

Community Board 12, Manhattan Parks & Cultural Affairs Committee
May 12, 2020 (held virtually via Zoom)

Committee Members Present: Elizabeth Lorris Ritter, Chair; Daryl Cochrane, Ass't. Chair; Nobles Crawford; Sally Fisher; Danielle Jettoo; Francisco Lopez; Alexis Marnel, Public Member, Yomaris Smith, Public Member. **Excused:** Ayisha Oglivie **Other Board Members:** Steve Simon; Barbara Frazier; Omar Tejada; Curtis Young. **Staff:** Paola Garcia, Ebenezer Smith. **Also Attending (23 members of the Public in attendance):** George Bloomer and Rebecca Kanfer (NYC Parks Capital Division), Beth Powmesamy, CH LaRoche, David Tanner; Gary Altheim, Jerry Culligan; Juan Moreiras; Katherine Higuera-McCoy; Loretta Henke; Megan Byrnes; Renee Nisivocchia; Timothy Frasca; Trish Anderton; Jennifer Hoppa, Northern Manhattan Parks Administrator; Jenny Bae Glenn; Leonardo Dominguez; Loretta Henke; KC; Leslie Peoples; Jerry Culligan; Ivan Lucas; J. Carlos; Jana LaSorta; Niria Leyva-Gutierrez; Ivan Lucas; Veronica Liu; Ryan Desso; Steve Harris; Isabelle Chagnon; Hillary Hinzmann; Alexander Campos; Adelle Bartlett; KC; Candida; Raun Ruffin; Nancy Preston; Natalie Espino (MBPO); Martin Collins; Latino Film Market Community Resident 2x.

1. The meeting was called to order at about 6:34pm by the Chair.

- Announcement that this meeting is being recorded; intro of Committee members. Reminder that while there are many questions and issues in these extraordinary times regarding public health, public safety, the economy, mental health, education, housing, and so many other issues, this meeting will focus on issues within the Committee's purview, i.e., parks, recreation, and cultural affairs.
- Lenape Street Co-naming: Chair Ritter spoke with Luis Ramos, who is in touch with members of the Ramapo tribe in regards to the street co-naming; they are excited about this possibility, and he is continuing to work w/them. Liz is still trying to figure out how the City Council is approaching street co-namings given the health risks of obtaining the necessary petition signatures. Since this is not under a particular time pressure, we will defer our resolution until we get clarification Council on co-naming processes, and will look to submitting our request in the batch for consideration in December.
- Update on the road-closures (for vehicles) in Northern Manhattan parks. Fort Tryon's Margaret Corbin Drive, Laurel Hill Terrace, and Dyckman St. between Broadway & Seaman Ave. are among the first round of closures. Parks are beautiful and continue to be open, but please respect the distancing and facemask guidelines; the NYPD have been monitoring facemask usage in an effort to keep the parks open and safe.
- Gave a summary of the agenda and what to expect in tonight's meeting; we're aiming for an 8:30pm adjournment.

2. Presentation on proposed Inwood Hill Baseball Fields renovation project (NYC Parks Capital Division) (6:42pm): Chair gave a bit of history on Inwood Ballfield 1's scoping meeting in December, 2018, and the scoping of the combined Ballfields 1/2/4 in January 2020. Stated that Councilman Rodriguez did an excellent job allocating the funds to expand this project. Today, George Bloomer & Rebecca Kanfer are presenting Parks' proposal for the expanded ballfield renovation project. The project will reconstruct the ballfields to repair the substantially degraded ballfields and correct significant drainage issues in the outfields, restore the historic concrete bleachers, make the dugout and spectator areas ADA compliant, fix and enhance the fences around the fields (raise height to 16'), add a picnic area; add lighting, and update player amenities (e.g., drinking fountains, trashcans, batter cages). Ballfields #3 & #5 will remain open for community use during the renovation project. The presentation highlighted current conditions, and recapped the feedback from the two scoping meetings. Total cost is \$7.72 million (source of funding is all City Council). The approximate timeline: design completion by January 2021; bidding & contracting are anticipated to take 9-12 months; ground-breaking should be in Fall 2021 or Spring 2022; construction will take 12-18 months.

Committee Q&A: Daryl/Sally - Any update on recycling? Answer: Sanitation has not committed to picking-up recycling in public parks. Parks is still looking for a solution with DSNY. **Sally:** Wondered about the effect of lighting on the neighborhood and the budget, and if Parks considered solar lighting. Bottle fillers for the general public? A: Since the ballfield is at a lower elevation than

Seaman Ave. given the location/positioning of the lighting on the field, it should have little impact on the surrounding residential buildings. Solar lighting was piloted and didn't provide enough energy for evening play in autumn months. Re budget, the lights cost ~\$1.6 - \$1.75 million; the exact cost won't be known until the bids come back. **Danielle:** Wanted to know if the public meetings reflected the demographic make-up of the neighborhood. A: absolutely! There was significant public outreach for both scoping meetings, both of which were well-attended by the ballfield users and other community residents. Permit holders and baseball organizations also were invited to the scoping meetings and their crucial input was solicited. **Q:** Danielle also asked about the safety of the water, and if it is possible to install foot pedals for the fountains to minimize touch-points. A: yes, there will be lead testing. Although Parks doesn't currently have a contract for touchless fountains they will look into the possibility of finding such equipment. **Q:** What are the plans to alert the community to ball field permitting; and how was the choice made to have a picnic area vs. a spectator seating area? A: Parks' permitting office will work w/ permit holders and community liaisons to get the word out; signage also will be used to make people aware. A picnic area was based on public feedback during the scoping meetings. **Francisco:** Asked for (and received) clarification of the location of the ADA-compliant seating; also asked for (and received) assurances on the new water fountain's durability; also asked if emergency call-boxes would be included in the project. A: Parks is looking into including these via another ongoing project; NYPD would need to install call boxes.

Public Q&A: Hillary Hinzmann/Beth Powmesamy/Renee Nisivoccia: shared concerns that lights will have a significant negative impact on the surrounding community if on late, and raised concerns regarding loud music, public urination & drinking, etc. A: The permit office would stipulate how late the lights stay on; this will be controlled by Parks, not the permit holders. Committee Chair: we can include in our resolution a time-cap for the lights. As for noise and other quality-of-life issues, we can address this in the resolution with a request for heightened enforcement, while also maintaining sensitivity to not wanting to criminalize these behaviors. Curtis (Public Safety Chair) concurred. **Adele Bartlett:** Has Park's considered extending the lighting into the basketball/tennis area? A: no, there is not sufficient funding. **Jerry Culligan:** How is Parks planning on keeping the park accessible during construction? A: Prior to construction, there's a pre-construction kickoff, where this issue is usually addressed to minimize impact on the lawn areas and malls. **Daryl:** Asked for clarification on the permitting period for baseball/softball? A: Spring through fall (April - October).

The Committee generally was in agreement with the proposed design, with the recommendations that Parks consider foot-operated water fountains and revisit recycling collection; and that there be appropriate enforcement of quality-of-life conditions on the ballfields in a way that doesn't criminalize community recreation. The Committee vote was 6 in favor (Francisco, Danielle, Daryl, Liz, Nobles, & Alexis), none opposed, and one abstention (Sally); two Board members (Curtis & Omar) also voted in favor, with Steve, who works for Parks, not voting due to conflict.

3. NY Parks Update - Jennifer Hoppa - (8:12pm)

- Audubon playground will be completed by the end of June - comfort station is on a separate contract due to being a building and will take more time.(delays due to COVID).
- Parks & 33rd Pct. are working to alleviate gatherings of homeless in David Freeland Square. 24/7 enforcement isn't feasible; we are looking for other options once COVID response is no longer the top priority.
- Grand Staircase at 183rd St. is being completely overhauled. The "Almost-Grand" (i.e., secondary) Staircase at Highbridge Park is not funded as a capital project, but is on the list of recommendations for the next round of funding.
- The Nature Center is in procurement, but there may be a hold on awarding new contracts during COVID-19; Parks is working on having this designated "essential" to continue work.

- Parks has distributed masks in five different Northern Manhattan park locations, and has also distributed more than 3 million meals citywide!
- Parks has developed “Parks at Home,” an online portal that enables New Yorkers to tour parks, meditate, get fitness instruction, nature lessons, kids’ activities, and more, from home.
- The Marina is functioning, with Parks staff on-site.
- Dyckman Farmhouse Park & Roger Morris Park are closed while the historic houses are closed, but are still being maintained.
- Parks continues to look for opportunities and locations to introduce community gardening & urban farming, but the criteria to meet the optimal areas are challenging, particularly given the contamination abatement requirements for soil in which food would be grown.
- Monsignor Kett project is moving forward and should be going out for bid shortly.

4. Brief Parks & Cultural Organization Updates (8:31pm)

- **Marin Collins (NoMAA / Uptown ArtStroll):** Virtual events being accepted through July 2020, anyone that has a performing or visual arts program can apply to include their work on the ArtStroll website. www.artstroll.com.
- **Natalie Espino (MBPO):** NYCGO.com, you’ll find the links for virtual NYC and contact form to fill-out. This is for all local artists! Please apply to make sure Northern Manhattan is represented. Natalie and Liz will be able to share with the community via email.
- **Meghan Bynes (Morris Jumel Mansion):** launching a new public lecture series called “Virtual Parlor Chats”, free with registration, starting on May 20th talking about Mary Phillips Morris. Also working with other historic houses to create a summer camp virtual curriculum.
- **Alex Campos (Hispanic Society):** Representatives of several uptown cultural institutions have been meeting weekly to discuss collaborations for community programming.
- **Veronica Liu (Word Up Community Bookshop):** Encourages everyone to check-out their website for many upcoming events. They’ve also started a GoFundMe to replace lost operating revenue.
- **Jerry Culligan (Rocky’s Dog-run):** Asked Jennifer to look into assistance with the Dog Run’s maintenance; she will follow-up with possible resources (mulch, etc.).
- **Sally Fisher (Friends of Inwood Hill Park):** Unfortunately most planned events have been cancelled due to COVID. Discussed the services/equipment that is being provided for people who would like to work in the park.

5. Old Business / New Business / Mail / Additional announcements (8:45pm)

- Since June is ArtStroll month, next month’s agenda will include a focus on arts & culture.
- Danielle asked about BBQing in uptown parks and how to expand available resources to the community. Liz stated that this would have to be part of a longer conversation that where there’s been notice to the public, and will add it to next month’s agenda. *[Updated note: Parks subsequently advised that BBQing & other large gatherings will not be allowed in parks for Memorial Day weekend. Signs have been posted in areas where folks often gather for large BBQs, and Parks has notified local parks groups.]*
- It was suggested that even though Community Boards are not required to meet during the summer, the Committee might consider an optional meeting in July and/or August due to the unique, ongoing challenges presented by the COVID “pause” and subsequent re-opening of public spaces. This will be added to next month’s agenda.
- Daryl, who works for NYC Commission on Human Rights, announced new NYC law that employers cannot discriminate in the hiring process due to a person’s prior marijuana usage.

There being no additional business, **the meeting adjourned at 8:53pm** (motion by Nobles; second by Daryl; no objection) though the Zoom continued for a few minutes so people could visit with each other.