

Minutes of the Parks & Recreation Committee Meeting of December 23, 2015 at the Riverdale Mental Health Association meeting room

Attendees:

Committee Members: Sylvia Alexander, Bob Bender (chair), Robert Fanuzzi, David Gellman, Marvin Goodman, Arturo Guzman, Laura Spalter (vice chair), CB8; Herb Barret, community committee member

DPR: Iris Rodriguez-Rosa, Margot Perron, Patricia Ferguson, Matt Drury, Steven Lenard

Guests: Debbi Dolan, Matt Turov, John Young, Catherine O'Brien, Suzanne Corber, Save the Putnam Trail; Andrew Sandler, Cohen's office; Alicia Grullon, Columbia University; Jennifer Scarlott, Bronx Climate Justice North; Sara Kempton, Friends of Van Cortlandt Park; IC Levenberg, BCEQ

Agenda:

The meeting began at 7:10 pm. Minutes of the October meeting were unanimously approved. There was no November meeting.

The Chair noted the presence of Bronx Parks Commissioner Iris Rodriguez-Rosa and thanked her for her attendance.

Presentation of Parks Without Borders Initiative

Steven Lenard, Deputy Director of Planning for DPR, and Matt Drury discussed DPR's new "Parks Without Borders" initiative (PWB). The goal is to remove or lower fences around parks where appropriate to make these parks a more integral part of the community. Besides lowering or removing fences, adding entrances or widening existing entrances are other strategies to make parks more accessible to the community. Adding benches or plantings to parks perimeters can also make parks more welcoming and beautify unused areas on parks perimeters.

Parks that are located in commercial areas or which abut libraries and schools are good candidates for PWB. Cultural programming in the park or nearby could also be a component of PWB.

DPR has secured \$40 million in capital funds for eight PWB projects citywide. Projects are nominated by communities and will be selected by DPR. An effort will be made to choose parks across the city. Outreach is being conducted through community boards, libraries, and other local institutions. PWB candidates must have community support. Not all parks are appropriate candidates: parks with athletic facilities, for example, often require high chain-link fences for safety.

The three most important criteria in selecting parks for the PWB initiative are: community support; increased access to the park in question; and the physical context of the park under consideration (is it in a commercial area, near a library, lacking in entrances, etc.)

DPR believes that more open parks are also safer parks. Mr. Lenard noted that people engaged in criminal activity want to avoid being seen and PWB makes parks more visible to the nearby community. "Good activity pushes out bad activity," according to DPR.

The group then discussed several CB8 parks that have been proposed as candidates, namely, Seton Park, Marble Hill playground, and the southwest corner of Van Cortlandt Park. Several suggestions were made for these and other parks in CB8. The committee will follow up with DPR.

Nominations for PWB close on Feb. 28, 2016. The website is nyc.gov/parks/PWB

Interim Check-In on CB8 Parks Evaluations

The Chair noted that all CB8 parks are being inspected by committee members as well as some volunteers from the community. The Chair urged all committee members to try to make multiple visits to their parks, ideally at different times and on different days, to see conditions in these parks firsthand. Photos that document concerns about maintenance and/or physical conditions of the park are encouraged. Several people have already provided interim reports on their parks.

Old Business

The Chair noted that it is expected that DPR will present its revised plans for the Putnam Trail at the January 27 meeting. He urged all those with questions and comments to reserve their remarks for this meeting. Plans for the trail renovation will be circulated well in advance of the meeting.

New Business

A recent fire in VCP destroyed much of the boardwalk in the wetland area just south of the Mansion. This area was the subject of a fire several years previously. There is conflicting information about whether this fire was accidental or intentional. Attendees at the meeting expressed concern about the lack of PEP officers and police in this area and in VCP in general.

In addition there are continuing problems with ATV's and motorized bikes using the Putnam Trail, Parade Grounds, and other parts of the park. This is an ongoing problem that cannot be solved without the help of the police. It was suggested that the Chair, Margot Perron, and Andrew Sandler schedule a meeting with Capt. O'Toole of the 50th Precinct to discuss the problem. *(Following the meeting Mr. Sandler said that Councilman Cohen would be discussing the matter with the 50th Precinct.)*

There was general agreement that too little is known about PEP staffing in the parks and that we should be better informed by DPR. The committee will follow up on this issue.

The meeting adjourned at 8:45 pm.

Bob Bender, Chair
Parks & Recreation Committee