

Riverdale Nature Preservancy  
c/o Riverdale Neighborhood House  
5521 Mosholu Ave  
Bronx, NY 10471

Annual Report  
2003/2004  
Prepared March 2005

### **Highlights**

The years 2003 and 2004 saw significant successes and setbacks in protecting the open space and neighborhood character that is treasured by residents of the Northwest Bronx. The Preservancy, often together with other community leaders: took a major role in opposing a proposal (which was ultimately withdrawn) for an industrial facility on the Spuyten Duyvil Triangle; saw that the designs for a park at the Metro-North Riverdale Station remain true to the community's vision (as of this writing, arrangements for park security are being renegotiated); participated in an extensive rewrite of the Special Natural Area District zoning regulations (which became law in February 2005); gained approval of funding for a Corridor Management Plan for the proposed designation of the Henry Hudson Parkway as a Scenic Byway. The years were not without losses: after decades of trying to preserve the mature forest and topography on the Chapel Farm property, the community witnessed their loss as a new development finally received building permits; as part of the City Department of Transportation's plans for strengthening the Henry Hudson Parkway overpasses, a Preservancy task force was successful in getting the Department to agree to keep the traditional stonework. That achievement is marred by the installation of steel guardrails and chain link fencing, which obscure both the beautiful stonework and the handsome bridges.

The Preservancy remains a strong voice in the community and in 2005 will continue to look to proactive tools and creative means to shape our community and protect our resources.

### **Henry Hudson Parkway Scenic Byway**

The scenic byway task force moved ahead on several fronts.

On the community outreach front, the task force held dozens of meetings with community boards, neighborhood representatives, elected officials, city departments, and design and management professionals and received letters of support for the concept of a scenic byway from a wide range of individuals and organizations. The task force held three community meetings—in the neighborhoods of Washington Heights, Riverside Park,

and Riverdale—to gather issues, problems, and solutions from local residents and corridor users, and an all-day symposium for all interested parties to share ideas about the byway program and the opportunities along the Henry Hudson Parkway. The symposium was filled to capacity and attended by designers, engineers, administrators, consultants, researchers, and community advocates from the city, state, and national levels. This work was completed through grants from Con Edison and the NY Community Trust.

Administratively, the task force made a preliminary presentation to the New York State Scenic Byway Advisory Board in Albany in July 2004. Representatives of the New York City departments of transportation and parks, State department of transportation, and the New York Metropolitan Transportation Council (NYMTC) were present to show their agencies' support. The board gave its enthusiastic approval of the initiative so far. In addition, NYMTC agreed to fund and manage the corridor management plan that will lay out issues, opportunities, and a byway management structure as part of the byway application process.

On the research and design front, the task force completed a number of studies that will be included in the corridor management planning process:

- The New York City Environmental Fund awarded a grant to study the feasibility of a bicycle and pedestrian route along the parkway. The study considered issues such as signage, pavement width, parking needs, potentials for motorized/nonmotorized conflicts, and curb cut placement. The route is still being finalized by the NYC Department of Transportation.
- In a complementary study, the New Yorkers for Parks Community Design Internship program provided the design services of an intern from the Harvard School of Design to consider how to incorporate elements of the parkway's historic design and greening elements such as pocket parks into the bicycle/pedestrian route.
- The Gaia Institute completed its report, *Stormwater Capture Parks along the Henry Hudson Parkway: Developing Endor Garden as a Watershed Model* to show the potential of the parkland along the parkway to divert stormwater runoff from city sewers into soils and support re-vegetation of the buffer. This study was funded by the J.M. Kaplan Fund.
- The J.M. Kaplan Fund also supported a report by the Sam Schwartz Company on jurisdictional issues along the parkway.
- The Preservancy began to compile the inventory of natural, cultural, recreational, historic, and scenic resources that is required in the corridor management plan.

### **Parkway Overpasses**

In a project related to the Scenic Byway, the Preservancy gathered community support and engaged the Art Commission of NYC in stopping the city's Department of Transportation from covering the stone parapets of Riverdale's parkway overpasses with concrete and chain link. The project was intended to strengthen the parapets to keep stones from falling on the parkway in the event of a collision on an overpass. The final compromise design, while not up to the Preservancy's expectations, saved the original stonework and increased safety for pedestrians on the overpasses. We continue to work

on improving the design before every overpass is duplicated in the same way. The resulting design couldn't be a better demonstration of why we need design guidelines for the parkway, the principal goal of the Scenic Byway."

### **Fieldston Historic District**

Historic districting of the Fieldston neighborhood was discussed during the summer of 2003. The Preservancy Board sent a letter of support to the City Landmarks Preservation Commission. At the end of 2004, the proposal had not yet been voted upon by the Commission.

### **Riverdale Railroad Station Park**

The Preservancy participated in several design meetings with the State Department of Environmental Conservation, community groups, and local elected officials. The meetings resulted in removal of an 80-foot long fishing pier from the design and replacement with a shoreline promenade. The Preservancy met with Metro-North President Peter Cannito to discuss removal of the "fifth rail" non-electrified track at the station, which would more than double the size of the park. Metro-North remains steadfast in its projections of future increases of commuter and freight traffic and continued need for the rail.

### **Empire Connection**

In the fall of 2003, a Preservancy board member learned of plans to construct an industrial facility on the Spuyten Duyvil Triangle, as part of the Empire Connection, a proposal to connect the upstate and downstate power grids. The facility was to be an 11-story high power converter, whose footprint would cover over one-half of the environmentally sensitive and scenic triangle. In addition to ignoring recommendations at the state and local levels to acquire the triangle for parkland, the proposal was to be exempted from local zoning for low-density residential land uses and protections of natural features under the city's Special Natural Area District zoning.

The Preservancy quickly turned its 2003 annual meeting into a forum on the Empire Connection, where environmental groups, elected officials and residents discussed the project and the community voiced its disapproval of the Spuyten Duyvil facility. The Preservancy also filed for active party status in the New York State Public Service Commission's application process.

Community outcry and subsequent downsizing of the project have resulted in removal of the Spuyten Duyvil Triangle facility from the project plans.

### **Special Natural Area District text amendment**

In early 2004, the Preservancy was made aware of work at the Department of City Planning to rewrite the Special Natural Area District (SNAD) zoning regulations. We began to confer with the Department's Staten Island office, which was leading the project, and with the SNAD task force, comprised of professionals and activists on Staten Island who initiated the project through their elected officials. After participation in the

remaining work sessions, the Preservancy offered its full support for the new text. While the changes do not respond to all of the Preservancy's concerns for preservation, we see them as part of a larger preservation program.

Public hearings on the text amendment began in late 2004. The Preservancy generated supporting letters and testimony from a variety of Bronx community groups, and intends to be a leader in proactive community education on the new regulations when they are adopted in early 2005.

### **Chapel Farm**

The Preservancy succeeded in getting the 13-acre Chapel Farm site added to the priority list of the New York State Open Space Conservation Plan (sites deemed critically important to preserve). The Preservancy also succeeded in getting the Trust for Public Land to seek to acquire this forested property, possibly as a bird sanctuary. The project failed, however, because of the developer's lack of interest in selling the property. He chose instead to proceed with his plan to build 15 single-family homes by taking advantage of a then-existing provision in the Special Natural Area District (SNAD) zoning regulations that allowed developments to proceed after rejection of a special permit or authorization application, as long as specific tree preservation and density requirements were met. This decision resulted in the deforestation of the last unprotected, continuously forested area in New York City, which had survived as an intact remnant of the oak and hickory forest that covered the region at the time of European settlement.

### **Preservancy Web Site**

As part of its continuing efforts to improve communication with its membership and reach out to a wider community, the board began work on a website. The website will provide notice of important decisions and meetings related to community issues, descriptions of local projects, and educational materials on a variety of topics related to the Preservancy's work. In 2004, content was organized and written and a designer was hired. As of this writing, the web site is newly launched.

**Annual Financial Statement – 2003**

**REVENUE (\$)**

Contributions/Membership dues	10,025
Grants	29,250
<u>Interest/Other</u>	<u>402</u>

**TOTAL REVENUE** **39,677**

**EXPENSES (\$)**

Accounting Fees	1,725
Consulting Fees	10,310
Administrative Expenses	3,961
<u>Project Expenses</u>	<u>55,297</u>

**TOTAL EXPENSES** **71,293**

<b>Surplus/Deficit</b>	<b>\$ - 31,644</b>
<b>Starting Fund Balance</b>	<b>\$ 77,258</b>
<b>Ending Fund Balance</b>	<b>\$ 45,642</b>

**Annual Financial Statement for 2004 has not been prepared at this early date.**