

Community Board 12, Manhattan Parks & Cultural Affairs Committee
November 10, 2020 @ 6:30pm (via Zoom)

Committee Members Present: Elizabeth Lorris Ritter, Chair; Daryl Cochrane, Assistant. Chair; Nobles Crawford; Sally Fisher; Barbara Frazier; Danielle Jettoo; Francisco Lopez; Edda Santiago; Alexis Marnel & Nayma Silver, Public Members. **Absent:** Ayisha Oglivie. **Other Board Members:** Richard Allman; Mary Anderson; Steve Simon. **Staff:** Paola Garcia. **Also Attending:** (note that some attendees didn't put their full names or any name at all): Bob Barnett, Harlem River Community Rowing; WMEI Bolton; Jennifer Bristol; Megan Byrnes, Morris-Jumel Mansion; Alexander Campos, Hispanic Society; Joanna Castro, NoMAA; Pat Courtney, Volunteers for Isham Park; Jerry Culligan; Rachel Cytron, RowNY; Natalie Espino for Manhattan Borough President Gale Brewer; Jennifer Hoppa, Luis Gualpa, & Erik Linsalata, NYC Parks Department; Katherine O'Sullivan; Nancy Preston; David Thom; Jennifer Vanasco;

1) Call to Order, Welcome, Opening Remarks, and Updates from the Chair (6:35pm)

- Commitment to keep the meeting to two hours.
- Lenape St. Co-naming update: Mr. Ramos is still working on the package to collect petition signatures and hopefully will present next month. (It subsequently was noted that the City Council considers co-namings in June & December so this item will be deferred until spring.)
- Recap of full Board's 10/20/2020 Public Hearing on Capital & Expense Budget Priorities. The slightly lower ranking this year of PCA items reflects the pressing needs in the areas of housing, health & human services posed by the pandemic. Still, 12 of PCA's capital items placed in the Board's Top 30 (including our #1 priority, Hispanic Society renovations, which ranked #17 overall), and 3 expense items placed in the Board's Top 20 (including our #1 priority, increased funding for Parks programming/operations, which ranked #7 overall).
- October 29th Scoping Meeting to replace Bennett Park's central lawn with artificial turf was informative and well-attended. The main concerns were regarding turf materials and heat absorption. Parks will use turf without rubber crumb which therefore doesn't retain as much heat. It is washable and provides drainage. Parks gave examples of other places in the City where this material is used. The Committee can expect schematics in Spring 2021 for further discussion and review.

2) Brief Parks & Cultural Organization Updates (6:50pm)

- Megan Byrnes (Morris-Jumel Mansion): noted recent events for Hispanic Heritage month; announced upcoming events, and recent opening of Andrea Arroyo's CoVIDa installation.
- Alex Campos (Hispanic Society): "Treasures on the Terrace" open through December. 12/8 we'll have a short presentation on our travelling exhibit. Thank you for your support in your budget rankings.
- Joanna Castro (NoMAA): "Thursdays with NoMAA" continue through November 19th with a different uptown artist or performer each week at 7:30pm on Zoom. Announced a series of free Community Healing Through Art workshops, and an artist's talk w/Andrea Arroyo on CoVIDa.
- Rachel Cytron (RowNY): new Executive Director; recapped information on their programming supporting uptown youth afterschool athletic programming and academic support.
- Bob Barnett (Harlem River Community Rowing): Spoke about the NYC Comprehensive Waterfront Plan that's being developed as a roadmap for the next 10 years of waterfront development and a workshop he recently attended on waterfront resiliency, equity, and health; announced a then-upcoming second workshop session and gave contact information.
- Sally Fisher (Friends of Inwood Hill Park): Thanks to funding received as one of the awardees of the Paper Recycling Challenge, Friends of Inwood Hill Park will be developing store of loaner tools and other materials for gardening and clean-ups and other civic maintenance projects in parks, as well as a read-aloud literacy series. Noted successful recent events, including 10/17 Riverkeeper Sweep, and announced several then-upcoming events.
- Alexis Marnel: announced 11/28 event for WH Dance Project event; ongoing virtual events with Inwood Art Works.
- Jennifer Hoppa (NY Parks): Announced upcoming programs including clean-ups and invasives removals.

3) Proposed reconstruction and restoration of the retaining wall in Amelia Gorman Park (7:10pm): Luis Gualpa & Erik Linsalata from Parks Capital Division gave the presentation.

- Following several retaining wall collapses around the City, the Mayor made funding available to fix "the worst of the walls in the City."
- Amelia Gorman Park is located on 2 levels at W. 189/190 Sts.: an upper plaza along Wadsworth Terrace atop a retaining wall built in the 1930's and a serpentine path descending through a landscaped area to Broadway.

- There was a partial collapse of the cladding in the retaining wall in March 2017; due to the danger to the public from using the damaged walkway and the possibility of additional collapse of the retaining wall, the lower part of the park was closed to the public.
 - The partially denuded slope has caused erosion and soil run-off which has clogged drainage structures; the closed frontage along Broadway is overgrown and Parks periodically clears it as staffing allows.
 - The lower park's closure is a loss of both an area of pleasant respite and vital pedestrian thoroughfare.
 - The work will reconstruct and stabilize the collapsed stone façade, and will fix the drainage lines. The project will include mitigation of overgrowth which will also help with erosion control, but complete re-landscaping is beyond the scope of this project, budgeted at \$760k. Any trees removed will be replaced per NYC guidelines.
 - The project is considered a replacement in-kind. There already is a contractor doing similar work on retaining walls Citywide so no bidding is required. It is unclear if Public Design Commission approval is required.
 - The proposed repairs will extend the useful life of the retaining wall by an estimated 25-30 years, but will focus only on the part of the wall in most dire need of attention. A Phase II project to complete work beyond the scope of this Project, including additional attention to the retaining walls & stairs and re-landscaping the lower park would still be required, and should be added to the Board's list of future Capital priorities.
 - Anticipated completion by July 2021, with 3 months for design and six months for construction.
 - A resolution supporting the project and calling on elected officials to fund a Phase II project was approved unanimously. (8 Committee members, 2 Committee Public Members, and 2 Board Members voting in favor, none opposed; 1 Board Member who works for Parks did not vote due to conflict.)
- 4) **Consideration of Parks Names and Possible Renaming (7:53pm):** There is public interest in re-naming of Parks to remove names of people who are controversial by modern standards. Jennifer noted that 2 parks/borough were renamed earlier this month to honor the Black Experience. (In Manhattan: St. Nicholas Park's James Baldwin Lawn & the Langston Hughes Playground, formerly St. Nicholas Playground North.) In CD12M, a main contender for renaming is Bennett Park as James Gordon Bennett had a terrible history of racism and racially inflammatory journalism. FDNY recently renamed an award formerly named for him. Sally noted that the Mellon Foundation recently announced a 5-year, \$250 million grant commitment for a Monuments Project to reimagine and rebuild commemorative spaces and transform how we tell history, and asked if Parks is has applied for such funding. *[Ed.: Jennifer subsequently replied that Parks receive two grants from Mellon last year for Central & Prospect Parks, and will continue planning additional projects at multiple sites primarily in outer boroughs.]* Francisco asked if the local community is taken into account when naming parks. A: although many parks were named decades/a century ago, some are more recently named: Juan Bosch Plaza, Juan Pablo Duarte Sq., Ilka Tanya Payan Sq., Raoul Wallenberg Playground, Sugar Hill Luminaries Lawn, etc. Daryl noted the importance of equity for BIPOC communities as well as how we memorialize a name change so as to learn from and not erase mistakes of history. Natalie noted the example of Marion Sims, his Central Park statue having been removed to Green-Wood Cemetery with the base remaining with an explanatory plaque. She also advised that our CB10 colleagues have grappled with how to memorialize public space, e.g., the renovation of Lasker Rink and acknowledgment of the Exonerated Five, a generation of Harlem children having grown up afraid to use that facility in the wake of that travesty of justice. Liz will reach out to CB10. The Committee was in favor of a renaming and agreed there must be greater public notice/participation. We will look to float ideas for renaming at our next meeting with the aim to provide a resolution in Dec. or Jan.
- 5) **Review of Inwood Re-zoning EDC POA/commitments:** Deferred to December due to full agenda.
- 6) **NYC Parks Report, Jennifer Hoppa (8:27pm)**
- Gave updates on ongoing capital projects; visit <https://www.nycgovparks.org/planning-and-building/capital-project-tracker> for additional info. Capital projects await OMB release to advance into construction.
 - Monsignor Kett Playground project, in which design process CB12M & this Committee played a vital part, received a Design Excellence Award from the Public Design Commission.
 - Answered questions in the chat from members of the public regarding lights in Ft. Tryon Park, and confirmed that Bankruptcy Court stipulations regarding the operation of the restaurant concession at the Dyckman marina are still in force in the absence of finalized amendments which are still pending.

There being no additional business, the meeting was adjourned at 8:41pm.

Respectfully submitted: Daryl Cochrane & Liz Ritter