

Urban Outdoors

No. 109 – Sept 14, 2005

PLEASE WATER YOUR STREET TREES AND IF YOU CAN, POST SIGNS ASKING OTHERS TO DO THE SAME.

If you enjoy receiving Urban Outdoors or think that the information that we provide to our readers is valuable, we ask that you become a member of Neighborhood Open Space Coalition. Membership is \$35 but we accept any contribution that you can make. Membership benefits include free trees and shrubs for your park Friends organization or community garden and the right to join us on our monthly Members Only walks. Contributing is easy at our web contribution location.

(http://partners.guidestar.org/controller/searchResults.gs?action_donateReport=1&partner=networkforgood&ein=13-3081501)

PARKS UNDERFUNDING BRINGS BENEFITS

One of the consequences of under funding NYC Parks is a change in the way that the agency sees its mission and its land. A positive outcome is the “forever wild” program, which sets aside land for minimal care and return to nature. As a result, New Yorkers are able to visit wonderful salt marsh habitat areas in four boroughs and significant upland forests in all five.

Some park advocates suggest that the cost of maintaining parks has moved the agency to favor acquisition of new parkland in the more natural outlying areas of the city and not in the park-poor inner city districts. With better planning, they say, the redevelopment of our city after the disinvestments of the 70’s could have included significant new greenswards surrounded by more densely developed new housing. Low parks budgets have made much needed “urban” open space a lower priority than it should have been.

The reality is that the Federal and State governments set most local spending priorities. Washington decides to subsidize only low-rise housing and cities scramble to find sites to build, creating a form of urban sprawl within the borders of the city itself. The Feds decide that transportation is a priority and transport agencies are well funded and Parks is not. Without a Federal and State effort to fund local parks or a dedicated source of funds that is bigger than the current parks budget, there is little hope for change.

PARKS PRIVATIZATION CONTINUES

Another way for a fiscally strapped Parks agency to save money is to shift responsibility for parkland to the private sector. This can be done in big ways or small ways, some appropriate to the agency’s mission and others less appropriate. Snack Shops that cater to all income levels are certainly an appropriate use of parkland. Some New Yorkers are not sure that high-priced restaurants are also right for public parks.

STADIUM OBSESSION MOVES TO BRONX & QUEENS

Media-centric Manhattan is spared the development of a new stadium and the city will not host the Olympics at any time soon. The Football Jets are now seeking to take over a chunk of crowded Flushing Meadows Park in Queens for their custom-made ball park.

In the Bronx, a new smaller stadium for the Yankees, “needed” because the current stadium does not have enough luxury boxes, moves forward at break-neck pace.

According to neighborhood activist JJ Brennan (savemacombsdampark@yahoo.com): “The alienation of Mullaly Park, where the new stadium would be built, was passed in Albany on the last day of the legislative session without prior local public notice. 150 angry residents turned out to a quickly organized meeting in response to the action.” The saddest thing about this stealth of public parkland for private interests is that it doesn’t have to happen.

Former Borough President Fernando Ferrer published a “Safe at Home” Plan in which he called for the development of a new stadium and sports complex south of Mullaly Park. It would satisfy everything that George Steinbrenner wants except his lust for a significantly extended real estate empire. Will Mayoral Candidate Ferrer stick to his guns on his more creative vision and defend our parkland?

LUXURY GOLF COURSE CAUGHT IN SAND TRAP

Urban Outdoors has covered the development of a luxury golf course on approximately 220 acres of the Bronx’s Ferry Point Park several times. The Daily News has now exposed organized crime activity there. The golf course developer has been accepting construction waste “to contour his course” for five years now. According to the Ferry Point Park Coalition (www.ferrypointpark.org) the average time to build a golf course in the United States is eighteen months. The Coalition believes that the developer, who promised to invest 22 million of his own funds to build the 18-hole course, is less interested in golf than tipping fees for waste.

The Parks Department will probably now look for a new developer. Not yet being discussed is the highest and best use for this land. Now that it is “contoured” perhaps a new beautifully landscaped “Central Park”, open to everyone instead of a privileged few, can be developed. Maybe the adjacent high-density neighborhoods can be invited in to a real park, instead of fenced out. Perhaps the long-promised greenway can be built near the water’s edge instead of a cull d’sac driveway for a high priced restaurant. New York City needs more use-intensive facilities than a luxury golf course at Ferry Point Park.

GREENPOINT REZONING DEFIES NYC WATERFRONT PLAN

The Department of City Planning’s Waterfront Plan calls for public access to the waterfront, low-rise construction behind the public spaces and high-rise development behind the low rises. Instead of following that consensus vision the Williamsburg - Greenpoint plan throws it away. Not only does it allow light blocking high rises to be built at the water’s edge, it doesn’t even require public ownership of a strip of land in return for the building bonuses that are built into the plan.

Instead it calls for part-time public access to land that is retained by the private developers. In places where this has been tried “public access” has been made ugly and uninviting and eventually curtailed because “undesirable” activity has occurred there. There is something about private ownership of a public resource that often fails to serve everyone’s interest.

Gantry State Park in Long Island City is a better idea. Here ownership of waterfront land is in the government’s hands. High Rises are across a street and separate from the park. If this model were to be used in Williamsburg/Greenpoint, title to a strip of land at the waters edge would be transferred to government in return for building bonuses. A very narrow road would be squeezed in where possible. Revenue projections for the new buildings would provide a dedicated source of funding for the maintenance of the public land. Public control of land would ensure some public input into its uses.

CONEY CAROUSEL SOLD TO CITY

At the 11th hour, NYC has purchased the antique Coney Island Carousel, which had been scheduled to be broken into pieces and sold. It will be moved across Surf Avenue and operated by a private amusement park owner. The carousel with its hand carved menagerie was the last in Coney Island, the last in the City with a “catch-the-ring” and the last with an operating calliope. Private? Public? In this case, the band does play on...

TAKE A WALK, NEW YORK!

Saturday, September 17, 2005. Walk and International Coastal Cleanup, Brooklyn, 9:30 AM. Joint event of AMC Conservation Committee, Friends of Gateway and the Sierra Club. Combine two kinds of healthy physical activity on this walk from Sheepshead Bay to Plumb Beach, where we will participate in an exciting conservation effort. We will collect and record marine debris while helping to preserve the coastal environment and providing data for a national research project. Bring water, snacks, sunscreen, a hat and work gloves if you have. Meet outside of the Sheepshead Bay Road station of the Q train (take the back of the train).

Saturday, October 8, 2005. MEMBERS ONLY WALK. North Bronx to Yonkers, 10 AM. Alan Ginsberg will lead us through Riverdale including Wave Hill and out of New York City into Yonkers staying along the Hudson as much as possible. We will end in downtown Yonkers where we will bus or train back. Take the #1 train to 242nd St. (last stop); meet at street level.

Saturday, October 15, 2005. 7th Annual Bronx River Golden Ball. 10 AM. We will join the Bronx River Alliance and many other organizations to celebrate the revitalization of the Bronx River. Our route will include a serene walk through Woodlawn Cemetery, exploration of the northern most part of the Bronx River in NYC, Muskrat Cove, the Botanical Gardens and the new Riverwalk area of the Bronx Zoo. Take the #4 train to the last stop, Woodlawn. Bring water and snacks.

Saturday, October 29, 2005. Hills of the West Bronx, 10 AM. Take your basic NYC six floor prewar apartment building and place it in a hilly environment and it becomes somewhere else. This neighborhood mixes housing styles from several eras with the blasted rock of Robert Moses highway building. Walk leader Sam Goodman, of the Bronx BP’s office provides insight into social history of the Bronx. Meet on the steps of the Bronx Boro Hall at 161st St. and the Grand Concourse. Take the D or 4 train to 161st St.

Saturday, November 19, 2005. The Secrets of Fort Wadsworth, Staten Island. 9:15 AM.

Bring flashlights for this walk that will include indoor and outdoor spaces in a now retired fort. Chosen for its high land overlooking the entrance to New York Harbor, Fort Wadsworth has been a military location since before the American Revolution. The historic fortifications are now in the hands of the National Park Service. Alan Ginsberg will lead the walk to the fort. We will have NPS escort within the grounds. Meet at the Staten Island ferry terminal; the ferry runs only every hour on the half hour on Sat AM, so plan to get to the ferry terminal on time. Staten Islanders can meet us on the Staten Island side at 10 AM.

URBAN OUTDOORS is the monthly newsletter of Neighborhood Open Space Coalition and Friends of Gateway. It reports on citywide public space issues and the work of hundreds of local civic groups that take an interest in the spaces. You have been added to the list because someone has entered your name. To be removed from the list "reply" with "remove" in the subject header. To add someone to URBAN OUTDOORS list: visit the subscription area of <http://www.treebranch.net/>.

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