

Community Board 12, Manhattan Parks & Cultural Affairs Committee
December 8, 2020 @ 6:30pm (via Zoom)

Committee Members Present: Elizabeth Lorris Ritter, Chair; Daryl Cochrane, Ass't. Chair; Francisco Lopez; Nobles Crawford; Sally Fisher; Edda Santiago; Danielle Jettoo; Barbara Frazier; Nayma Silver, Public Member. **Excused Absence:** Ayisha Oglivie; Alexis Marnel, Public Member. **Other Board Members:** Richard Allman, Tanya Bonner, Yosef Kalinsky, Steve Simon, Omar Tejada. **Staff:** Paola Garcia. **Elected Officials/Agencies/Institutions Represented:** Natalie Espino, MBP Liaison; Jennifer Hoppa, NYC Parks; Wendy Lorenzetti Olivo, NYS Assemblymember Al Taylor; Matthew D. Levy, NYS Senator Robert Jackson; Mariel De La Cruz, NYC Comptroller Scott Stringer; Megan Byrnes, Morris-Jumel Mansion; Alexander Campos, Hispanic Society Museum; Joanna Castro, NoMAA. **Also Attending** (80+ members of the Public, some of whom did not sign in with a complete name): Michael Regan; Jacob Fine; Carolyn Hearn; Bob Isaac; Jill Jacobs; Howard Dillon; Meghan Alvarez; Molly Hein; Bruce Kamiat; steven2759@; Donna Corbett; moto x4 / nedlogh@; Melissa Moschitto; Timothy Brutus; Patricia McMaster; Jennifer Bristol; Kely Espinal; Beth Alberty; N Rodriguez; Jill Reinhardt; Bob Barnett; Ira Gershenhorn; Rose Ellen Neidish; Avid Attwood; Tumi Jolaoso; Rosa Yolanda Pineda, Conectemonos; Jana La Sorte; Aaron Tacy; Jeanine McAdam; Jen Peng; Naiomyguerrero; Simon Wolf; Kathryn Whyte; Eric Stewart; Rob Snyder, Manhattan Borough Historian; Danny Vazquez; Rachel Gorman; Jeri & Fred; Jen Schriever; Jesse Swimm; Emma Cillekens, Mighty Writers; Deborah Cardona; Daniel Glover; Loretta Henke; Samson Bechhofer; Evan Bialostozky; Mandy Braun; Laszlo de Simon; Ruth Lilienstein; Trish Anderton; Pinar Ayata; Joe winchacha@; Allison Arlotta; David McWilliams; John Dwyer; A Decker; KB Berryhill; John Rumely; Leslie & William Hennessey; Vanessa Cariddi; Kate Dwyer; Margaret Day; Maggie Clarke; Jessica Griffo; Katherine O'Sullivan; Gunda Narang; Arilyn Martinez; Antonio A. Camacho; Lonnie Cooper; Conor Doyle; Sara Saiger; Alexandra Barbosa; Jennifer Bennion; Jasmine Coles; Jane Sheffield, Friends of Bennett Park; Avi Gitler, The Audubon Project; Angela Fernandez; MaryAlice; Pat Dwyer; Shahabuddeen Ally; Amanda Cruz Fernández. **Press:** Kristen, NY1.

The meeting was called to order at about 6:31pm by the Chair.

1) Welcome, Opening Remarks and Updates

- November reso in support of proposed repair of Amelia Gorman Memorial Park's collapsed retaining wall passed the full Board: 38 in favor, none opposed, 1 abstaining, and 1 not voting due to conflict.
- No update on Lenape Way street co-naming; Louis Ramos still collecting petition signatures.
- Attended ribbon cutting this morning for the Adventure Playground/Sunken Playground in Highbridge Park! (Enter on Edgecombe Ave. at 164th St.) Beautiful design and fun new equipment; shout-out to the Mayor for funding this project as part of the Anchor Parks initiative.
- Avi Gitler & The Audubon Mural Project are installing a mosaic on W. 163rd St. & Broadway (NW corner).

2) Review of Inwood Rezoning EDC Points of Agreement (6:40pm)

- In August 2018 The Mayor's Office sent to the City Council a summary of the investment commitments related to the Inwood Rezoning. The 39-page document details 87 items in the areas housing; open space, public realm, & waterfront access; small business & workforce; education & economic development; community services, arts, & culture; and transportation & infrastructure. Land Use Chair Wayne Benjamin suggested each Committee periodically review these commitments. Of the 87 commitments, 18 relate to the business of the Parks & Cultural Affairs Committee (#26-#38, #69-#72, & #75).
- The Inwood Rezoning was on hold due to legal challenges: a community group sued the City and won in December 2019; the City appealed and won in July 2020; the NYS Court of Appeals rejected a final appeal last month.
- The status of funding for the Inwood Rezoning is unclear given the current economic impacts of COVID and the downsizing of budgets in every City agency. Many capital projects are on hold.
- The status of the following items is unclear: #26 (Sherman Creek Malecón); #27 (North Cove restoration & park); #29 (Harlem River waterfront restoration); #30 (Dyckman Pier & dock); #33 (Dyckman Rest restoration); #36 (Dyckman soccer field restoration & water service); #69/70/71 (Immigrant Research Center & Performing Arts/IRCPA); #72 (Inwood Library); and #75 (Audubon Ballroom programming).
- The following items have been completed or are in process: #28 (Msgr. Kett Playground); #31 (Highbridge Anchor Park initiative); #32 (Highbridge Water Tower restoration); #34 (Highbridge Park court amenities); #35 (Anne Loftus Playground renovation); #37 (Inwood Hill Park adult fitness/Dyckman green gym); #38 (IHP ballfield mobile lighting).

- Sally noted that many of the items, including most of the ones already completed or in process, were unrelated to the Inwood Rezoning and were already in process prior to the Rezoning. The Anchor Parks initiative is unrelated to the Inwood rezoning, and is improving a park (Highbridge) that is Washington Heights, not in Inwood. The Dyckman Green Gym was done through Participatory Budgeting.
- Natalie noted that the MBP had included funding for wayfinding and interpretive signage for the Native American and enslaved African burial grounds in Inwood within her recommendations for the Inwood Rezoning, but this was not included in the POA. It is not clear why this was omitted, but the Committee agreed that this should be included in the City's and the developers' commitments.

3) Brief Parks & Cultural Organization Updates* (6:58pm)

- Alex Campos (Hispanic Society): The terrace installation closed this weekend. They plan to do another exhibition this spring on the terrace. Planning their holiday guided (virtual) tour (12/15 @ pm), and a kids' storytelling event on Dec. 20th. Email education@hispanicsociety.org for more info.
- Natalie Espino (MBPO): Open culture bill (Intro 2068A) in the Council. Following along the lines of Open dining/streets - the opportunity to use public spaces for their work. 5-day responses for artist permits (DOT and local council member). Rolling-out in the spring. This is the first of many bills aiming to support the creative economy in NYC, to bounce-back from COVID; and with an anti-racism focus. Question from a member of the Public: What was the mechanism of awarding the Paper Challenge Grant? [A] Pratt Industries, in collaboration with the MBPO and Solid Waste Advisory Board initiated this program. Winning Boards were determined based on comparison of collection data from the Department of Sanitation. CB12M placed 1st in the 4th Quarter. Q: how did the Board determined awardees? A: This was up to each Board; Liz to follow up and share information with Maggie. [Awardees were drawn from among those recommended or self-nominated during the challenge, following a broad solicitation to the public by the MBPO: <https://manhattancommunityboards.wufoo.com/forms/s7miirp1t8zuij/>. The challenge went from 7/1/19-6/30/20.]
- Rosa Yolanda (Connectemos): Ran an 8-week Saturday clean-up program in the abandoned park area on the edge of the GW Educational Campus at the curve of Ft. George Hill. Thanks to the Parks Department & the New York Restoration Project for their support. Connectemos started with planting bulbs in Highbridge Park, and on the greenspace initiative at the W. 186th St. basketball court; now they are looking to turn the abandoned area at GWEC into an urban farm, and are working with DOE, Parks, the MBPO, and Councilman Rodriguez to realize this dream. Thanks to the Community Board and PCA for its support.
- Megan Byrnes (Morris-Jumel Mansion): Andrea Arroyo's Covida's installation is up through Dec. 31st. It is a moving piece; go see it! Announced many upcoming events.
- Avi Gitler (Audubon Mural Project): The new mosaic installation, which is still in progress, is on the NW corner of 163rd & Broadway. Folks are encouraged to come by and participate in the building this piece.
- Johanna Castro (NoMAA): The Dyckman Farmhouse recently opened an exhibit, "Unspoken Voices: Honoring the Legacy of Black America," featuring the work of three local artists (through 9/1/21). As an outgrowth of research the Farmhouse has done on its own history with enslaved people, another artist has a temporary exterior light installation which has received national and international press.
- Sally Fisher (Friends of Inwood Hill Park): FIHP were one of the five recipients of the "Paper Challenge." 5,054 pounds of paper was recycled in the fiscal year. FIHP is using the awarded funds to purchase as well as for tools to loan to members of the community people who wish to do gardening or park maintenance projects. Inwood Hill Park is a MulchFest drop off site and will be accepting Christmas trees for chipping Dec. 26th – Jan. 9th; there also will be special MulchFest events on Jan 2nd & 9th.
- Jennifer Hoppa (NY Parks): the \$84M budget cut has brought out more community volunteers (8k hours); announced upcoming stewardship events, and a bald eagle watch with the Urban Park Rangers on 12/19.
- Maggie Clarke (RING): announced 31st Annual Christmas Tree lighting, featuring Santa & Mrs. Claus.

*excludes events which were then-upcoming, but held prior to publication of these minutes.

4) Renaming of Bennett Park (7:26pm) The Chair opened up the conversation with a recap of the history of James Gordon Bennett, after whom the Park is named, as a racist and vitriolic journalist who regularly

published inflammatory content against free and enslaved Africans and African-Americans, egregious insults of President Lincoln, incendiary secessionist rhetoric, etc. As noted in last month's discussion, the FDNY award of honor named after Bennett (based on a 19th C endowment by Bennett) recently was renamed for FDNY Chief Peter J. Ganci due to Bennett's problematic history and the FDNY deciding it was appropriate to name an FDNY award for bravery after a brave Fireman. (Ganci was the highest-ranking FDNY to die on 9/11.) There has been an active discussion on social media regarding the renaming of the Park, and while that is valuable, it is more transparent to have the discussion in an open and public forum, publicly announced and with a public record, hence this meeting and these minutes.

In considering a name it is important to note this is an overwhelmingly Latino community, built on Dutch estates built on land stolen from the Lenape who lived here first; in between there have been many different ethnic groups and luminaries. A park name can be drawn from any of these histories: a specific person or persons (deceased for at least three years), a group of people, an event or a time period; a park also can be named for a geographical or social concept, or a geological feature. Parks are named at the discretion of the Parks Commissioner, based on recommendations by the community and/or local officials.

She noted that as part of a conversation around renaming this Park, we may also want to consider renaming Bennett Rest, a small sitting area on the perimeter of Fort Tryon Park on Bennett Avenue. Additionally, the Traffic & Transportation Committee had a brief conversation at its meeting to evaluate renaming Bennett Avenue, though a street naming has a broader set of considerations than a park naming. Furthermore, there are other parks in the community that have been mentioned to consider renaming, including Fort Tryon Park (named after a pre-Revolutionary British Governor) and Roger Morris Park (named for a Tory Loyalist who left the Colonies for England).

In preparation for this meeting, the Chair reached out to folks at CB10 for background on their June 2020 reso honoring the Exonerated Five and the recent movement to remove the statue of Dr. Marion Sims. This evening's goal is to continue the conversation from last month, and to ensure public participation. There will likely be many ideas proposed. Although this conversation is time-sensitive, there is no deadline, and we do not need to rush a resolution. We may need to do additional research and outreach, and it is unlikely that we will come to a resolution this evening. To that end, and since this conversation began last month with considerable participation by the Committee Members, the Chair opened the floor to members of the Public to speak first (in the order that their hands were raised, followed by Member of the Board not on the Committee, followed by Members of the Committee).

Members of the Public

- Dave Hunt: Had initially thought it would be appropriate to rename the park in honor of recently-deceased Pulitzer Prize winning journalist and longtime community resident Jim Dwyer, who championed many social causes, including famously the Exonerated Five. Dave reached out to Jim's family, all of whom agreed that in consideration of Bennett's dubious legacy it would be most appropriate and in keeping with Jim's ideals to name the Park for a person of color.
- Debbie Cardona: Proposed naming the Park for her mother, Emilia "Toni" Cardona, a longtime community resident, educator, community organizer & advocate, parks champion, and esteemed former member of CB12M and of this Committee. Toni immigrated to the United States in 1945; she died in 2010.
- Alexandra Barbosa: Resident on Pinehurst, her great uncle, PFC Emilio Barbosa, is already memorialized in the park. He was an immigrant from Nicaragua who died at 19 in WWII (Okinawa).
- Jen Peng: Encourage CB12 to help the community understand what the process is like. Would like to propose to potentially reflect the Lenape land that our parks are all on. Asked about how the process works. A: The Committee would work to reach public consensus and pass a resolution (requiring a vote by the full Board) recommending a new name for the Parks Commissioner's consideration.

- Daniel Glover: “Bennett Park Parents” Facebook group founder. Former firefighter. Had long supported the renaming of the FDNY’s Medal, especially for Chief Ganci. Also supported renaming the Park for the land’s indigenous people. Suggested reaching-out to indigenous groups to ensure that they approve of this idea and to get guidance on what appropriate names would be.
- Timothy Brutus: Agree with using a Lenape name, if that would be their desire. Possibly expand the Barbosa memorial as well, because a lot of people don’t know about that. Potential names: *Kittuteney* (Great City), *Lenapehoking* (Lenape Lands), *Wehikiyankw* (Our Homeland), *xinkwenatay* (Big Island).
- Jacob Fine: Suggested naming the Park after Margaret Corbin, the first American female combat veteran, who took over her husband’s cannon in the Battle of Fort Washington after he was injured.
- Jen Schriver: Community resident and member of Bennett Park Parents; supports renaming the park with a name from the indigenous community/tradition/language.
- Rob Schneider, Manhattan Borough Historian: There is signage and architecture in the park recognizing different moments and historical significance and it’s important to incorporate that in a new name. The Chair noted that the historical signage in the Park certainly could and should be changed to reflect why the name of the Park was changed.
- Jessica Griffo: Community resident & lifelong friend of Barbosa family; supports renaming for PFC Barbosa.
- Angela Fernandez: Lives next to the park. Supports the movement to rename the park from the Lenape’s choosing. She suggested the word for “Mountain,” in recognition of Bennett Park containing Manhattan’s highest natural point, but thinks Lenape should decide.
- Vanessa Cariddi: Indigenous woman from a tribe in Maine. Supports an indigenous name: “Our names were stolen from us. A lot of the idea of reconciliation is that what’s been taken can never be returned, but there is something powerful and meaningful in the acknowledgement of that.”
- Molly Hein: Supports the renaming due to the historical violence and suppression of Bennett; concurs with using an indigenous name.
- Jayden Day: Supports getting Lenape input on the name. Wanted to speak to the equitable and inclusive narrative/acknowledgement of indigenous people to our city.
- Bruce Kamiat: The historical location of the park is significant to the history of the city and the country. That should be the focus; proposed named if after Col. Robert Magaw (Commander in the Battle of Fort Washington in 1776). A nearby street is named for Col. Magaw.
- Michael Reagan (retired FDNY): Wanted people to know that the Ganci Medal is the highest honor in the FDNY, and wanted to voice his embarrassment for the name, and his support of renaming the award for Chief Ganci. Lives in Brooklyn, but is really impressed by the WH community as evidenced by this conversation. Also supports renaming the Park for Jim Dwyer, who “was a Hercules of a man, a giant comparable to Chief Ganci.”

Members of the Board & elected officials’ representatives

- Richard Allman: *[At the Chair’s request, Richard reached out to the Fire Dept. to find out what their process in renaming the Ganci Award.]* The process was simple, it was organic within the FDNY that the name should be changed, based on longstanding objections initially raised by members of the Vulcan Society, the fraternal organization of Black Firefighters. Overall, we should look at the task to honor those in our community with more namings throughout the District, not just this Park. Suggested we rename Bennett Park, “Sosua Park” (or Square) - to honor the intersectional history of Jews and Dominicans, and the Dominican town that welcomed a boatload of Jews fleeing the Nazis, the only country to do so.
- Tanya Bonner: Spoke to the erasure of the Lenape, and referenced other fights in NYC to recognize and acknowledge that we are on stolen land. Also spoke of erasure of Black people in this community. She quoted Maya Angelou: “When you take something from somebody, give it back.”
- Omar Tejada: On T&T Committee, which is looking at name of Bennett Avenue. Supports Park renaming.
- Wendy Olivio for Assemblyman Al Taylor: This conversation was raised in the legislative session. Thanks to the community for this constructive conversation, which she will definitely bring back to the A/M.

Members of the Committee:

- Nayma: Wants to “right the wrong” of the park’s current name. Suggested the 19th C poet and abolitionist John Greenleaf Whittier, and quoted a section of his inspiring poem, “Don’t Quit.” Slaves in New York also made a part of this community and should be given the same respect as indigenous groups.
- Barbara: This discussion is opening a Pandora’s Box, but in a good way. Rebutted naming over the Revolutionary War heroes because there are plenty of names for them here. She wanted to focus the name on something that would serve to teach children. She also noted that parts of the park can have different names from the Park itself, e.g., the playground, the lawn, etc.
- Francisco: Wanted to voice support for the Lenape having the right to rename the park. Also noted that he is pleasantly surprised that the conversation was so open to this.
- Nobles: Supported letting the Lenape choose the name, and also that we should not include Bennett’s name on a plaque after renaming.
- Sally: Wanted to voice her support for the Lenape renaming the Park.
- Danielle: Wanted to voice her support for the Lenape renaming the Park. Respectfully disagreed with Nobles, stating that interpretive signage in the Park should state that it was renamed and why.
- Daryl: Gave a summary of the various names that had been suggested in various social media pages, some of which already had been mentioned this evening, and some of which are ineligible as the honorees are either still-living, or recently deceased: Pinehurst Park, Hudson Heights Park; High Point Park, Summit Park, Hilltop Park, Crown Park; Wecquaesgeek, Lenape; Stan Lee, Dr. Ruth Westheimer, Lou Gehrig, Dr. Charles V. Paterno, Col. Robert Magaw, Arlene Stringer-Cuevas; Margaret Corbin, Stanley Michels, James Dwyer, Herman "Denny" Farrell, St. Francis Cabrini, Rabbi Joseph Breuer, Ted Weiss, Charles Rangel, Lerone Bennett, Michael Bennett, Tony Bennett, Maria Callas, Ruth Bader Ginsburg, David Dinkins, George Grey Barnard, Martha Washington. Personally supports the local indigenous tribe to recommend/provide input on the name. As part of a broader conversation in keeping with Richard’s suggestion he’d like to work on an audit of all of the District’s parks and park areas that could be named.
- Liz: It’s important (and remarkable) to note that in a meeting attended by more than 90 people in addition to the Committee members we heard zero objection to renaming the park; it was not a discussion of *whether* to rename the Park, only *what* to rename it. I am inspired and moved by the tenor of this conversation, which has been very productive. Also supported Barbara’s suggestion of multiple names of and within the Park. Next steps will include conducting a survey of local parks per Daryl’s suggestion, outreach to the Lenape Center and other contacts.
- Jennifer Hoppa: Wanted to thank folks for their thoughts and ideas, and to add that this isn’t the only opportunity. She advised all of the arts organizations on this call to take this inspiration to apply to their local work for expression of community connection through the arts.

5) NYC Parks Report from Jennifer Hoppa, Northern Manhattan Parks Administrator

- Capital update covered earlier in the agenda in the discussion of the Inwood Rezoning POA
- Operational issues addressed in real-time on chat

6) Old Business / New Business / Additional announcements (8:50pm)

- There was no old or new business
- The Chair announced a Hanukkah klezmer concert on Zoom on Weds. 12/16 at 7pm.

The meeting was adjourned at 8:52pm in memory of Emilia “Toni” Cardona (motion by Nobles; second by Sally; no objection) though the Zoom continued for a few extra minutes for informal socialization/chatting.

Respectfully submitted: Nobles Crawford & Liz Ritter