elliston shared that:
 - ☐ The zoo works within a one-mile educational ecosystem containing 77 schools
 - ☐ Approximately 34% of those schools participated in zoo programming during the prior academic year
 - ☐ Programs include field trips, classroom programs, scavenger hunts, and family/community days
 - ☐ He noted that participation is increasing again following recovery from the 2023 flooding that temporarily closed portions of the zoo and interrupted educational programming
- ☐ Teacher Development and Partnerships the zoo offers:
 - ☐ Professional development for teachers
 - ☐ Coaching sessions
 - ☐ School partnerships
 - ☐ A master's degree partnership program with Miami University of Ohio
- ☐ Longstanding school partnerships include:
 - ☐ Maple Street School
 - ☐ P.S. 429 The Caden School
 - ☐ Parkside Early Development Center
- ☐ STEM Starters Program
 - ☐ Mr. Elliston discussed the STEM Starters initiative focused on 3K and Pre-K STEM learning. The program includes:
 - ☐ Classroom support for teachers
 - ☐ Zoo field trips
 - ☐ Family engagement activities
 - ☐ Hands-on science kits
 - ☐ Research associated with the program has demonstrated measurable gains in science and technology learning among participating students.
- i) Youth Employment and Career Development

☐ Mr. Elliston highlighted WCS's role as one of the largest youth employers in New York City during the summer.

☐ Key points included:

☐ All internships are paid

☐ Youth can advance through multiple roles and departments within WCS

☐ Opportunities exist across education, animal care, operations, and business services

j) The zoo also participates in the STEM career network known as the SIGN Network, partnering with institutions including:

☐ American Museum of Natural History

☐ Brooklyn Botanic Garden

☐ Queens Botanical Garden

k) Family and Community Engagement

☐ Programs highlighted included:

☐ Summer camps

☐ School break camps

☐ Birthday parties

☐ Community days

☐ Free summer family programming in partnership with the Prospect Park Alliance

l) Mr. Elliston also discussed:

☐ Programming at Maple Street Community Garden

☐ Partnerships with Brooklyn public libraries through mobile educational gallery exhibits

m) Volunteer Engagement

☐ The zoo reported:

☐ 90 teen volunteers

☐ 32 adult volunteers

☐ More than 1,100 volunteer hours

- ☐. Approximately 166,000 visitor interactions during the previous year

4) Committee Discussion

- ☐ Access and Outreach to Title I Schools
- ☐ Committee members asked how the zoo ensures underserved and Title I schools receive access to programming
- ☐ Mr. Ellison stated that:
 - ☐ Scholarships are available
 - ☐ The zoo tracks participation geographically and by school type
 - ☐ Funding partnerships help target underserved schools
- ☐ Committee members emphasized the importance of interdisciplinary curriculum connections so schools can justify field trips academically across multiple subjects

5) Adult Engagement Opportunities

- ☐ Committee members discussed increasing adult participation at the zoo.
- ☐ Suggestions included:
 - ☐ Community Board 9 family or community day events
 - ☐ Adult-focused programming
 - ☐ Food vendor partnerships and community-based events
- ☐ Mr. Elliston shared that the zoo recently piloted adult mocktail and conservation-themed evening programs and is open to additional ideas and collaborations.

6) Community Advisory Council

- ☐ Mr. Elliston shared plans to create a community advisory council to strengthen outside input and collaboration with neighborhood organizations and residents

7) Invitation to Community Resource Event

- ☐ Committee members invited the zoo to participate in the June 6 community resource event through tabling and outreach opportunities
- ☐ Mr. Elliston expressed interest in participating.

8) Roll Call

- ☐ A quorum was established

9) Approval of Previous Minutes

- ☐ A motion to approve the minutes was made and seconded. The motion carried.

10) Public Comment / Community Discussion

11) Community Town Hall Discussion – Proposed Shelter

- ☐ Committee members discussed the recent Community Board 9 town hall regarding the proposed shelter at the Ramada hotel site near Rogers Avenue and Empire Boulevard
- ☐ Key concerns raised included:
 - ☐ Lack of transparency from city agencies
 - ☐ Community notification and engagement concerns
 - ☐ Existing shelter saturation within the neighborhood
 - ☐ Fairness and equity in shelter placement
 - ☐ Public safety and environmental impact concerns
- ☐ Committee members emphasized the need for:
 - ☐ Greater community consultation
 - ☐ Transparency regarding contracts and timelines
 - ☐ Fair distribution of social service facilities citywide

12) Committee Reports and Announcements

- ☐ Major Owens Health & Wellness Community Center
 - ☐ Members discussed applications for the advisory committee at the Major Owens Health & Wellness Community Center and encouraged participation
- ☐ Brooklyn Botanic Garden
 - ☐ The committee confirmed that representatives from the Brooklyn Botanic Garden are expected to present at the June meeting
- ☐ Prospect Park Alliance
 - ☐ Discussion included continued participation and collaboration opportunities with the Prospect Park Alliance

13) Future Planning Discussions

- ☐ Arts and Music Summit
 - ☐ The committee discussed organizing a future arts and music summit highlighting local artists and cultural organizations.

14) Tentative timeframe discussed:

- ☐ April 2027
- ☐ Potential partnerships discussed included:
 - ☐ Medgar Evers College
 - ☐ Local cultural institutions

15) Sports Summit

- ☐ The committee discussed creating a sports summit focused on:
 - ☐ Youth sports organizations
 - ☐ Community collaboration
 - ☐ Athletic programming
 - ☐ Team exhibitions and networking opportunities
- ☐ Tentative timeframe discussed:
 - ☐ Winter/Spring 2027

16) Resource Fair Participation

- ☐ Members discussed encouraging all organizations presenting before the committee to also participate in future Community Board 9 resource fairs

17) Parks Tour and Mural Project

- ☐ Additional future initiatives discussed included:
 - ☐ A Community Board 9 parks tour
 - ☐ A mural project within the district
 - ☐ Expanded collaboration with cultural institutions

18) Future Summit Planning

- ☐ The committee continued discussions regarding long-term planning for future committee initiatives and summits.
- ☐ Members discussed tentative timelines for:
 - ☐ A borough-wide parks conference
 - ☐ A sports summit
 - ☐ An arts and music summit involving schools and community organizations

- ☐ Discussion included the possibility of scheduling future conferences and summits during the winter or early spring months to allow sufficient planning time for summer programming and partnerships.
- ☐ Tentative months discussed included:
 - ☐ January or March for conference planning
 - ☐ February or March for the sports summit
 - ☐ April for the arts and music summit
- ☐ Members emphasized the importance of involving schools, youth organizations, and community partners in future programming efforts

19) Virtual Attendance and Accessibility Discussion

- ☐ The committee discussed maintaining virtual attendance options for Community Board meetings and committees.
- ☐ Members noted that virtual participation was heavily utilized during the pandemic and expressed support for continuing hybrid or virtual accessibility options moving forward
- ☐ Discussion included:
 - ☐ Evolving meeting practices to reflect current technology and accessibility needs
 - ☐ Increasing participation opportunities for community members
 - ☐ Potential bylaw or procedural changes to formalize virtual attendance options
 - ☐ A motion was discussed regarding support for continued virtual attendance accessibility
 - ☐ Members noted that a formal resolution may be drafted and presented to the Executive Committee and General Board at a future meeting.

20) Closing Remarks

- ☐ Members discussed continued participation in upcoming Executive Committee and General Board meetings and encouraged ongoing collaboration across committees and community organizations

21) Adjournment

- ☐ The meeting adjourned at approximately 8:56 PM.

Minutes submitted by: Abigail Timm

Minutes reviewed and approved by: Chair, Nicolas Almonor