

Community Board 12, Manhattan Parks & Cultural Affairs Committee
May 11, 2021 @ 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, Public Member; Nayma Silver-Matos, Public Member. **Absent:** Ayisha Oglivie. **Other Board Members Present:** Tanya Bonner, Curtis Young. **Staff:** Ebenezer Smith. **Elected Officials, Agencies, & Institutions Represented:** Jennifer Hoppa, Northern Manhattan Parks Administrator; Leanna Rodriguez & Ashley Whited, Urban Park Rangers; Capt. Charlie Bello, NYPD 33rd Pct.; DI Peter Andrea, Lt. Taveras & PO Christian Perez, NYPD 34th Pct.; Alexander Campos, Hispanic Society Museum; Barbara Peck & Pieter Lindenburgh, Harlem River Community Rowing; Dorkys Ramos, Uptown Stories; Martin Collins, NoMAA; Miguel Guadalupe, BRC. **Also Attending:** Iphy Murphy; Afua M. Preston; Aidan Panotes-Bengzon; Amelia Pimentel; Angelique Dillon; Bernard Grobman; Carlos Manzueta; assandre Collazo; Cheryl Miller; Chloe Luterman; Elliot Avi Gittler; Evelynneal; Fiona Szeto; Frank Monroy; Gary Altheim; Ian Caddick; Jasmine Coles; Jeanine McAdam; Jeffrey Dinowitz; John Rumely; Kiran Aliah; Lisa Byrd; Miguel Plaza; Nancy Preston; Ned Klein; Patty Dukes; Priscilla Ramchand; Susana Montes; Tim Frasca.

1) Welcome, Opening Remarks, Updates & Announcements, (Liz Ritter, Chair) <6:34pm>

- April Reso regarding Bennett Park Central Lawn passed full Board unanimously (35 votes) last month.
- Additional clarification on the Open Culture program, which essentially is a different kind of street permitting through the Mayor's Office of Street Permit Activities (SAPO). The main difference is that events permitted through Open Culture are allowed to charge an admission fee. There are a variety of rule/prohibitions re noise, obstruction, etc.; will forward a helpful document from the MBPO Culture liaison. There is no mechanism for CB input, though they are encouraged to share any concerns/complaints about permitted activities with SAPO.
- There have been a number of complaints recently about noise in the Javits Playground due to after-hours use. With the advent of seasonal staff the locking of that playground should be more consistent, which should help reduce after-hours use.
- Many complaints regarding a Mr. Softee truck at/near that playground. The vendor has alleged that the Parks Department took away his permit for that location and has enlisted community support, while residents of the neighboring building have registered 311 complaints for noise/fumes and also have enlisted community support on social media. Per Parks, this vendor currently has a concession license for another location in the Bronx but never had a license for this location. Another vendor has a license for a hot-dog cart at this location; she previously was permitted for both a truck and a cart, but no longer operates the truck due to complaints from playground users about noise/fumes. The current architecture of Margaret Corbin circle is complicated by construction and staging for the 190th St. A-train elevator renovation; once that project is completed Parks might consider a truck concession in the SE quadrant. If so, this would be let through a competitive bidding process, as is the case with all such permits/licenses.
- Miguel Guadalupe of BRC gave an update on their proposed supportive housing project 3966 Tenth Ave. on land formerly used as an African-American & Enslaved Persons Burial Ground and a Native American Ceremonial Pit. The specifics of BRC's project is a matter for the Housing & Human Services Committee and will not be vetted here, though the subject of how best to memorialize and interpret the space as a living memorial is a matter for this Committee. BRC has formed an Advisory Group for the Inwood Sacred Sites, and retained experts to dig trenches in the property to determine whether there are any remains; their report will be made public later this month. Prior to beginning that work and in keeping with solidarity of those who came before us, a ceremony was held on May 2nd to bear witness and recognize the history of that space. The event included local clergy, representatives of the Lenape Center and Chiefs for Nigerian, Ghanaian, & Central African decent, with song, chant, prayer, and the ceremonial pouring of libation.

2) Urban Park Rangers HS Interns' presentation <7:04pm>: Rangers Leanna Rodriguez & Ashley Whited gave a brief presentation on their role in connecting NYC residents to parks and educating about nature and the proper use and stewardship of our parks; they also assist with injured wildlife rescues. UPR has a teen internship program, the Ranger Conservation Corps, for NYC high school youth. Two participants, Iphy Murphy & Priscilla Ramchand, gave a presentation about their team's experience with the Rangers, including trash pick-ups, wildlife exploration, gardening, removal of invasives, surveying, and more, in both Queens and Manhattan (Inwood Hill Park). Gave information on how to get involved. Thanks to Nayma for inviting these dynamic and engaged youth to present to the Committee.

3) Jennifer Hoppa, Northern Manhattan Parks Update <7:26pm>

- Many upcoming free events in parks, including an Urban Parks Rangers tree tour in Inwood Hill Park on May 23rd; Ft. Tryon Park stewardship events; 5/23 clean-up at Bennett Park; second-Saturdays event at the Highbridge Park mountain bike course, and the 19th annual Drums Along the Hudson on June 6th. (This year's event will be scaled down due to COVID, but will include peace plantings, a pow-wow, and 23+ performers, artisans, and craftspeople.) Visit www.NorthernManhattanParks.org for more info.
- NY Pops Up also partnering w/NYC Parks for free concerts in the parks throughout NYC.
- The Highbridge Rec Center & Pool is reopening June 26th. The COVID testing center will shift to mobile units.
- Please if you have an event you are planning in a park get a special event permit so that when you go to do your event you don't find that someone else is in that same spot with some other event. There are so many people and groups planning events outside.
- Reminder regarding the Litter Ambassador Program; thanks to all who have signed up so far. This includes Saturday & Sunday education and distribution of trash bags in key sites in parks, and "Meaningful Mondays" cleanups at 8am with community members & elected officials at key sites in parks, beginning June 7th at Inwood Hill Park; also August 16th in Highbridge Park.
- New exhibit at the Dyckman Farmhouse: "Unspoken Voices: Honoring the Legacy of Black America," a 45-minute immersive experience (by appointment) featuring local artists Rachel Sudlowski, Sheila Prevost, & Gwendolyn Black, whose work reflects on and reacts to the recent research about the enslaved and free people whose work enabled the farm to prosper.
- At long last the Inwood Nature Center renovation will begin soon; completion anticipated to take 20 months. Important to note: the Urban Parks Rangers' Dyckman Street presence will move northward when they vacate the Payson Playground building.
- Capital Updates: The \$5 million Dyckman Rest project will be coming before this Committee before the summer. *[Update: this has been placed on the June 8th agenda.]* The Anne Loftus Playground will be closing for construction probably in the second week of June for 12 months. Because the project includes significant repairs to subsurface infrastructure the entire playground will be closed for the duration of the project. There was some concern among the committee around the timing of closing a playground in the summer, especially since this could mean the loss of two seasons of use if there are delays. Jennifer noted that there were already significant delays due to COVID, and we are lucky that the contractor is willing to do the job at the previously-bid price; if there are further delays we'd likely see cost escalation and which would stall the project further. *[Update: the new construction start date is July 12th.]*
- Cassandra Collazo: question re scheduling a tree planting to honor Isaiah Moronta & Manny Flores, the boys who drowned last year in the Hudson near Inwood Hill Park. She will follow up w/Ms. Hoppa.
- There were several questions regarding parks closing hours (generally dusk for playgrounds, 1am for parks unless otherwise noted). The High Bridge closes at 8pm in the summer; no available staff to keep it open later. Bathrooms generally open until 4pm in winter, 8ish in summer; no available staff for later lock-ups.
- Jasmine Coles had a question regarding lighting in the parks following the death of Dominique Alexander who was found hanging from a tree in Fort Tryon Park on Jun 9, 2020; the ME/NYPD ruled the death a suicide though the family does not believe this to have been the case. As has been discussed previously in Committee this is a police matter and Ms. Coles was referred to the Precinct Community Council, and to the Public Safety Committee. Danielle (who also is Assistant Chair of Public Safety) offered to guide Ms. Coles through that Committee; Curtis Young, PS Chair, has already been in conversation with Ms. Coles and has been following this matter since last year when it was first raised in both committees. Nayma argued passionately that the death of a Black man particularly under these circumstances must be noted; Nobles noted that we had discussed this tragedy extensively in Committee last year and had had a moment of silence for Mr. Alexander immediately following his death. A lengthy conversation ensued re CB12M's budget ranking process and how best to ensure that a capital project for more lighting in parks stays on the Board's radar; Liz will follow up with the Traffic & Transportation Committee as parks lighting goes through NYC DOT, not Parks. She also encouraged Ms. Coles to attend the Budget Ranking Hearing usually held in October to advocate for this project.

4) Brief Parks & Cultural Organization updates <8:05pm> <Note: then-upcoming events which have passed may be omitted.>

- **Martin Collins, Northern Manhattan Arts Alliance (NoMAA):** Northern Manhattan Arts Alliance invites you to join Grammy nominee Miguel Zenón and CU's Zuckerman Inst. at an online performance 7:30pm Monday, May 17th; Thursdays w/ NoMAA featuring uptown artists resumes at 8pm Thursday, May 27th, and continues at 7:30pm each Thursday thereafter; the 19th Uptown Arts Stroll starts Friday, May 28th. Artists send NoMAA your events ASAP for the Manhattan Times special insert. Grow with Google partnered with NoMAA for a June 4th workshop benefiting artists; tell us what time that day works for you. Info on all events at www.nomaanyc.org.
- **Barbara Peck, Harlem Community Rowing:** We're a volunteer group committed to bringing the joy of rowing to Inwood & NYC. Our other goal is to promote the Harlem River as NYC's most underutilized recreational resource. We offered free rowing in Inwood for three years until COVID put a halt to our programming. We had planned to get back growing this year, but the Muscota Marsh dock closed for reconstruction and it's now postponed until the fall. We are having a Town Hall on Thursday, May 20th at 7pm for community members who've rowed with us or are interested in rowing with us in the future, as well as for our supporters who helped us through a tough year and for anyone interested in promoting on-water recreation in Inwood. Visit www.HarlemRiverCR.org for more info.
- **Dorkys Ramos, Uptown Stories:** We are a community organization serving Washington Heights' children since 2014 offering fun creative writing workshops to kids ages 7-17. We cover a broad range of genres (poetry, fiction, comics, myths, memoir, screenplays, journalism, etc.). We partner with local schools and other organizations, such as Word Up & Buunni, both of which carry anthologies of our students' work. We meet at the Cornerstone Center (178 Bennett Ave.) or in Fort Tryon Park and have been transitioning from virtual programming to in-person workshops. Right now we have 4 in-person and 3 virtual workshops. Tuition for all of our classes is pay-what-you-can because we believe every child deserves a seat at our table and to have their voice heard. Our spring session is in full swing, and we'll be announcing our summer lineup soon. Info/registration/newsletter: www.uptownstories.org.
- **Alexander Campos, Hispanic Society:** Our new ED, Guillaume Kientz, is now on board and is building relationships with community leaders/organizations; he will present at next month's meeting. He is committed to building the Hispanic Society as a community resource. Upcoming programming: we have a concert of Spanish Baroque works for violin as part of our series which culminates w/the world premiere of the Opera Apollo Daphne on June 30th. On May 26th we'll hold our virtual benefit; details TK. We are pleased to partner with NoMAA on 2 exhibitions: a mural project family/community programming featuring uptown artists which showed briefly in the Plaza by the United Palace; and a small exhibition of photos from the "In The Heights" movie on June 9th. Free! Info: HispanicSociety.org.
- **Sally Fisher, Friends of Inwood Park:** We had 2 recent successful events. Our fifth Earth Day Festival was April 22nd-24th. Thanks to our many community partners & 100s of people who came participated in cleanups, pollination station, walks, gardens-to-go, upcycled arts activities, community drum circle, and more. On May 1st we hosted the 10th Annual Riverkeeper Sweep, with 66 volunteers at two sites (Dyckman Pier & Northern Inwood shoreline) who collected 1,125 pounds of garbage & recyclables. We will be hosting another Riversweep event on June 5th; details available on Facebook & Instagram.
- **Barbara Frazier, Riverside/Inwood Neighborhood Garden (RING):** We've increased public opening hours; please come by! Bring your compost, and help with the gardening & plantings. Now that many of the COVID restrictions have been lifted we will be adding more events. We will be participating in the Uptown ArtStroll, Art in the Garden, etc., so come on by and participate.
- **Hike The Heights:** On June 5th, as part of National Trails Day.

5) WH/I Noise Task Force Presentation & Discussion of NYPD/PEP Enforcement in parks <8:21pm>

- CB12M 2nd Vice Chair & Noise Task Force founder Tanya Bonner gave a summary of the TF's work to date. Formed last summer in response to the violence and public health hazard of excessive noise, including (but not limited to) motorcycles, drag racing, popping car engines, loud parties/music, and fireworks, the Task Force membership is diverse as to age, gender, occupation, geography, ethnicity, etc., and represents diverse stakeholders including renters, owners, landlords, business owners, schools, institutions, and public health experts. It has been meeting monthly since November; has done a detailed, broadly representative survey of community noise issues/hot spots; and has convened productive meetings w/agencies & elected officials.

- Lt. Taveras, 34th Pct.: we keep in close conversation with Sgt. Rivera of PEP, monitor social media as to conditions, and deploy the NCOs to monitor their respective sectors.
- Jennifer Hoppa: we had a kickoff meeting with the 34th Pct. to discuss conditions/enforcement in parks in anticipation of the high-use summer season, and will do the same with the 33rd Pct. We also monitor social media, but things change very fast, so enforcement on loud parties is a bit like playing “whack-a-mole.” The PEP allocation for northern Manhattan is 1 Sgt. & 4 Officers to cover all of Manhattan north of 125th St.
- 33rd Pct. Capt. Bello: met with Riverside Park & MN Scooter TF covering Tues-Sat; Pct. covers Sun/Mon. We coordinate with PEP. J. Hood Wright Park remains the main priority for noise as that is where the Pct. gets the most complaints. We just got 12 new recruits, but they have ~2months training before they’re officially assigned. We prioritize violent crime, which for the most part are not happening in parks, over quality of life violations. Starting in June we’re also responsible for Highbridge Pool which requires much manpower.
- Francisco Lopez suggested reaching out to MEND (Mediating Establishment and Neighbor Disputes), a free mediation service dedicated to resolving quality of life disputes between restaurants, bars, and nightlife establishments and their neighbors through direct communication and compromise offered through program of NYC’s Office of Administrative Trials & Hearings (OATH). He also expressed concerns about over-policing and criminalizing misdemeanors. Danielle shared a similar concern, and as a public health professional noted the tension between the dual public health concerns of noise and over-policing.
- There was significant pushback on this point from Tanya and others: that quality-of-life issues, in particular noise, affect all residents irrespective of race, ethnicity, or class, and that excessive noise is especially harmful to the very old & young, the ill, those with jobs, and those at school: a broad cross-section of the community.
- Capt. Bello stated that their approach is first to talk with the perpetrators, then confiscate equipment or vehicles; arrests comes later, for repeated infractions, they do not generally start with an arrest over noise.
- Curtis suggested this or his (Public Safety) Committee might consider a reso calling for more PEP. Also wants to know what is the mitigation plan for fireworks in advance of July 4th. Liz observed that we don’t usually do resos for budget items and that we usually do this through the budget priority rankings process described earlier. She also posited that in a time of calling to “defund police” and to support police work with different kinds of professionals (e.g., social workers, mental health professionals, peace officers, etc.) that increasing the number of PEP officers – unarmed Peace Officers trained in public education – might be a good solution for dealing with noise and other quality of life issues in parks.
- Regarding a specific question on closing the IHP peninsula at 10pm: this is a mixed bag because then the party moves to the street directly under windows of the residential buildings Indian Road, a bigger disturbance.

6) **“We Love Pop-ups” / Jack’s Pumpkin Pop-up: Proposed Holiday Festival Event in Parks <9:22pm>** Promoters Frank Monroy & Miguel Plaza showed a short video about their seasonal, family-oriented, holiday-themed event (corn maze, hay rides, etc.). They are looking for 2-3 acres of open space in Inwood or WH, ideally a park, for 3-4 weeks in the fall for the benefit of the community. These are ticketed events although some free admissions would be made available to school groups & community organizations. There was a lengthy discussion about the relative merits of such an event, which the Committee widely regarded as potentially fun (the use of a derogatory term for Romani people to describe one of the activities notwithstanding) but had serious concerns over the admission cost, and that this would take public space away from public use for a for-profit endeavor. There were many mentions of various free community events. Jennifer noted that Parks is unlikely to grant a permit for extended, exclusive use of parkland, and that even if they did the site fee would be cost-prohibitive. The conversation pivoted to privately-owned vacant sites which would be both cheaper and less restrictive, e.g., the lot on Broadway btw. Academy & 204th Streets; the triangle at St. Nicholas/Amsterdam Avenues between 162nd-163rd Streets; the construction lot at the NE corner of 207th St. & Tenth Ave. or the supermarket parking lot at the SW corner; CU’s Wien stadium; etc.

There being no further business, the **meeting was adjourned at 9:50pm.** (Motion by Daryl, second by Nobles, approved by acclamation.)