



Meeting Minutes for Ridgewood Reservoir Community Listening Meeting #4

June 1, 2017 at the North Brooklyn YMCA

44 people in attendance (list below)

City & State Officials present:

- Diana Reyna, Brooklyn Borough Deputy President
- Debby Kuha, Administrator Forest and Highland Park, NYC Parks Department
- Margaret Carrillo-Rosas, NYC Parks Department
- Salema Davis, Parks Chair, CB5 Brooklyn
- Gary Gioradano, District Manager, CB5 Queens
- Ken Scarlatelli, Natural Resource Manager, NY State Department of Environmental Conservation

Matt Malina, Founder and Director of NYC H2O, opened the meeting and introduced himself and NYC H2O. Its mission: H2O inspires New Yorkers of all ages to learn about, enjoy and protect their city's local water ecology and needed resources. NYC H2O has provided free STEM water ecology field trips to the Ridgewood Reservoir to over 3,000 school children over the last 3 ½ years.

Attendees introduced themselves and explained their interest in the reservoir.

Jonathan Turer, Programs Manager NYC H2O, then facilitated the meeting.

Discussion Points

Recent Developments at the Reservoir

- NYC H2O Historic Register Nomination; looks like it's moving through both processes smoothly. OK for State and final edits on National. Jonathan brought copies of support letters from Parks Dept and others. They are available at [this link](#).
- Formal reclassification of "dam" - the walls of the reservoir. Now LOW HAZARD. This allows for the walls to stay intact and removes the need of breaching the wall.
- **Parks hearing on June 21** will be a double header.

- 6pm public hearing for comments on the CEA. There is only one other CEA in all of NYC and that's Jamaica Bay. RR would be the 2nd.
 - 7pm **community meeting to discuss next steps at the reservoir**. We don't know what the plans are and how they differ from what was proposed in 2013. We'd like to see a comprehensive plan that addresses ecological and community concerns. The plans will not be made public by Parks before the June 21 meeting despite Commissioner Lewandowski saying they would be made available at the May 23 meeting.
- Talking with NY State, they're prepared to begin the process of a wetland delineation. Something official probably in July. Very positive.
- Dept of Transportation in communication — make it safer for people to use the space. YMCA summer program is afraid to bring kids to the reservoir because the streets are not safe. **DOT is beginning a survey for the possibility of placing a pedestrian-activated crossing light from the parking lot across Vermont Place** to stop the cars racing on that street. Queens side wants to start a comprehensive overview of that intersection - Highland/Vermont to make it a safer experience. Hoping this includes changes in signage, crosswalks, openings, metal barriers (that make it harder for people to get there).
- Precedent for Ridgewood Reservoir → The Discovery Center in Philadelphia. Birders advocated for the preservation of this abandoned reservoir in Philly. Partnering through Philadelphia Audubon with the Outward Bound School and the City of Philadelphia. High-level preservation of the ecosystem there along with doing outdoor education. We're getting inside info on how the process worked for them. Precedent is real positive sign for potential.

Q&A

- Steve Nanz: Is concerned that Parks will develop Basin 3 in a way that does not respect the ecology and wildlife habitat. We have to show strong support for the nature center. Applied for wetland delineation 8 years ago, resubmitted 4 years ago. Theoretically the DEC is doing this in July. To do this, they need soil core samples, comprehensive scientific analysis is required. Basin 3 has wetland species and it should be preserved. Round Mountain environmental group conducted a survey - found 3 endangered plant species in Basin 3. 2 different surveys found wetland habitat in Basin 3. DEC still has not done the science required by their own rules to make any decisions.
- Gary Comorau: Wetland delineation offers more protection to the Reservoir than the CEA Parks has less power.
- Diana: Wants to have the Community Boards in BK & QNS request **letters of support for the wetland delineation from their State officials because DEC is a NY State agency**. They were done in the past but we need to do another letter writing campaign now. Elected officials will address the agency which will then respond. Support from not just the applicant, but from everyone. Builds a paper trail. Diana has called DEC about this and has met with Deputy Commissioner Lewandowski a year ago who said she was waiting for this. However, there is no communication and no paper trail right now. It's

important that there be resolutions from the appropriate Community Boards calling on the president or a call to action upon the agency to move.

- Selina: we can bring this letters of support idea up at the last community board meeting, because they go on break in July & August. This can be mentioned so it will go down in the minutes when she has to do her report on this meeting. When these letters are requested, it will then be documented. CB5 BK will definitely work on that.

Announcement to the board and community on requesting the letters.

Challenges & Opportunities

- Pedestrian access to site and safety: we see lots of people with strollers, bikes, dogs running — all of these people deserve a better way to get into the RR.
- Improving access by public transportation: rerouting the B15 bus route was a no again, but will continue fighting this. CB5 QNS petitioned MTA who said no. CB5 BK is next.
- Invasive Species — Mike Feder does gardening up there and is introducing native species up there in the morning. Invasive species removal + tree planting with him.
- Councilman Espinal has 13-15 million dollars slated for park development within the Brooklyn area.

Presentation of Concept Boards

- DCAP and RAFT were asked by NYC H2O to create concept boards for a new vision that show the combined ecological and cultural treasure that is the RR.
- Request to RSVP with Debbie for the Parks meeting on the 21st and you have to provide 3 pieces of information.
- Jackie Robinson Foundation suggested to be involved in the creation of the nature center because of the proximity to his grave and it could be important to economic justice in East NY and Ridgewood.
- Ridgewood Reservoir was one of the first ones in the country to direct water upwards. Steam and the importance of engineering education — this is one thing that you must have in the Ridgewood Reservoir nature center, appreciation of engineering miracle that this reservoir was.
- Jonathan: 8 different unique ecosystems in RR. To have the vestiges of the engineering elements that provided such a major city with water is unique. Part of our vision that we see getting support is a respectful access point to the basins so that people can fully appreciate these different ecosystems.
- Thomas Dowd presented NYC H2O with an Earth Flag from the UN-associated NGO Earth Society Foundation as an Earth Trustee award.

Future Action Items

- Idea was proposed to have a **livestream/birdcam in the basins** — observations of the entire life cycle of plants & animals in every classroom in Brooklyn & Queens.
- Idea was proposed to have a **boardwalk** along the basins: 3 no's. 1 no is no for basin 2. An unsupervised boardwalk will mean garbage in the basins.

- How do we motivate Parks Dept to stop phragmites invasion? Parks Dept is putting plastic sheets in Prospect Park Lake to kill the phragmites. Prospect Park Alliance + Dept of Parks has volunteer base helping out.
- Ken from DEC: meetings this coming Wednesday to discuss the issue.
- NYC H2O: we can try to rally volunteers to help out in RR, but we're not there yet.
- David: Philly case study is unusual. Private groups with a lease that allows them to be stewards for the space but still make it a Parks space.
- Jonathan: NYC H2O advocates for controlled access into the basins. Access points might best be accessed through a rehabilitated gatehouse building that functions as an interpretive center and a human gatehouse. Limits the kids bringing food, trash, encampments, paintball, etc.
- Cemetery on one side of the Reservoir has been sued for dumping. Owned by the former Mayor Bloomberg for his synagogue. He may be persuaded to contribute to the nature center plan.
- This vision is different from Parks plans from the past because it manages access to the space in a better way. Sanctuary for birds, endangered native plant species, and education center.
- **Citizens can speak on behalf of science - lesson taught at the RR field trips and lesson for these community meetings.**
- Gary: Have you worked out a plan for how you plan to get to this nature center? Train young people in the area to do the work and give them jobs.
 - Jonathan: recognize that a new vision won't happen if that dam remains high risk.
 - Matt: Historic Register Nomination makes the site eligible for environmental protection funds and money from the National Park Service. Coalition of state representatives that can put something together in the budget for the RR. Reyna can work on garnering some capital funds.
- Tom says there is no **ecotourism** in NYC. 22 mins by bus to RR from where the cruise ship tourists come in at the ports. What will they do when they dock?
- Heidi: Idea proposed for some walkways down in the basins - especially in 1 and 3.

Attendance List

1	Matt Malina (NYC H2O)
2	Donna Dowd
3	Thomas Dowd
4	Margaret Carrillo-Rosas (NYC Parks)
5	Debby Kuha (NYC Parks)
6	Farrah Lafontant

7	Steve Nanz
8	Rob Bate
9	Heidi Steiner
10	Yasmin Vega
11	Nilda Vega
12	Victor Vega
13	Victor Vega Jr.
14	Rosa Sawyer
15	Robert Holden
16	Larry Williams
17	Kimberly Wyche
18	Ana Fischer (NYC Council)
19	Jedd Flanscha
20	Diana Reyna (Brooklyn Borough Deputy President)
21	Manny Steien
22	Melinda Alfano (NYC H2O)
23	Delia Kulukundis (RAFT Landscape)
24	Rob Jett
25	Gary Giordano (CB5Q)
26	Sam Finqus?
27	Steven Laxton
28	Jacob Mandel
29	Sharon Brown
30	Andy Holloway
31	Kele Nkhhereanye
32	Nancy Tognan (Queens County Bird Club)

33	Melissa Trasky
34	James Northrop
35	Ken Scarlatelli (NY DEC)
36	Tony Canty
37	Alberto Ramos (Cypress Hills East New York Coalition)
38	Ryan Goldberg
39	Diana Reyna
40	John Rodrigues
41	Salema Davis (CB5K)
42	Jonathan Turer (NYC H2O)
43	David Cunningham (DCAP Architects)
44	Berenice (DCAP Architects)

Introductions

- Brooklyn residents made up $\frac{2}{3}$ of the audience and Queens $\frac{1}{3}$
- Diana: Ridgewood Reservoir is a shared ecological and cultural treasure for Brooklyn and Queens and serves to unite both boroughs. Highland Park funds of \$50 million were contentious because they were tied to building a stadium for the 2012 bid for the Olympics. The Forest Park Trust oversees the Forest & Highland Park/Ridgewood Reservoir. Debby Kuha is the Executive Director of the Forest Park Trust and, “godmother of this organization.” This is an opportunity for us to envision the next chapter for Highland Park and the Ridgewood Reservoir. Vision for Diana is an observatory / skywalk, that can allow us to walk across, experience wildlife. Boy scout troops have to go very far to experience this right now. 35 years ago, an environmental/nature center was started in South Brooklyn, but this is difficult to access (2-hour ride for this area to get to). Bring equity and access to a nature center closer to home. Want a capital plan in place to have applications for capital dollars ready next year.
- Jonathan:
 - Salema Davis: mom used to run around the park in the '70s
 - Heidi Steiner: did a bird survey 10 years ago at the Reservoir w/ Steve. Former board member for NYC Audubon
 - Rob Bate: President of the Brooklyn Bird Club, NYC Audubon board member
 - Jedd: designer/art director at Unicef. New resident, moved from Bed Stuy.
 - Vega Family: Living near the reservoir for 35 years. Know the beauty of Highland Park. Taken bird watching walks with Heidi and Steve.
 - Jacob Mandel: moved here a few years ago, draw to the hood was proximity to the reservoir. avid users of the park. want to see it remain useful to everyone moving forward
 - Melissa: President Cypress Hills art organization & gallery. The Reservoir is a jewel that we must take care of.
 - Steven Lexon: Fell in love with reservoir, moved to the area.
 - Kim: Resident of East NY for 12 years, avid gardener.
 - John Rodrigues: lived in cypress hills all his life. President of 75th precinct community council. Fight crime. Enjoys running around the Reservoir. Seeing the crime in East NY in the '70s and '80s, he knows that the only way he can fight crime in the community is by working with law enforcement at all different levels. Problems with dumping across from the Reservoir, sex work. June 15 at St Peters at 7pm is their next meeting.
 - Matteo: long-time resident. Director for NYC Commission of Human Rights.
 - Alberto Ramos: President of Cypress Hills East New York Coalition, part of CB5. Cancer walk are around the reservoir. 1000 Jamaica Ave is his office.
 - Nancy: Lives in Bayside VP of the Queens County Bird Club
 - Sharon Brown: Parks Committee, CB5 member.
 - David Cunningham: architect

- Bernese: junior architect w/ Dave
- Delia: works for RAFT
- Ryan Goldberg: freelance journalist. learning about decade-long campaign to preserve the Reservoir. Brooklyn bird club member.
- Tom: long-time resident of Ridgewood 74 years?. President of UN-associated NGO. Presenting an Earth trustee award to NYC H2O and the site.
- Jonna: resident for 47 years. Taught teachers how to teach science, city educators, love of earth science. It's a place to bring children, it's a place to learn. It needs to be preserved as a natural habitat. After 9/11, our kids couldn't go anywhere.
- Tony: 4th grade teacher. Live in Glendale, Gary is next door neighbor. Went to RR one day and thought "where am I?" I thought I was in a whole other place.
- Gary: formed an organization to protect the Reservoir.
- Wilkinson: Newtown Historical Society. Working with Heidi & Steve since 10 years ago. runs Save the RR Facebook group
- Green shirt: Founding members of RR Alliance. Runs blog called Save RR
- Bob Bolden: President of Human Parks Association, member of CB5Queens. Professor for 40 years, about to retire. Running for councilman seat in the area
- Mandy: submitted several freedom of information act request regarding RR and none were responded to. Unless you can buy a judge, this act means nothing. When was the hazard site designated?
- Gary Giordano: everything we wanted is likely to happen. Walls don't have to be breached, CEA designation.

Attendance + Emails & Zip Codes

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