



CITY OF NEW YORK
MANHATTAN COMMUNITY BOARD 10
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PARKS AND RECREATION COMMITTEE MINUTES
Wednesday, March 8th, 2017, 6:30pm
Hon. Karen Horry, Chair

Meeting began at 6:40 pm and was held in the 4th Floor Conference room. The meeting was chaired by Hon. Karen Horry, Chair.

Committee Members in attendance: Chair Karen Horry, Troy Gethers, Maurice Sessoms, Kevin Bitterman, Crystal Shipp, Derrick Graham and Leever Holmes

Committee Members Absent: Arian Punter, Mark Bones and Henrietta Lyle

Guests in attendance: Beth Mount (JD Wilson), Alvena Wilson (Jed Wilson), Rayquan Ethridge (JD Wilson), Cathy James (JD Wilson), Elizabeth Alvarez (JD Wilson), Cynthia Worley (JD Wilson), Hana Worley (JD Wilson), Kenneth Williams (Green Thumb-Community Liaison), Kjirsten Alexander (NYC Parks), Yvonne Andre (Jackie Robinson Park Conservancy/150-155 Street Edgecombe Block Association), Sharon Peterson (Macombs Manor), Rene Calvo (Mandela Garden), Shevann Horce (112th Street), Ricardo Hinkle (NYC Parks), G. Kobres (JD Wilson), Jeff Duer (JD Wilson), Erin Duer (JD Wilson), Sarah Kennedy (JD Wilson), Charles Yarborough (155 Block Association), Jacqueline Fuller (Edgecombe Avenue), Mariah Hussein ((JD Wilson), Chantal Gailloux (Mandela Garden), Benzenia Johnson (Edgecombe Avenue), Richard Washington, Steve Simon (NYC Parks-Manhattan Chief of Staff), Mickey Donohue (JD Wilson, Harlem Rose Garden), Raymond Figueroa (President-NYCCGC), Alex Yanos (Hughes Hubbard _), Lucian Reynolds (MBPO), Jenny Bell (JD Wilson Garden), Yvette Cruz (Project Harmony), Krishanv Patel (Mandela Garden), Stacy Crawford (Project Harmony), Kieishsha Y. Garnes (NYC Parks), Alice Butts and Robin E. Dickens (Mandela Garden, NYCCGC Board).

PRESENTATIONS

1. GREEN THUMB - Kenneth Williams- Senior Outreach Coordinator, CB 10 and 11

Mr. Williams introduced himself as Senior Outreach Coordinator and presented the program's offerings and role with respect to the realm of NYC community gardening.

During the financial crisis of the 1970s, many parts of the city suffered, and vacant and abandoned lots—both public land and newly public land acquired by foreclosure— were endemic. Abandoned buildings, if they weren't already torn down,

dotted the landscape, especially in Manhattan neighborhoods such as the Lower East Side, Hell's Kitchen, and East Harlem, and underutilized land sat fallow amidst widespread urban neglect. A nonprofit environmental group dedicated to preserving urban gardens, the Green Guerillas, started in 1973 by lobbing "seed bombs" packed with fertilizer, seed, and water over fences around vacant lots where access was otherwise limited in an attempt to beautify some of these eyesores with greenery. This move not only beautified formerly vacant lots but soon became a grassroots program that fostered neighborhood participation. Green Thumb was established as an outgrowth of this movement. There are currently 550 gardens registered with the garden management program; 32 of which are located in CB10.

Community gardens provide a multitude of community benefits, among them; provision of fresh nutritious food, fostering community and building networks, promoting health benefits and a place to retreat from the noise and commotion of urban environments; and helping to provide employment, education, entrepreneurship and reduction of crime.

Community gardens also have a positive impact on nearby property prices. A New York University study looked at the impact of community gardens on the neighboring property values. The authors of the study, Vicki Been and Ioan Voicu, compared the sales prices of properties within a certain distance from community gardens, to prices of similar properties in the same neighborhood, but not near a garden. By comparing prices in the same neighborhood, the authors hoped to deal with the potential price difference due to neighborhood location. The study found that community gardens have statistically significant positive effects on the values of property within 1,000 feet of the garden

Green Thumb will be hosting its Annual "Grow Together" Conference on March 25th at Hostos Community College. The all-day event is a kick-off for community gardening in the city as well as the celebration of gardening throughout the world.

Green Thumb's supply distribution, originally centered in Queens, will now be expanded to 112th Street and Madison Avenue. The site will service all registered community gardens. Spring workshops will be available as well as year-round workshops which are listed in the Green Thumb program guide. Additional support is provided to senior citizen gardeners, such as snow removal from gardens. The distribution site will provide material and technical services to gardeners. Green Thumb also provides advocacy support on behalf of community gardens to HPD.

2. PROJECT HARMONY - Cynthia Worley

Joseph Daniel Wilson Memorial Garden (JDWMG) was founded in 1985 on vacant unkempt lots on West 122nd between 7th and 8th Aves. The 0.15 acre garden spans Manhattan block 1928, lot 22 (223 WEST 122 STREET), New York City Department of Parks and Recreation (public), Manhattan block 1928, lot 23 (219-00 WEST 122 STREET), New York City Department of Parks and Recreation (public), Manhattan block 1928, lot 121 (225 WEST 122 STREET), (private), Manhattan block 1928, lot 122 (WEST 122 STREET), (private).

CB 10 & Green Thumb approved the founding of the Garden. Eight area lots at that time were all under the Department of City-wide Administrative Services (DCAS), as

taxes had not been paid on them for many years.

During the Giuliani Administration, four of the lots were reclaimed by the city, transferred to the Partnership for New Homes, and made into housing. Narrowness of the lots, required that the two houses that were built be constructed on 2 lots each, leaving the remaining four narrow lots (12 feet wide each) for the garden. The four remaining alternating and non-contiguous lots were still under DCAS. JDWMG advised that in 1999 the person who still held title to two of the lots, was given the opportunity to buy back the unpaid taxes which had been sold into a tax lien trust and as a result reclaimed title to the lots that had been previously abandoned.

The lease that had been converted to a license agreement that JDWMG has with Green Thumb/the City of New York is not and never has been contingent upon the Garden giving up the lots for housing at any point, as the gardens are not under the jurisdiction of HPD. Initially, a lease was issued for only lot 23. Once JDWMG became aware that there was a "titular owner" (private owner), Green Thumb issued "licenses" to the Garden for lots 22 and 23 only. JDWMG, going on 14 years, continued to garden on the lots claimed by the "titular owner" because they believed, as they were advised, that many legal experts agreed that the lots were the Garden's by right of adverse possession.

JDWMG is comprised of 4 lots, two of which are "permanent" garden under the Parks Department, per the 2002 Spitzer-Bloomberg agreement. The garden maintains that the issue at-hand, are the two privately owned lots, which are non-contiguous and intersecting with the park-licensed lots, thus sharing long-standing, deeply-rooted flora and fauna.

The lots were reclaimed in 1999 by the "titular owner". The two non-contiguous lots, purchased by a private party in the 1970s and then abandoned with taxes unpaid, reclaimed from foreclosure when, in 1999, the titular owner, who has been current and consistent, was given the opportunity to pay the back taxes. JDWMG advises that several appraisals have determined that the two non-contiguous lots would not be suitable for housing because they are too narrow.

The titular owner wants to sell the lots. The community wants them to remain a garden. JDWMG asserts that to break into the garden at two or even one point would totally destroy the entire garden. JDWMG asserts that there are two possible alternatives:

1. Court litigation; wherein the gardeners would claim ownership of lots by right of adverse possession, as they have "openly and notoriously" utilized the space with the owner's knowledge but without his objection for many, many years. This would be a lengthy and drawn-out process, costing the titular owner a great deal. The garden has pro bono [free] legal assistance
2. Ask the city to purchase the land by declaring eminent domain. This too is a lengthy process but will ultimately be a win/win for all involved.

The JD Wilson Garden is a lush oasis in the City which provides countless resources to the entire community and neighborhood. JDWMG features 30 year old trees, a pond, compost bins, a feral cat colony, vertical gardens, bee hives, beautiful flora and

fruit trees. Its loss would be a tragedy. Neighbors from all around come to compost, participate in the CSA, benefit from the thriving bee hives and are able to purchase low-cost, organic, locally grown produce at the People's Market. Thousands of pounds of fresh organic produce are donated each year to a local family shelter and also to a local school where children participate in making their own meals. Children and adults alike participate in countless educational workshops & healthy food prep/eating demonstrations, not to mention community concerts & poetry readings, cook-outs, holiday celebrations and more.

The Joseph Daniel Wilson Memorial Garden is also a tourist attraction and has been visited by both domestic and international travelers.

Borough President Gale Brewer is very much in support of maintaining the garden, because of the tremendous and positive impact on the Harlem community. The Borough President's Urban Planning Division recommends that flexibility be stressed in any resolution developed through a collaboration of the community board and elected officials, which might consider such mechanisms as a purchase or land swap.

Project Harmony submitted a petition with hundreds of signatures; primarily of local residents, but also included residents from other parts of the city, as well as other states and countries.

Outcome: The Committee voted in favor of supporting resolution to the plight of the garden and will issue a letter of support, contingent upon receipt of the remainder of a 400 signature petition which the group partially submitted. The favorable sentiment will be conveyed to the Executive Committee.

3. JACKIE ROBINSON PARK - PARKS WITHOUT BORDERS - SCHEMATIC DESIGN- Kjirsten Alexander - Assistant Landscape Architect -Parks Capital Projects – Manhattan

The Parks Department project design team presented final design plans to the Committee, after incorporating additional community feedback. the project scope will encompass the Northern Connection (entrance 155th Street/Edgecombe, entrance 152nd Street/Bradhurst, two stairways and connecting paths), the Southern Connection (entrance 145th Street/Edgecombe, entrance 146th Street/Bradhurst; rebuild stairway and connecting path ADA Access) and Western Border (entrance 150th Street/Edgecombe; Edgecombe fence only); and

The NYC Parks Department advises that it will continue to identify additional funding to further additional renovations to the Western Border (Edgecombe tree beds and bench installation) and Southern Border (Edgecombe tree beds and bench installations).

The project budget is a \$4.4 million - FY17 mayoral allocation.

\$335,635.65 remaining from the NYS grant: “Community Enhancement Facilities Assistance Program” (Original Grant Project ID #: 1885 Reconstruction of Sidewalks, Fencing, Curbs, and Landscaping along Edgecombe Ave) will be reactivated and applied towards the project budget to complete the fence replacement along the Edgecombe Avenue border of the park.

The design project will focus on three areas of the park; entrances, edges and park adjacent/under-utilized spaces. The design approach will help unify park spaces with the neighborhoods they serve. It will make entrances more welcoming, convenient and easy to find. The proposed project will make park boundaries greener and more comfortable with added furnishings and amenities. It will increase park safety by improving sight lines. The Parks Without Borders project will also create new centers of community activity out of underused areas next to parks.

Six Community meetings were held to incorporate community input; January 13th, 2016, May 24th, 2016, October 17th, 2016, November 9th, 2016, December 14th, 2016 and March 8th, 2017.

Outcome: The Committee voted in favor of the final design plans and will draft a resolution, in support of the implementation of the Jackie Robinson “Parks Without Borders” project. The resolution will be recommended to the Executive Committee as a voting item for the April full Board meeting.

DISCUSSIONS

1. MANDELA GARDEN - Rene Calvo

The Mandela Garden, founded in 2014, spans three lots; Manhattan block 1932, lot 5 (269-67 West 126 Street), Manhattan block 1932, lot 7 (265 West 126 Street), and Manhattan block 1932, lot 107 (263 West 126 Street). The Garden is under threat of being designated for housing development. The garden site is an HPD property. The city announced on January 13th that the Nelson Mandela Garden had been awarded by the city agency for contracting developers to build housing.

The proliferative three year old garden, named for Nelson Mandela, has a three-fold purpose; (1) restore local aquifer to support surrounding trees and decrease the load on the NYC’s sewage system, (2) promote the growth of indigenous N.A. wildflowers, trees and plants that beautify the neighborhood, contribute to soil remediation and support biodiversity and (3) creation of a public space where neighbors can meet, work together, celebrate the seasons and build community.

The group is asking for a letter of support to have the city change its jurisdiction from HPD to NYC Parks. The gardeners supplied a signed petition and will be submitting additional signatures.

Outcome: Committee voted in favor of the project and will issue a letter of support, contingent upon receipt of additional signatures from local area residents which the

group partially submitted. The favorable sentiment will be conveyed to the Executive Committee.

Voting Items:

Project Harmony - 7 Yes 0 NO 0 Abstentions

Mandela Garden - 7 Yes 0 NO 0 Abstentions

Jackie Robinson Park - Park Without Borders - Schematic Designs -
7 Yes 0 NO 0 Abstentions

The Committee did have quorum. Three of the now ten standing members were absent. The Committee strongly suggests that members attend to achieve quorum for all future meetings.

Meeting was adjourned at 9:45 pm.

~Respectfully submitted by Parks and Recreation Chair, Karen Horry~