

Community Board 12, Manhattan
Parks & Cultural Affairs Committee Meeting: June 6, 2017
CB12 Conference Room (530 W. 166th St., 6th fl., NYC 10032)

Committee Members Present: Elizabeth Lorris Ritter (Chair), Osi Kaminer (Assistant Chair), Daryl Cochrane, Natalie Espino, Domingo Estevez Barbara Frazier, Mitchell Glenn, Richard Lewis, Karen Taylor*. **Board Members Present:** Sally Fisher, Edgar Roman, Steve Simon. **Staff:** Paola M. Garcia. **Also Attending:** Katerina Athanasou, NYC Parks; Trish Audentoi, Inwood Canoe Club; Kirsti Bainbridge, Partnership for Parks; George Bloomer, NYC Parks; Annel Cabrera, New York Restoration Project; Dave Crenshaw; Arelis De La O; Martha Dubon; Constancia Ferreres; Peter Fisher; Joan Furlong; Ira Gershenhorn; Kev Goudy; Oliver Grullon; Jennifer Hoppa, NYC Parks; Allen Juba, MKW; Paul Kittas; Andrew Moore, MKW; Rosalta Naranjo, CA; Douglas Nash, NYC Parks; Alix Rico, US Coast Guard Auxiliary; Bruce Robertson; Lucia Rodriguez;; John Romeley; Maria Riley, QRP; Marsha Samuel; Ann Shorter; Jesse Woods.

**It was realized only after the meeting that Ms. Taylor's Board term had expired. The minutes record her full participation as a Board Member, which was understood at the time to have been her status.*

Welcome, Opening Remarks and the Agenda. Liz Ritter called the meeting to order at 7: 15 pm, and made general announcements about the Uptown ArtStroll, sponsored by the Northern Manhattan Arts Alliance (NoMAA); Open Studios; movies in Inwood Hill Park; Play with Your Dinner (theatrical readings featuring professional actors and members of the community) at Coogan's; and other upcoming events in/around the community.

Presentation by Annel Cabrera, Director of Community Engagement for the New York Restoration Project (NYRP)

Progress is being made to transform Sherman Creek Park. (See <https://www.nyrp.org/green-spaces/park-details/sherman-creek-park> and <https://www.nyrp.org/support/events/spring-picnic>). NYRP:

- is raising funds to improve the Sherman Creek Park waterfront and increase it by two acres in order to expand public access to the waterfront;
- is in conversation with NYC Parks to achieve this goal;
- has done a feasibility study regarding the proposed additional acreage, which could include oyster beds and eel mops, both of which prevent erosion;
- is planning a series of community-visioning sessions and wants to connect to educators about NYRP's Education Pavilion; and
- expects to share a more fully-realized plan with the Committee and Board in the fall.

Liz mentioned that per the City Charter, Community Boards are not required to meet, so there would be no PCA Committee meetings until September, but it would be a good idea for NYRP to have a community meeting to present their findings and plans. She also suggested that for NYRP's community-visioning project, they hold a few community sessions to ensure optimal participation, e.g., one or more daytime/weekend session, and at least one weekday evening session, with Spanish translation available. Additionally, solid outreach to residents of the Dyckman Houses would be helpful. To reach the school community over the summer months, she suggested flyering at the school lunch programs. Q (Sally Fisher): how does this relate to the InwoodNYC initiative (<https://www.nycedc.com/project/inwood-nyc-neighborhood-study>)? A: although they are both happening in Inwood, they are essentially unrelated. Q (Richard Lewis): wanted to ensure that the planned eel mops and oyster beds did not interfere with the ecology of the Bronx side of the Harlem River. A: (Ms. Cabrera & Jennifer Hoppa) stated that other organizations are involved, including NYC Parks' Natural Resources Group and environmental organizations in the Bronx, and that the planning is not done in isolation.

Presentation by Vice Flotilla Commander Alix Rico, US Coast Guard Auxiliary This was an added agenda item, and Mr. Rico announced upcoming activities. On July 8th and 9th the public is welcome to attend classes about Marine/Boating Safety, and to have free safety checks of small vessels. Additionally, the USCGA is looking to work with NYC Parks, and NYPD to help mitigate potential accidents on the water having to do with jet skis and/or ferries. The events take place on the *Baylander*, a decommissioned Navy vessel at West Harlem Piers, New York, NY 10027. Phone 917-280-3934 (See http://cgaux.org/boating/class_finder/index.php and

[harlem/vietnam-era-navy-ship-finds-new-berth-at-west-harlem-piers](#)) Ms. Ritter suggested that at least some meetings for CB12 be held at La Marina in Inwood, rather than in Harlem. This will help increase attendance and participation. Mr. Rico agreed that rotating the meeting venue is a good idea. Q (Mitchell Glen): general question about ferry safety. A: the speed limit is five knots; the USCG has plans to install signs to alert ferry captains and recreational boaters to observe safety precautions to mitigate potential for accidents with small vessels and jet skiers. Q (Barbara Frazier): can jet-skis have a dedicated area in order to minimize conflicts? A (J. Hoppa): jet-skis actually are not allowed at La Marina. A. Rico: USCGA has no policing powers, it just provides marine safety education to the public.

Additional Announcements J. Hood Wright Park is a presenter site for Films on the Green 2017 (See <http://frenchculture.org/film-tv-and-new-media/festivals/films-green-2017>). There also are schedule booklets from NYC Parks with a plethora of programs throughout the District, all summer long. These are available at the CB12 office, or visit www.northernmanhattanparks.org.

Audubon Playground Community Parks Initiative (CPI): Andrew Moore, Partner, Quenell Rothschild & Partners (QRP) Ms. Hoppa opened the presentation, stating that the CPI is the first New York City Parks, capital-fund-supported renovation of uptown parks in twenty years. Mr. Moore mentioned that QRP has done playground renovations for many years, with projects in the Bronx and the Martin Luther King, Jr. Playground. He proceeded though an extensive PowerPoint presentation, which he cut short in the interest of time:

- The new design adds more square footage and saves all large trees.
- The mini-school (a “temporary” structure installed more than two decades ago) will be removed, and the footprint re-graded.
- QRP met with Friends of Audubon Playground and representatives of the school to get a handle on what was needed. Based on these discussions, the position of the entrance was moved from where it is currently;
- All of the existing equipment is being replaced, except for the turtle which is being retained.
- Various types and heights of fencing will be used to maximize safety, delineation of space, and aesthetics.
- To honor John Audubon’s legacy as an ornithologist and neighborhood resident (his house was on W. 155th Street), plants that attract birds will be planted. Some plants will have (non-toxic) berries, but care will be taken to locate berried plants away from where there is any danger of eating the berries, and away from the basketball courts and other play surfaces.
- Wants to work with schools to have teaching opportunities connected to the park and to birds/
- Synthetic turf will be used for soccer, track, junior basketball.
- Game tables will be placed adjacent to the Park entrance;
- Two distinct play areas will be created; one for young children (2 to 5), one for older children (5 to 12);
- Play areas will be separated by a section in the center of the playground that is planted with trees and plants; water spray play area is possible addition;
- Comfort station will be renovated and fenced off;
- Sidewalks will be replaced or renovated; all play areas will be covered with safety surfaces; school-use area will be fenced off; basketball court will have a high fence;
- In accordance with the Parks Department commissioner’s “Parks without Borders,” fences, in general, throughout the park, will be lower;
- ADA access is ensured through re-grading;
- Parks went through an assessment process to ensure that playground has some green infrastructure, which resulted in a plan to create large planted areas that will decrease storm runoff;
- Slides will be made of stainless steel, not plastic;
- QRP will ask manufacturer to adapt design for wheelchair accessibility on certain play equipment;
- Will install misting post to mitigate heat from synthetic surfaces;
- Local groups will continue perimeter plantings;
- Design includes shade trees and ornamentals;
- A bird house evocative of the design of J. J. Audubon’s original house will be constructed;
- Comfort station will be ADA compliant, doors will be widened to accommodate wheelchairs, and mural on will be removed to repair masonry.

Discussion ensued. Ms. Lorris Ritter suggested that an Audubon-themed mural be painted on the comfort station, and that QRP team up with Ari Gitler, the local contact for the Audubon Project which has been installing bird murals on buildings in southern Washington Heights and Harlem. Steve Simon suggested that the mural be placed on the apartment building adjacent to the playground. Mr. Lewis made remarks/asked questions regarding drainage, toxicity of berries on shrubbery, heat retention on the stainless-steel sliding boards and potential injuries, and keeping in contact with the school. Mr. Moore stated that lights will be added; drainage will improve due to regrading; all plants are non-poisonous. Ms. Frazier suggested that bird ornamentation be added to the fences, similar to Loftus Playground. Parks noted that while this is feasible, it is expensive, and would use up budget that is allocated for other aspects of the renovation. Ms. Frazier also wants to have some kind of fun water-flow interruption gizmo in the play area.

Daryl Cochrane asked how many stalls were in comfort station (there will be one). Steve noted that, for security reasons, the outer door of the comfort station cannot be locked, only the stall can be locked. There was a lengthy discussion ensued regarding male-female-unisex access to bathrooms. Ms. Ritter took an informal vote, via a show of hands, which showed a 3-to-1 preference for unisex/non-gendered bathrooms. She stated that the resolution, in support of this project, would include language to the effect that a unisex (non-gendered) comfort station is optimal and is the Parks and Cultural Affairs's committee's recommendation. It is understood that there are some constraints due to the existing configuration of the comfort station. Further, the resolution would approve the plan for the playground, but with the aforementioned changes. Mr. Simon reiterated that the community board supports removal of the Department of Education's pre-fab building. Mr. Cochrane suggested that the Intergovernmental Relations Department of the New York State Commission on Human Rights be consulted to find out what the laws/regulations are regarding gendered vs. non-gendered bathrooms. Natalie Espino asked about whether the comfort station had a changing station. There are plans to have one changing station in each stall.

Domingo Estevez inquired about lights for potential soccer field, but the area is too small for a soccer field. Mr. Estevez also wanted to ensure that berries are conveniently placed, so that they don't create a mess in the play areas. Ms. Fisher suggested that play areas are too far apart for watching multiple age groups of children. Ms. Ritter suggested that if the height of the central plantings were lowered to provide more visibility this would balance the need for separation of younger/older children to minimize conflicts which also meeting the need for supervision of multiple children by a single caretaker (e.g., a caretaker responsible for both a toddler and an older child). Arellis De La O, Vice President of the Friends of Audubon Playground, was unable to attend the earlier presentation and stated that the organization wanted to make sure that the mini-school was eliminated, the turtles stay, and a number of other operations and design requirements; she was assured that all of these were included in the design presented prior to her arrival. She also shared the group's preference to have the higher fence on the outside and the lower fence on the inside, so as to protect the community's planting. After a discussion of NYC Park's "Parks Without Borders" which seeks to open parks and playgrounds at their perimeter to the community to be more inviting, she agreed that the fencing plan as presented was acceptable.

Vote on the presented plan, with above suggestions: 9-0-0-0 Committee; 1-0-0-1 Other Board Members; 15-2-1-0 Public.

Presentation on Phase II Renovation of Highbridge Park, under New York City Anchor Parks initiative, by Al Juba, MKW

Ms. Hoppa stated that this is a report back to the committee from MKW's March presentation. Al Juba was primary presenter, along with Joan Ferlong, and an extensive PowerPoint was presented, but was shortened due to time constraints. There was a brief recap of the public engagement process and the Phase I renovation, details of which can be found in the minutes of the March 7, 2017 meeting and resolution, which passed the full Board on March 28th.

Phase II recap:

- This project will cost just over \$16 million plus design; Phase I is \$10.8 million for a total of \$30 million.
- The Adventure and Sunken Playground is out of date;
- The Plan includes a new entry at Edgcombe Avenue between W. 164th & W. 165th Streets;
- Separate play areas for younger and older age groups;
- Turf will be installed for the informal kicking around of a ball, but area is not large enough for a soccer field;
- Brand-new comfort station will be installed. Its dimensions will be 21' x 37', and will be in a central location;

- A new fitness area, with at least half of the equipment being ADA compliant, will be created which increases capacity for this activity ten-fold;
- There will be benches at the W. 164th Street entrance;
- The play equipment will include accessible ramps at various levels; in accordance with ADA, ramps will not create more than a 5' elevation;
- The play equipment will be comprised of interconnected climbing platforms and ramps which use transparent materials, fitting with interactive elements, and will increase play value compared with current play equipment;
- The center of the play equipment, the color of which is inspired by trees and nature, will include rope climbing and the overall design is to provide transparency and to fit into nature;
- The play equipment for 2- to 5-year-old children will be smaller, and will include transfer platforms for wheelchairs;
- Stainless steel slides will be installed, and, to prevent overheating and burns, will be faced in a northerly direction;
- A spray shower with a tear-drop design evocative of the Highbridge Tower will be installed;
- Similarly, the pavers that will be used in the playground are inspired by those at the Highbridge Tower;
- Fencing will be minimized: a 4' fence will be added to segregate age groups for safety, and to enclose fitness area;
- Lighting: 9' apart in Sunken Playground, with new lights also added along the path to Highbridge Water Tower Plaza;
- Sidewalks on Edgecombe Ave. outside of playground will be redone;
- The area at north of the playground around W. 175th- 176th Streets is large enough to accommodate a junior soccer field (100' x 300'), but this is not included in the plan due to budgetary constraints;
- There will be drinking fountains with bottle fillers installed on exterior of the comfort station;
- Comfort stations will have arched features evocative of the design of the High Bridge.

A discussion ensued. Mr. Simon offered that the existing playground configuration, for its era during the 1970s, was an advanced playground, designed by famed local architect, Richard Dattner, who also designed a number of schools and playgrounds. Ms. Ritter suggested that the bathrooms be non-gendered, and that there are fewer constraints in executing a non-gendered design as the comfort station is being designed from scratch not renovated from an existing structure. Additional discussion regarding bathrooms was not had, that having been thoroughly vetted earlier in the meeting. Ms. Espino suggested that the designers consider the size of the bathrooms, and make them large enough to accommodate a caretaker assisting an elder or a child. Mr. Lewis raised questions about the drainage system, the old aqueduct system beneath the playground, and how the design could incorporate transparency in the tubular-steel design elements. MKW stated they would speak to the playground manufacturer about the tubular-steel design; and that the old aqueduct is outside of the playground proper. It's on the trail, which is what's on top of the old aqueduct. Mr. Lewis also inquired about the lighting. MKW stated it is approved by the NYC Department of Transportation in accordance with their specs, and that it is LED and vandal proof. Ms. Kaminer asked about the timeline for completion of the renovation. MKW expects a builder could be chosen by mid 2018 and construction could begin by 2019, so the playground could be complete by 2020. Ms. Hoppa mentioned that Parks has investigated Highbridge Park for the kind of flatness one needs for a soccer field, and that there are no other suitable areas in the park large enough to accommodate a soccer field. Additional comments/questions from the floor: the number of tables (no fewer than current number); tennis courts (there are tennis courts elsewhere in parks and the public consensus here is for soccer); the number of handball courts (no additional courts at this time as there already are several in Highbridge Park and in J. Hood Wright Park); and how long it would take for a bottle to fill at the bottle filler. Ms. Frazier wants the play equipment to be more engaging for the children and include skills and strength activities, such as climbing, getting off and on ramps. MKW also will include "fall zones" for safety.

Nancy Bruning suggested that the design of the adult fitness area should be developed with the help of BarStarzz, who have expertise in this area and just worked extensively with NYC Parks on fitness areas in Fort Tryon Park (Javits Playground), Inwood Hill Park (Dyckman Street), and in J. Hood Wright Park. Ms. Frazier added that BarStarzz has experience developing ADA-compliant designs. MKW agreed to reach out to BarStarzz with contact information to be provided by NYC Parks. Mr. Cochrane asked if there would be a recycling bin and Mr. Glen suggested the three-way garbage/recycling sorted canisters; Ms. Hoppa said that there are serious issues with public compliance of recycling rules in Parks and that recycling bins are invariably contaminated with garbage, but that Sanitation would put silver-bullet trash receptacles in the playground.

Ms. Ritter encouraged Parks to ensure that funding within the project be found to ensure that the soccer field north of the Playground get built, just as funding was found within the Phase I project for the additional (“not-so-”) grand staircase at the northern end of the Park. Mr. Simon isn’t sure if all of the funding is in place for that second staircase.

A resolution in support of this Phase II renovation was discussed. In addition to the various suggestions noted above, Mr. Glen suggested that language be added to show the innovative nature of the existing design and to mention the historic connection to 1970’s design, which was, at the time, innovative. Approved unanimously: 8-0-0-0 Committee; 1-0-0-1 Other Board Members; 8-0-0-0 Public.

Art Vendor Permit Caps Caps on art vendor permit issues were discussed. Mr. Simon stated that there are no such caps, except for Central Parks, Union Square, and Battery Park, and the area neat the Met. Katerina Athanasou of the Parks Department will check with the head of revenue to see what the rules and regulations are regarding permits.

Earlier Closing Hours for Sherman Creek Park Below Dyckman Street Adjacent to Harlem River Drive Ms. Ritter mentioned that there was be a request to shorten the hours of the Harlem River Drive esplanade due to public safety issues. Ms. Fisher mentioned that she is opposed to the closing of access to public lands merely because there is inadequate enforcement. Due to the lateness of the hour and the absence of any strong advocates in favor of such a curtailment, this matter was postponed to a subsequent meeting.

Additional Announcements: Ms. Fischer announced Sing for Hope’s piano program throughout the city. (For more information, visit <http://www.singforhope.org/pianos/>.)

The meeting was adjourned at 9:45 pm.

Respectfully submitted by Karen D. Taylor; edited by Elizabeth Lorris Ritter