

**Meeting of the
Parks, Recreation and Conservation Board
WebEx
May 19, 2022
4:00 PM**

PRC BOARD MEMBERS PRESENT

J. Henry Neale, Jr., Chair
Debra Clay
Sobeida Cruz
Pamela Dubitsky
Charlene Indelicato
Martin Kamarck
Vishnu Patel
Martin Rogowsky
Hon. David Tubiolo

PRC BOARD MEMBERS ABSENT

Joel Seligman

MEMBERS EMERITI

Richard Greco, Jr.

MEMBERS EMERITI ABSENT

Lorraine Palais
Larry Wilson

EX-OFFICIO MEMBERS PRESENT

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Norma Drummond, Commissioner
Department of Planning
Hugh Greechan, Commissioner DPW&T

PRC STAFF PRESENT

Kathleen O'Connor, Commissioner
Peter Tartaglia, First Deputy Commissioner
Judith Allen, Administrative Aide

PRC STAFF ABSENT

William Bland, Assist. Director of Div. - PRC
Neil Squillante, Deputy Commissioner

GUESTS

Robert DelTorto – President of the Bronx River
Parkway Reservation Conservancy
William Brady – Chief Planner, Department of Planning
Gayle Katzman - First Deputy Commissioner DPW&T
Aviva Meyer - Westchester County Liaison
David Zapsky - President of the Friends of Lasdon

ITEM NO. 1 – APPROVAL OF MINUTES

Upon motion by Charlene Indelicato and seconded by Sobeida Cruz, the Parks, Recreation and Conservation Board unanimously approved the minutes of April 21, 2022.

ITEM NO. 2 – MEMBERS REPORTS**A. Recent Park Visits**

Debra Clay, Charlene Indelicato, and Pamela Dubitsky went on an hour tour of Cranberry Lake Preserve led by Jason Klein, Director of Conservation and Kristina Hayek, the Parks new Curator. The tour was enjoyed by all. Ms. Clay stated Mr. Klein was an excellent historian and although I was not prepared for the challenge of the hike, we conquered it.

First Deputy Commissioner Tartaglia stated Ms. Hayek will be handling everything at Cranberry Lake. There is an upcoming capital project for a nature center that will be built in the next few years and there will be day camps in the summer. The rocks at the Cranberry Lake quarry built Kensico Dam.

Commissioner O'Connor stated in relation to Ms. Clay, Ms. Dubitsky, and Ms. Indelicato trip to Cranberry Preserve, the Park's staff love show and tell. The staff knows the history of the parks and really appreciates having Parks Board members or the Board of Legislators visit. The staff's knowledge of the parks comes from their heart and as Commissioner, I am very proud of my staff.

Mr. Neale told Commissioner O'Connor that leadership of the Parks come from her. When the Commissioner is working at the Parks on a Sunday Afternoon that is leadership, and it makes a big difference.

Mr. Neale worked on a Pitch in for Parks project near the Bronx River Reservation picking up litter. There were approximately sixty people working on the project and approximately ninety-six bags filled with litter were collected.

On Sunday, May 15, Mr. Neale visited the Polish Festival at Kensico Dam. There were approximately 2,000 people. There was food, music, vendors and tents. One of the most interesting things at the festival was Commissioner O'Connor handing out literature about the Parks.

Mr. Neale toured Pocantico Lake Park a couple of times in the month of May with elected officials. Also, Mr. Neale had communications with County Executive Latimer. At the moment, the County Executive Latimer is not a supporter of the purchase of Pocantico Lake. Mr. Neale hopes County Executive Latimer will change his mind and become a supporter of the purchase because he is an important person to have on our side and there will be an effort put forth to persuade County Executive Latimer and others.

ITEM NO. 3 – CHAIR'S REPORTS

Chairman Neale thanked Vice Chair Richard Greco for his years of successful service on the Parks Board. Mr. Greco was first appointed by the Astorino Administration and then reappointed by the County Executive George Latimer. He has become a personal friend and I admire his service as the Assistant Secretary of the Navy. Also, Mr. Greco is the

founder of the Montfort Academy, a high school located in Mount Vernon. For me personally, I will miss him and I appreciate him.

At the next upcoming meetings, there will be a discussion and an election on the Vice Chairman.

County Executive Latimer has appointed Vishnu Patel to succeed Mr. Greco. Mr. Patel has had a successful career in business. He has served three terms on the Yorktown Town Board. Mr. Patel has a strong interest in Parks and extensive community service.

Being a Parks Board member has its perks. When we see Mr. Patel in person, we will have the formal presentation of him receiving a parks hat.

Mr. Greco welcomes Mr. Patel to the Parks Board. I served eight years on the PRC Board and the experiences have been most rewarding. I will be available, if I can be of any help to you.

Mr. Greco thanked County Executive George Latimer for keeping him on the Board and reappointing him. He was grateful and appreciated his trust in him.

He thanked Aviva Meyer for being a wonderful liaison with the County Executive.

Thanked Mr. Neale for his leadership as Chairman. It was an honor to serve as your Vice Chairman. Mr. Neale gets things; big and significant things such as Scout Field and taking money from the sale of properties that are no longer being used as parkland and putting the proceeds into a fund that can be used for park purposes. I am very happy to call you my friend.

It has been a privilege to serve with everyone on this Board and you are all wonderful stewards.

Mr. Greco enjoyed working with First Deputy Commissioner Tartaglia professionally and getting to know you personally. Mr. Tartaglia is a consummate professional. It was nice to see the teamwork that you have with Commissioner O'Connor which is a rarity.

I have served on several corporate boards, publicly traded companies, and nonprofit organizations, I have never worked with a more dedicated hands-on Chief Executive than Commissioner Kathy O'Connor. It is your helpful and genuine care that you have for your staff.

Commissioner O'Connor stated that it is important to know that the County Executive has designated Richard Greco as an Emeritus member.

The County Executive Latimer through the activities of the Deputy County Executive Jenkins is tightening up on the attendance performances of members on various advisory boards. The Charter states that if a member misses three meetings, they can be removed.

The newest Parks Board Member Vishnu Patel introduced himself to the Board members. Mr. Patel stated he moved to Yorktown in 1973, worked at IBM in research, and is responsible for 65 issued patents. He worked on two 10-year and 10 million dollar projects. Mr. Patel spent his time in the schools and the surrounding community encouraging students in math, science, and technology. After achieving his accomplishments, Mr. Patel retired and joined the Town Board. Both of his children and son-in-law serves in the military.

ITEM NO. 4 – COMMISSIONER’S REPORT

Commissioner O’Connor thanked Mr. Neale for the accolades. She explained to the new member Mr. Patel that all Board meetings are recorded and are shown publicly later. We are on a schedule because we do it virtually, the Board meeting is from 4:00pm-5:30pm.

We had close to eight hundred real volunteers participating in Pitch in for Parks. Mary Benjamin from the Westchester Parks Foundation was tremendously helpful in organizing the program. A tremendous amount of work was accomplished.

Unless something changes dramatically, all of our facilities are open. We are opening the pools and beaches.

Our biggest event at Kensico is the Kensico Music Festival on July 3, which ends with fireworks.

99.9% of our programs are scheduled outside.

Our nature centers, basketball, and golf camps are almost filled.

We are very excited that Camp Morty Morty is returning as an overnight camp at Mountain Lakes Park. During the pandemic it was a virtual camp in 2020 and a day camp at Tibbetts Brook Park in 2021..

The fountain at Croton Gorge Park will reopen on Wednesday, May 25.

We purchased a Showmobile from the sale of the County property that had been purchased by Ursuline High School.

We are moving forward with our national accreditation.

We have had a rough time with golf due to the rain but our numbers are still steady.

Ms. Clay asked Commissioner O’Connor what happened to the old Showmobile. Commissioner O’Connor stated it is still used by the Parks Department.

Mr. Greco stated the signage of Scout Field on Midland Avenue is just beautiful.

Ms. Indelicato spoke to the County Attorney John Nonna about the Scout Field Liability issue at a function last week. Mr. Nonna stated he is aware of the situation, and it is in litigation.

Mr. Neale stated the Boy Scouts cabin gives new meaning to the concept of chutzpah. They do not have one legal theory to stand on.

Mr. Neale asked how is Playland coming along? Commissioner O'Connor stated Playland is schedule to open on June 9. Tremendous work through our capital program has been done.

Mr. Tartaglia stated quality is more important than the deadline. The park is able to open. There are some things not completely built, but will be finished in the fall. All the park walkways have been paved.

How is the recruitment of lifeguards at Sprain coming along? Commissioner O'Connor stated we are currently working on it, and we have raised our annual pay.

We open our beaches on Memorial Day Weekend (Croton Point Park and Glen Island). Mr. Tartaglia stated we need lifeguards to staff two beaches.

Mr. Neale stated the pools are not over your head. It is not deep water. Commissioner O'Connor stated we are governed by the County Health Department, American Redcross, WSI, and LGI. The County Health Department is mandated to follow the New York State protocol. The rulings are very strict.

Mr. Neale asked when is the work on the bridge at Glen Island going to begin? Mr. Tartaglia stated it bridge is still in the design phase.

Mr. Neale asked when will the sign on Gramatan Avenue, Mount Vernon stating that Scout Field is a Westchester County Park be place. Commissioner O'Connor stated she has ordered the sign.

Legislator Tubiolo stated the Parks Department put a sign at the entrance on Midland Avenue stating that Scout Field is a County Park. Mr. Tubiolo is in agreement for more signs stating that Scout Field is a County Park. Mr. Tubiolo thanked Commissioner O'Connor and First Deputy Commissioner Tartaglia for their efforts.

Mr. Neale stated Upper Scout Field looks much better than it did. The bank stabilization brook has been successful.

ITEM NO. 5 – INFORMATION ITEMS

A. Pocantico Lake Park Update

Mr. Neale stated he doesn't know if anything has happened. Currently, the environmental impact statement is being drafted. The scoping session resulted in a series of questions and assignments back in December.

The neighbors are getting ready and there is a lot of political support for acquisition of the 36.8 acres to add to the County or most of the acres. One of the possibilities is to exclude the two houses on the property. Excluding them would not affect the natural area and will save the County of having to demolish and remove them.

The County Executive's Administration is currently having meetings. There is going to be an effort by the Potanctico Lake constituents to gather signatures on petitions. I think it will move forward, but the process will take time.

The Planning Board took the first step that was recommended in the March 17 Resolution. There was a Planning Board meeting on May 3. Bill Brady made a very thorough, professional, and a complete explanation on the Potantico Lake Dam.

B. Staff and Program Updates

Slowly but surely we are getting some key people replaced. Two gentlemen retired after forty years of service. We do a tremendous amount of training. You can start as an hourly; you can move up into a full time position. We are looking forward to having a few more people in place by the end of June, so we can hit the road running.

ITEM NO. 6 – ACTION ITEMS

There were none

ITEM NO. 7 – OTHER BUSINESS

A. David Zapsky (President of the Friends of Lasdon)

Mr. Zapsky, President of the Friends of Lasdon introduced himself to the Parks Board.

The friends of Lasdon are a friends groups through the County representing Lasdon Park. We have partnered with the County for approximately twenty-seven years.

It has been an extremely collaborative relationship working with Jessica Schuler, Program Coordinator (Natural Resource Manager) as well as all the members of the Administration and the County.

We are starting to provide innovative concepts to the County; blending technology with nature such as the Dinosaur Garden where the dinosaurs are interactive and the Lilac Walk in which you are educated. You can use an APP on your phone to access these programs.

At some larger exhibits, we have been able to increase the scope, which reflects the interest of the Friends of Lasdon and the County of Westchester.

Working together has its benefits; we are able to rotate staff throughout the different parks in the County, the staff have learned skills that are unique to what we can offer to them, and some equipment and training that we provide are able to be used in the parks.

As I took leadership of the Friends of Lasdon gave me an opportunity to impart some of my philosophy and style in the parks and events.

It is important to calculate well plan risks in order to succeed. As the Park continued to be less than optimally staffed, we had to consider whether we can do two train shows. The answer was no; therefore we condensed it into one show. How can we change the show and take calculated a risk? Not only did we expand the show, but we expanded the time. Due to this change, we made three times the revenue.

We can continue to do more together in this partnership. We want to put together a master plan to build a five-year actual projection of what we would like to accomplished and what is possible for the park and its benefit to the citizens of the County.

We are looking at another facilities to hold exhibitions, educational classes, and private events. One of the things that is extremely important about the park is the accessibility of the park. We would like to continue our collaborative partnership with Hilltop Hanover. We want to start looking at sustainable practices for the park.

Mr. Zapsky told the PRC Board a few things about himself. Mr. Zapsky was a Friend of Lasdon Board member since 2015. He became the Vice President in 2020 and stayed to September 2021. He is currently serving as the President of the Friends of Lasdon since September 2021. Furthermore, he started the Veterans Advisory Board in the Town of Bedford, and he is currently retired from the Air force and the Federal Reserve Bank of New York. Mr. Zapsky is presently working at USAA.

Again, Mr. Zapsky thanked the PRC Board for allowing him to speak on behalf of the Friends of Lasdon.

Ms. Indelicato stated she loves the collaboration with Hilltop Hanover and the collaboration should be done between all the parks and friends groups.

Mr. Neale asked why do people joined the Friends of Lasdon. Mr. Zapsky stated most people join the Friends of Lasdon to received discounts at the plant sale. Also, it is a way to give back to the community. We advertise events to the Friends of Lasdon group first and offer them discounts before reaching out to the public.

Mr. Zapsky stated we currently have eleven people on the Board. We recently appointed three new members.

Mr. Neale asked Mr. Zapsky what is the budget of the Friends of Lasdon. Mr. Zapsky replied the budget is separated between the County of Westchester and the Friends of Lasdon. The budget for supporting the parks that is specifically set aside for events as well as other activities. The majority of our funding comes from the Lasdon Family each year through a grant; a portion of that goes to the Friends of Lasdon and a portion to the County.

A shovel went into the ground today to begin Nan's Garden; which will be finished ahead of time and under budget.

Mr. Neale inquired about the Veterans museum. Commissioner O'Connor stated The Trail of Honor is open. The museum is closed because it being utilized as an office for the staff because the main house is being renovated.

Mr. Neale asked Mr. Zapsky what is the accessibility problem? The biggest problem is parking. The parking is limited. In the design plans, we would like to have accessible parking near the facility or behind the current conservatory so the person in a wheelchair is able to get out of their vehicle and be within 20 yards of the Lasdon gardens.

On behalf of the Parks Department, Commissioner O'Connor thanked Mr. Zapsky for attending the PRC Board meeting and stated it is a pleasure to work with him. Your leadership has made a difference and Ms. Schuler is a gem to work with. Thank you for your work, and we will continue to help you.

Mr. Neale thanked Mr. Zapsky for attending PRC Board meeting.

ITEM NO. 8 – DATE OF NEXT MEETING

Upon motion by Martin Kamarck and seconded by Marty Rogowsky, the Board unanimously voted to adjourn the meeting.

The Parks, Recreation and Conservation Board will meet on Thursday, June 16, 2022 at 4:00 pm. via WebEx.

Submitted by,

Judith J. Allen

