

Community Board 12, Manhattan ~ Parks & Cultural Affairs Committee
January 7, 2014

Attendance: Committee Members: Mitchell Glenn, Chair; David Kach, Assistant Chair; Karen Arthur, Richard Lewis, Elizabeth Lorris Ritter and Chris O'Sullivan; Juan Mejia, Ulises Noboa and Zead Ramadan were absent. Board **members:** George Fernandez, CB12 Chair. Also present: Shamel Martin, Partnerships for Parks; Andrew Moore and Rene Fan, Quennell Rothschild & Partners; Allan Scholl, George Bloomer and Jennifer Hoppa, NYC Department of Parks & Recreation; Danica Doroski, New York Restoration Project; Eleni Bournaris-Suarez, Office of NYC Councilmember Mark Levine; Osi Kaminer, Paul Kittas, neighborhood residents.

Meeting called to order at 7:10pm in the CB12 meeting room at 560 W. 166th St., 6th floor, with an intro & welcome by Chair, Mitch Glenn.

Jennifer Hoppa introduced a presentation on the reconstruction of Staircase #50 in Ft. Tryon Park: Allan Scholl, Landscape Architect; George Bloomer, Design Supervisor; Andrew Moore: Landscape consultant from Quennell Rothschild. The project will be presented to the Landmarks and Public Design Commissions. Schematic, contract #M029-111M.

Quennell Rothchild has worked in FTP since the '80's, doing many projects including the Alpine Gardens, New Leaf, etc. Staircase #50, built in the 30's, is one of the original features of the Park, and is the most direct connection from the playground at Broadway/Dyckman/Riverside to the Cloisters. The project site is not in a flood zone. Olmsted Brothers wanted to emphasize the park's rough topography in the design. Photographs of the original stairs show level treads and even joints. These have degraded considerably over time. In restoring the stairs the architects must go through and see what is original and what is restored, and rely in addition on the original designs both of the staircase and the plantings. As this is one of the earlier uses of municipal asphalt, it will be proposed in the restoration. There is little evidence of most of the original plantings, the landscaping having been filled in by volunteer plantings. The original planting plan had different species based on seasonal considerations, and where people were most likely to congregate. (E.g., less likely to be in the western section in the Spring, when it is raw and chilly.)

The stairs are hazardous and have been closed for 4 years. They are blocked by snow fencing, though many people ignore it and use the stairs anyway. Original features include bluestone treads and risers, asphalt landings, bluestone landing pavers; concrete curb with steel railing is likely not original. Virtually everything will be removed; those that are salvageable will be reused. New stones will be matched to the original materials. New plantings will also help to open up site-lines, and will be consistent with the spirit of the original plan, though not using invasive species that were used in the original plan. Emphasis on native plantings within the palette originally used, including evergreens and perennials. Flowering and non-flowering mixed, with the goal of blending with existing plantings that are farther from the stairs and beyond the scope of the project. Concrete-and-steel railing will be removed, and replaced with a new steel handrail that is appropriate, similar to what is in the Linden Terrace. The idea is to be functional and attractive, but not a design feature. Existing boulders will continue to edge either side of the staircase, with additional boulders added. The catch basins are silted up; this will be remediated.

There will be railing on only one side, so as to honor the original design while also improving visitor experience. There was considerable discussion about the railing, and if there should be railings on both sides, or in the center, for increased utility as well as honoring the original design and maintaining openness of the staircase. Special consideration will be given to the red oak near the top of the step-ramp portion. This feature generated considerable discussion, and there was no agreement among the Committee or the public as to which would be best: a single rail on the western side as proposed; rails on either side; or a single, central rail.

Trees which will be removed are dead or dying; one is a real hazard. Any trees removed will be replaced. There was some discussion of planting of additional mosses and lichens to supplement that which will grow naturally so as to enrich the soil and control erosion. The project will cost \$1.35m, which has been fully funded by then-Borough President Scott Stringer.

The Committee voted unanimously (6 votes) to support the project and the preventative approach of the design. The Committee encouraged DPR to consider other design options with respect to the railing to maximize accessibility while mindful of aesthetic considerations, though 5 of the 6 members would not oppose the plan as proposed. It also was suggested to add signage at the top and bottom of the staircase indicating the non-stair alternatives. (Remaining vote was: 1-0-0-0 Board; 2-0-0-0 public with 3 declining to participate in the vote.)

Announcements

- Mitchell spoke about the United Palace Theatre. Recent “It’s a wonderful life” a tremendous success. “Muppets Take Manhattan” showing this Sunday.
- Danica Doroski, NYRP, re: family gardening plots. 16 raised garden beds in the children’s garden in the Sherman Creek Park by PS5. If you are interested in a plot, contact her: 212-333-2552 / 917-291-6436 / ddoroski@nyrp.org.
- Paul Kittas gave an update on the Harlem River Valley and the Highbridge. Needs better signage. Once the High Bridge is open, there will be more people in the park than we are ready for. Will be bringing a slide show next month.

DPR Update from Northern Manhattan Parks Administrator, Jennifer Hoppa:

- Our reso on the skating rink was received and transmitted to the Revenue division. Many of the recommendations will be incorporated into the RFP. Thank you for your helpful input.
- Ribbon-cutting on Dec. 30th for Ft. Washington Park. Great event; many people, including many neighborhood children, several CB12 members, electeds, and now-former Parks Commissioner White. Thanks to CB12 for its support for this project over the years. With regard to accessibility, JH noted that DPR’s former Accessibility Coordinator, Victor Calise, was very involved in the design and helped Parks Capital Division make changes to the design so that more of the final playground amenities would be accessible:
 - Two accessible Picnic areas with six accessible picnic tables.
 - The Sand Box has a transfer platform
 - The track style rides also are considered ground level, but in this instance we made transfer platforms (unique and above requirements) with two of the rides using your hands above head and the third you can sit (again a DPR first).
 - Two accessible swings
 - All three drinking fountain are accessible
 - Fibar Engineered Safety Surfacing
 - The Tree House has spiral stairs versus the typical stairs, which allows each stair to be a transfer platform.
 - All the mushrooms, beams, leafs, pods are approachable from the ground and are not considered elevated components; many are the same height as a wheel chair.
 - All the curbs on the site are flush.
- North end of Fort Washington Park, making progress on the ADA ramp. Contractor has until September of 2015. There is a lot of coordination of effort of State, Federal and City agencies.
- FW Lighthouse link project suffered some damage following Hurricane Sandy, but is now on track for completion by summer.

- Snow Day at Highbridge on Jan 4th – sledding, hot cocoa, and lots of fun. \$96m in the last decade invested in Highbridge Park, and it's really paying off, though people seem to be unaware of all of the improvements, and we need to continue to build awareness.
- Mulchfest: Jan 11th & 12th at various parks throughout the district; see handout / URL.
- Almost done with Orville & Wilbur Playground. Would like to open it soon, even though the bathrooms won't be open for another 2-3 months.
- Inwood Hill Park DeGroat (Little League) Ballfield and batting practice area. Funded by City Council a while ago, but since it's so small it took almost two years to find a qualified bidder. Renovation is moving forward, but is weather-dependent, probably sometime in the Fall '14.
- Muscota Marsh is finished. It is open, but that hasn't been officially announced yet. Community celebration of opening will wait until the warmer weather. Sandra Harris attending next month and will provide details.
- EcoDock – probably scoping meeting in February.
- Highbridge Park Rec. Center is looking great with the improvements and the central enclosure.
- 20% done with the pathways project at Sherman Creek.
- Pathway below cottage in Ft. Tryon is advancing.
- John T. Brush staircase – contractor still working on it. Working with ConEd to get power there. DoT has approved the plan.
- Edith asked regarding annual memberships, that people with disabilities be considered for reduced fees on par with seniors and youth <24, i.e., \$25. JH will get back to us.
- Mitchell asked about the Amtrak Bridge in FW Park: when is that closing? A: We have to pay a fee for them to review the designs, and also for flagmen to come out when there is active construction. Not clear when it will begin. JH will advise as to expected date, and anticipated length.

The meeting was adjourned at 9:15pm.

Respectfully submitted: Elizabeth Lorris Ritter