

CB9M Landmarks Preservation & Parks Committee Minutes and Updates

Wednesday, March 1, 2023

Location: Virtual Zoom Meeting, Called to Order at 6:41pm

Co-Chairs: Hon. Heather Jason and Hon. Jonathan Thomas

Committee Members Present: Hon. Patricia Caldwell, Hon. Dan Cohen, Hon. Heather Jason, Hon. Carolina Ramirez, Hon. Hugo Torres-Fetsco.

Absent Committee Members: Hon. Kelsy Bettis, Hon. Michael Palma (Excused), Hon. Jonathan Thomas and Hon. Liz Waytkus.

Community Members and Park Representatives Present:

Leslie Wright (Denny Farrell Riverbank State Park(DFRSP)), Mallory Craig (The Hort, DFRSP Greenhouse), Matt Genrich (NYC Parks), Wesley Hamilton (Riverside Park), Stephanie Caban (Riverside Park Outreach Coordinator), Brad Taylor (Friends of Morningside Park), Kim Johnson (St. Nicholas Block Association), Louis Bailey (We Act for Environmental Justice), Shannon Richards (142nd Dog Run), Michael Johnson (Morningside Park Café Kiosk), Vanessa Milu.

MCB9 Members and Staff: Madison Ayala and Victor Edwards.

New Business: NYC Parks and Historic Harlem Parks Updates & Announcements

- **Denny Farrell Riverbank State Park:**
 - [Riverbank State Park \(Denny Farrell Riverbank State Park\)](#)
 - [Riverbank State Park | New York NY | Facebook](#)
 - The bi-annual **Community Garden Lottery** occurred **Saturday February 25, 2023. 300 people showed up to participate in the lottery.** It was very orderly. Everyone got in the room on time. The doors were closed at 10:59am. Normally two people for every one bed showed up in the past. **52 of the 65 beds will be maintained by new community gardeners. Astonishingly high participation rate.**
 - All 65 beds are assigned to gardeners. **There is a waitlist of 30 more gardeners. Everyone's efforts paid off to give as many people as possible the chance to have a two-year raised garden bed.**
 - **The next garden meeting will be in mid-march at the Park. At this time, gardeners will sign their gardening agreements, identify their alternates and commence with gardening shortly thereafter in early April, for the season.**
 - Ongoing construction projects in the athletics locker rooms. Demolition is completed. Plumbing and duct work is progressing. Finishing work to start soon. The project is on track and on time. The contractor has managed around surprises and will open by June.

- Track and Field will close March 20th when it will be ripped up and put back down fresh. It will be complete by June.
 - In May Giant Aquatics Locker Room Renovation project will start and last 13-14 months.
 - Please follow the park on Instagram, Facebook, or the parks on website for all the different film festivals and programs and activities are going on.
 - June 17th is going to be the big, happy birthday DFRSP. The park turns 30, and there will be a big party with all sorts of music and fun stuff.
 - Swimming, carousel rides and skating will be free on DFRSP 30th birthday party.
 - The marching cobras will kick off the day. It's a giant marching band and dancers. It will be a big performance for everybody and for all ages. All day long. Rain or shine. If the weather does not cooperate, the event will be moved inside.
 - Another film series, highlighting, extraordinary women, for Women's month. The flyer will be sent to the community board tomorrow.
- **Friends of Denny Farrell Riverbank State Park** meets every second Saturday of the month in the Theater Rehearsal Room. (Reminder)
- **The Hort**
 - Gardening will commence in April.
 - [The Greenhouse Education Center](#)
 - <https://drive.google.com/file/d/1JEoaq39oQUyUCMkwYcjsHTq7119dR111/view?usp=sharing>
 - <https://www.eventbrite.com/o/the-greenhouse-education-center-6398168851>
 - <https://drive.google.com/file/d/1vpXY5A8MV6uXspz5BLkB-FN10EaXsi9D/view?usp=sharing>
 - The winter had lots of arts programming that will continue.
 - Thursdays are our big art day. 6:30pm Botanical arts which is led by Harlem based artists around botanical illustration and there will be a second workshop on art and agriculture. We're making art in response to our food systems and understanding what the culture around the foods we eat. Led by a Harlem based artist Jalisa Nancy, who will provide amazing eco printing with food, scraps, and herbs, and lead in a conversation around our food waste, and how we can use it to make artwork.
 - That Horticultural Society of New York is going to be launching its new website in March. It's being streamlined to sign up and share some of the programming. Desire to make program accessible to everyone who might want to join.
 - March 12th is our seed celebration giveaway thanks to Birthday Seeds. Workshop on how to start your own seeds in the greenhouse. Snacks, some music, art making, and sharing a seed library. Bring your seeds and come swap them. Stay tuned to Eventbrite, and social media, because more events will be advertised. Woman's history events, particularly around the book. "All We Can Save," and thinking about how women and girls can lead thoughts on climate action.

- **NYC Parks**

- A lot of construction projects going on. The Jacob Schiff sitting area is still underway and expected to be completed on time this summer.
- The Sheltering Arms Playground Comfort station is expected to be completed this fall.
- Timing is not yet available, but the Annunciation field synthetic turf field will be going under renovation.
- The Morningside pavement project is part of the state of good repairs. It's still ongoing. We expect the pavement project to be completed on the southern end of the field this late march. Next, the plan is to move up to 120th Streets to get the paths redone around the park this spring before peak season, but for Memorial Day.
- There will be all brand new paths throughout Morningside Park, come this summer.
- In March, plan the season ahead for community engagement around volunteering, programming and partnerships.
- Working with Barnard and Columbia to plan the Olmsted Earth Day event on April 20th.
- Concessions coming this spring, and some wonderful public art, etc., that are in the mix.
- Sometime this year the synthetic turf field and track at Annunciation Park (135 and Amsterdam) will be under construction to be replaced through a state of good repair.
- Typically fields are past the useful life before replacement. A synthetic turf field crew takes care of all the fields throughout the 5 boroughs. A lot of grooming and maintenance of fields is performed to increase their useful life.
- The funding on the website for these projects reflects multiple parks.
- <https://www.nycgovparks.org/planning-and-building/capital-project-tracker/project/1323111>
- It is possible that some of the other parks that are being renovated through this repaving project are not going to be completed as soon as expected. But Morningside Park, the lower part at West 114th and then move up to 120th is expected to be complete before Memorial Day.

- **NYC Parks Riverside Park**

- Crews have been engaged with snow removal. March begins restoration and lawn repairs.
- Losing senior staff deputy administrator Benjamin Kramer who has been with us for 9 years. He is moving on to the Bronx and being promoted to the regional manager position.
- The Comfort Stations' power at 140th Street were restored right after the last meeting by Con Edison and is open daily.
- Pathway lighting on the promenade south of the Dog run at approximately West 142nd is in need of illumination in the park, while we have plenty of street light. This has been a request for 3 months. DOT responsibility.
- A response should generally be received in 30 days, but it has been slow. A request has been made at least twice. Wesley Hamilton will follow up.

- **Riverside Park Conservancy**

- There are a lot of opportunities for youth this summer to learn more about horticulture and environmental justice.
- Interested in connecting with schools and organizations that are interested in a paid internship program specifically focused on horticulture and justice.
- It was suggested to attend the CB9 youth and education meeting to provide information about wanting to work with the schools.
- Attended the CB12 Youth and education, but have not yet attended CB9. Plan to mark CB9 Youth, Education and Library on the calendar. Will send flyers about the program to be distributed within CB9.
- Saturday March 25th vampire is coming up at the end of the week.
- @summeronthehudson on IG and Twitter

- **Friends of Morningside Park**

- Harlem Youth gardener program application is live. This program will be accepting applications until March 22nd. Please spread the word. This is a STEM educational program for teens ages 14 to 19, who also get paid \$18 an hour while they work.
- This program is presented under the auspices of Friends Morningside Park, a 501C(3). But the friends of Saint Nicholas Park we'll be taking the admin lead this time around.
- Interest in a historical signage in the Morningside Park to acknowledge and memorialize all the community protesters who fought so hard against the Columbia gymnasium.
- Seeking a Resolution. If it wasn't for the community protest, we would probably have a Columbia gymnasium in Morningside Park. In February, 1968 local community groups got together and sat in front of Bulldozers. There were articles in the New York Times.
- Instagram account Morningside Park has a lot of information about this. A memorial tree is planted on the lawn in memory of some of those who are no longer with us.
- We have a one community resident and activist Suki Port, helped us compile a lot about the history of that event. She's all in favor, of course.
- Columbia is very interested to bring this full circle, so that the story is actually positive about Columbia. This is one of the things we're working on around the pond and its issues and trying to bring Columbia University in with more of its resources. Not just its study resources, but it's funding resources as well. Collaborate together to connect both ends of this story in a very positive way, while Suki can be honored.

New Business:

- **Review of Columbia University (CU) Community Benefits Agreement (CBA)**

- There are several items in this CBA that relates directly to our committee.
- The members of this committee must become more involved, and review the CBA.
- Let's brainstorm to come up with ways that we can make sure that the community is receiving these benefits within the next couple of weeks.
- Hugo Torres-Fetsco is currently a student at the Columbia Business School Executive MBA program. He has a couple of classmates who work for Columbia University, and states there's a lot of interest with the MBA students to find different initiatives and

opportunities to engage with the community. He is interested in exploring and serving as a liaison with Heather Jason.

- We need increased participation from committee members.
- There are 50 pages in the CBA of which 10 pages relate directly to this committee.
- Many in kind benefits **(CU Facilities and Services) page 11 Section E in effect until 2045.**
- **Section F Programs and Goals, p.12:** Including item **(h.) Historic Preservation.**
- **P.13: CU** “shall make available to its academic departments in the CU Graduate Schools including, the Graduate School of Business, Engineering and Architecture, Planning and Historic Preservation, information provided by the WHLDC related to the creation of internships in order to encourage graduate students and their advisors to support local businesses and the arts community.
- **Section G Advice and Guidance, p.13.** Sustain program development and growth over time in a range of areas. Meetings and phone calls in response to specific requests.
- **Section I Technical Support from CU Graduate Students, p. 26,** pro bono technical advice and business consulting services to local businesses and entrepreneurs. Columbia enrolled real estate program students to provide advice and consulting services on land use, development and property issues consistent with other internships for real estate program students and number 3, which directly relates to us when it says any other graduate program that would offer technical assistance to businesses located within the West Harlem community. There are a lot of businesses in our community in buildings that are in historic districts and could benefit from the historic preservation program.
- **Section C Streetscape Enhancement Measures, p.34.** CU has agreed to facilitate the use of plants and streetscape in the project area subject to zoning and other similar limitations. CU has agreed to provide the city's department of Parks and Recreation funds for staff and enhanced services for the West Harlem Peers Park which payments commenced in 2008, and shall extend 24 years thereafter. Such funds shall be in the initial amount of \$500,000, escalating at 3% annually.

West Harlem Piers Park concerns from Victor Edwards

- I've been working on the CBA for the past 5 years now trying to make sure Columbia lives up to their end and make sure we utilize it properly.
- In December I sent to letter to Steve Simon, who is chief of staff for the area, asking about the money that's going to the Piers, which is \$500,000 a year. 3% increase annually since 2008.
- We want an explanation about where this money is being spent.
- I'm often down to Harlem Piers. It's a beautiful park, but I don't see where \$500K is being spent yearly.
- I received the email this evening at 5:00pm from Steve Simon, outlining one year's worth of expenditures. I don't see that much staff down there when I when I'm there. Hopefully, we will keep the focus on this, and hold people accountable. I want to make sure that the money is spent properly in that area and in the historic district. I can't thank you enough for bringing this up.

Response from Wesley Hamilton NYC Parks

- The park is maintained by our staff.

- CU has provided all the funding that we have asked, based upon the administrator, John Harold. In some cases we don't spend all the money for it, just like you mentioned staffing.
- In some cases we hire staff, for that staff may move on, or they may quit, and it takes some time to replace them. And so and also we do that in a revolving 7 day week as well.
- We don't always like that. They provide the funding, but we don't charge them for funding. If we don't have the staff, and that's usually on our end where we have to hire them, or if they quit. Recently we had a gardener that we hired, and she just got promoted, and is going back to Queens. So you know, those are some of the examples with the staffing, so that we have to deal with, and that's more of a park issue. That's not a Columbia issue with that. Steve wanted me to assure everyone that it's not a use it or lose it. In that aspect that money gets rolled over from year to year. So even if we don't spend the money or if we don't have enough staff. We have staffing situations. That money that we didn't spend is rolled in to the following year. Hopefully that addresses some of that issues there with staffing and funding.

Victor Edwards

- Well, actually it doesn't because my question to Steve in my letter was: What's the program? His letter did not explain any programming issues, any enhancements.
- So people from the Board had asked about having a bathroom down there. Now that Fairways is closed, people and families that go down there have no bathroom to use. We had asked some time ago about a bathroom in last year or the year before.
- People asked for Porta Potties that could be placed, removed and serviced during the summer months. We never got an answer on that.

Wesley Hamilton NYC Parks

- I'm not sure about the porta potties that we really try not to get into, but when we can help it if we need to. But because of sanitary reasons our staff can't really clean porta potties. An outside contractor must be hired to remove them and clean them. In some cases they get vandalized and become unsanitary.
- Then, people get mad at the Parks department, which I get it. But we do use them in some cases, so we can circle back to that. That's something I can talk to Steve about.
- Building a bathroom is more of a capital project, and not like a like a staffing or 2.
- That might be another discussion. But as far as programming, the Riverside Park Conservancy does a lot of the programming, and they do provide some programming at West Harlem Piers.
- Steve also provided the last year, all programs, and they did it at West Harlem Piers Park, and we'll be doing that again this summer as well that they'll be providing programming and mostly recreational activities at the pier. They've been performing that through the Conservancy.

Victor Edwards

So the Columbia money, half a 1 million dollars. Part of it goes to the Conservancy. Is that what you say?

Wesley Hamilton NYC Parks

Oh, well, I don't want to say the half a 1 million dollars. That's probably the whole pot. But some is for the programming. Yes, the Conservancy performs with Parks Department as well. Again, the staffing supports the Conservancy, so both of them are tied together. But yes, that's the Programming has been done a lot with the Conservancy in conjunction with the Parks Department.

Victor Edwards

Okay, thank you.

CU CBA Discussion Continued

- **Section D. p. 37 Endowment** to provide Infrastructure and other in kind support.
- **Section F. p. 37 West Harlem Cultural Projects:** project that preserve and document the cultural and living history of West Harlem.
- **Section G. p. 37 Living History Project:** Strive to preserve the legacies, traditions in history of the people of West Harlem while introducing the emerging melting pot community. The CU Gym protest Memorial may qualify under this area.
- **Section H. p. 37 Harlem Legacy.** Our committee is focused on preservation. These areas may directly impact our committee.
- **Section X, pp. 39-40, Historic Preservation:** Committed to assisting in the preservation and enhancement of the historic context of the local community, and promoting public awareness of its rich architectural resources.
- It will be beneficial for CU graduate students to work with the small property and business owners in our community. There are lots of tax credits for an example that are available. The emphasis on infrastructure development and the Inflation Reduction Act builds on foundational climate and clean energy actions of the Biden-Harris Administration. There is much technical expertise that MBA, Architecture, and Historic Preservation students can provide small businesses and property owners in order to fully benefit from this legislation that will enable our community to become more sustainable and preserve our existing built environment. We often hear about developers coming into the community and building new housing. But we have a huge existing housing and business stock here that desperately needs assistance.
- Work with the National Trust for Historic Preservation to identify community driven programs such as the Preservation Development Initiative (PDI).
- Utilize the CU expertise in the development of the RKO Theater.
- Comprehensive preservation development strategy and Local Community Preservation Assessment.
- It was suggested to request a Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) to receive the accounting of the West Harlem Pier's Park Funding that has been rolling over yearly.
- Utilize the Columbia Law School and Journalism school to raise awareness about the CBA.
- Suggestion to hire someone to provide regular accounting of the funding.
- Jana La Sorte provided connection for Loftin Flowers of Columbia to contact Heather Jason and schedule a meeting to review the CBA and start building a better and deeper relationship around our parks.

Old Business:

- **142nd Street Dog Run**
 - 2 new garbage cans have been put in the proximity of the dog run.
 - Environmentally friendly and rodent resistant.
 - Council member plans to pick this up as a community enhancement issue in its own right, and feels that the budgeting number of about \$5,000 for about 5 additional cans on the east side of Riverside Drive from West 135th Street, north to 141st Street which represents about \$900 each and is reasonable.

- **Donnellan Square between West 149th and 150th Streets at Saint Nicholas Avenue**
 - Pruning is complete. Not sufficient space to plant a pine tree due to the density of the canopy. Instructed to call 311 to request a pine tree through the Million More Trees Initiative.
- **Proposed West Harlem Historic District and Conference** - Yuien Chin, West Harlem Community Preservation Organization and Harlem One Stop. **Proposed conference will be April 23rd and 24th.** No new update.
- **West 142nd Street Development** unpermitted Scaffolding, Liz Waytkus. No new update.
- **RKO Theater** – Exploring the possibility of the Jazz Museum as anchor tenant and space for other tenants. Request that they tour the site and explore potential space for their new facility. Due to the pandemic, it was difficult receiving responses.
- Contacted nonprofits to advise of the Preservation League of New York State Grants
 - The grant guidelines and pre-application are available here: <https://www.preservenys.org/preserve-new-york>
 - My PNY Grants Webinar is available for viewing here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vHWutNytn28&t=151s>
 - The full application deadline is **Friday, March 31**.

Meeting Adjourned at 8:15pm: Next meeting is scheduled for Wednesday, April 5, 2023.

Respectfully submitted by Heather Jason