



**RIVERDALE NATURE PRESERVANCY**  
2017-2018 ANNUAL REPORT

# Table of Contents

Activities .....	1
Monitor Local Development	
Vital limitations imposed on proposed development along the Hudson River .....	2
Bloomfield Development .....	3
Long-term planning and preservation	
Changes to Special Natural Area District zoning regulations .....	8
Hudson River Valley Greenway .....	9
Progress on pesticides/herbicides .....	9
Henry Hudson Parkway listing in the National Register of Historic Places .....	10
Provide Information and Strengthen Communication	
Annual Meeting .....	11
Community Events .....	11
Email blasts.....	11
Table A: 2017 - 2018 Hebrew Home Activities .....	3
Table B: Summary of 2017 and 2018 email blasts.....	12
Annual Financial Statement 2017 .....	14
Annual Financial Statement 2018 .....	15
Board of Directors 2017 & 2018 .....	16

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

[www.RiverdaleNature.org](http://www.RiverdaleNature.org)  
[info@RiverdaleNature.org](mailto:info@RiverdaleNature.org)

The Riverdale Nature Preservancy is a non-profit 501(c)3 membership organization working in Community District 8 in the northwest Bronx, New York City. We are organized for the purpose of protecting the natural and historic features and the neighborhood character of this unique part of New York City. Our neighborhood has retained much of its hilly topography and treed landscape, and the rustic features of the area's first roads and settlements, because of visionary protections of earlier generations of residents, because of our low-density and Special Natural Area District (SNAD) zoning and because of the landmarking of historic districts and individual buildings in the area.

## Activities

The Preservancy **monitors local development** projects to ensure full compliance with zoning and historic preservation regulations. We **initiate and participate in long-term planning and preservation** projects, to ensure that community needs are heard and met, and to protect and enhance Riverdale's superb natural environment and community character. We also **provide information**, through community meetings, written materials and our website, to enable local residents to be active and engaged in environmental and planning issues.

# Monitor Local Development

## **Vital limitations imposed on proposed development along the Hudson River**

In 2017 and 2018 the Preservancy continued its leadership role in the community effort to temper a proposal by the Hebrew Home at Riverdale, now RiverSpring, for some 300 apartments on a bucolic site along the Hudson River.

In 2018, six years after it was first proposed, the development application entered the formal public review process. A monumental effort was hoisted by the Preservancy and other community groups to argue for reductions to the scale of the plan and for other concessions to the community related to traffic, parking, accessibility to open space, noise control and other concerns.

We achieved a vital success; we won major changes, codified in a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU), that respect our zoning and local land use plan and limit the development:

- Building heights are reduced
- Open space is preserved
- Additional, larger trees will be planted
- Green roofs will be installed

In the fall of 2018, the City Planning Commission and the City Council approved the modified plan.

## ***Continuing Community Oversight***

The MOU also stipulated formation of an advisory committee including representatives of the community which will monitor the site during and after construction.

Table A summarizes 2017 and 2018 activities

## ***Background***

The development was first proposed by Hebrew Home in 2012. Community opposition focused on the inappropriateness of the development for the site, which is mapped with the lowest residential zoning district in New York City – R1-1 – allowing only single-family, detached homes with a minimum lot size of 9,600 square feet.

Community opposition on many fronts including Bronx Community Board 8 resulted in two meetings in 2015 between architects representing the community and Hebrew Home. A revised plan was prepared, but the community made it clear to Hebrew Home and elected officials that the plan remained too large and too out-of-scale with the context and neighborhood to support.

In March 2016, NYC Department of City Planning and City Council approved and adopted new zoning aimed at increasing the supply of affordable housing in the city and at improving the quality of housing overall. One provision of this new zoning made it possible to build long-term care facilities in New York City's lowest-density residential districts, R1 and R2. Recognizing the intrusion these developments will likely make into low-density neighborhoods, the City Council required developers to obtain approval for a special permit.

Licensed Continuing Care Retirement Communities (CCRC) are included in the city's zoning definition of long-term care facility, and thus are now allowed in R1 and R2 zoning districts via special permit.

In March 2018, the NYS CCRC Council awarded CCRC certification to Hebrew Home. While the application was still pending, in September 2016, Hebrew Home again came before the Community

Board 8 Land Use Committee. Community groups argued that their presentation did not address the special permit findings required by the new zoning.

In 2017, the community focused its effort on campaigning for a second design suggested by Hebrew Home. Known as the "Cottage Scheme", it proposed several dozen detached homes on the property. The Cottage Scheme was in keeping with the property's low-density zoning. However, it was considered by Hebrew Home to be a much less viable solution and was not

included in Hebrew Home's land use application.

**Bloomfield Development**

In January 2017, a member of the board reported that this development was presented to the NYC Landmarks Preservation Commission in November 2016. It included a reduction in the number of houses but retained development on the corner lot, to which the Fieldston Property Owners Association strenuously objected.

The proposal was tabled with no vote.

Table A 2017 - 2018 Hebrew Home Activities	
Sept. 2016	When Hebrew Home came back before the Community Board Land Use Committee in September 2016, community groups argued that the presentation did not address the special permit findings required by ZQA; two options were presented – the Sail Scheme and the Cottage Scheme. No analysis was presented for the Cottage Scheme and it was not included in Hebrew Home's land use application. The Cottage Scheme was designed meet expectations for development under R1-1 zoning.
Feb 2, 2017	Riverdale Press meeting with Riverdale Community Coalition (RCC)
March 12 – 17, 2017	Preservancy and RCC prepare a model letter and list of mailing addresses to elected officials for distribution to community members who might want to express to the Community Board and their Elected Officials their support for the "Cottage Scheme" development concept for the Hebrew Home expansion. Community is notified via email blast that materials are posted on the Preservancy's website.
March 23, 2017	CB 8 full board meeting. During gallery session, Preservancy expresses support for cottage scheme; Statement from Riverdale civic groups calls on CB8 and elected officials to deny any special permit that would "render our zoning meaningless."

April 6, 2017	Preservancy Annual Meeting. Focus is on environmental regulations and development issues, primarily focusing on the Hebrew Home proposal
June 1, 2017	Preservancy board meeting. NYC Planning Department representative presents to Preservancy board on the review process for land use applications.
Jan. 17, 2018	Community strategy meeting
Jan. 25, 2018	Community Board 8 Question & Answer session with representatives from Hebrew Home. Preservancy submits a follow-up letter to the Community Board, copied to the Borough President and City Planning.
Feb. 7, 2018	Meeting of community partners
Feb. 13, 2018	Community Board 8 full board meeting. Preservancy makes statement during gallery session and submits longer written statement.
March 13, 2018	Community Board 8 full board meeting. Community partners, represented by Riverdale Community Coalition, present position on Hebrew Home application.
March 15 and 16, 2018	<p>Prior to March 16, community partners submit to NYS CCRC Council two letters from counsel presenting opposition to the project on the basis of process (letter 1) and planning principles (letter 2), as well as one letter from an individual partner organization. Community partners submit to the Council on March 15 a joint statement on Hebrew Home's application for CCRC designation and attend a Council public hearing on the topic in Albany on March 16.</p> <p>The Council votes to approve the application.</p>
week of April 16, 2018	Community strategy meetings to prepare for upcoming public hearings.

April 23, 2018	NYC Department of City Planning (DCP) certifies Hebrew Home application as complete. Uniform Land Use Review Procedure (ULURP) review begins with 60-day review and comment period for community board. Environmental Assessment (EA) concludes that the development is aligned with the 197-a Plan.
April 2018	RCC attorney writes to the NYS Department of Health stating that a proper EIS/EAS at the state level was not conducted.
May 2, 2018	DCP issues notice of negative declaration of environmental impact of Hebrew Home proposal. 30-day public comment period on EA begins.
May 7, 2018	Community Board 8 Land Use committee meeting. Public testimony is taken but there is no sign-in sheet. Community opponents are well prepared and attend in force, make statements and carry signs. Twelve neighborhood groups including Riverdale Nature Preservancy place signed advertisement in Riverdale Press stating opposition to the application.
May 8, 2018	Community partners meet with Bronx Borough President Ruben Diaz Jr.
May 8, 2018	Community Board 8 full board meeting. Representative of RNP announces during the gallery session (3 minutes) that an information session on land use and the Hebrew Home application will be held on May 11.
May 11, 2018	Community partners meet with their local City Council Member.
May 16, 2018	Community Board 8 Environment & Sanitation committee meeting. The committee discusses environmental aspects of Hebrew Home application and concludes that the Environmental Assessment Statement (EAS) did not adequately study the conditions and impacts and that a full Environmental Impact Statement was called for.
May 17, 2018	Community partners meet to develop potential areas for negotiation, for discussion with community board.

May 17, 2018	Community Board 8 Traffic & Transportation committee considers transportation aspects of the Hebrew Home application.
May 22, 2018	Community partners meet with Chair of Community Board 8 Land Use committee to discuss possibilities for negotiation.
May 25, 2018	Community partners meet with editorial board of the Riverdale Press to discuss land use implications of the Hebrew Home application.
May 31, 2018	Preservancy submits comments on Environmental Impact Statement.
June 4, 2018	Community partner strategy meeting to prepare for June 7 public hearing.
June 5, 2018	Community partners submit to Community Board 8 a letter outlining a compromise position based upon discussions on May 17 and May 22.
June 7, 2018	Community Board 8 Land Use committee hearing on Hebrew Home. Meeting held at insistence of community partners who argued that May 7 public meeting did not conform to the legal requirements of a public hearing. Public testimony taken; representative of the RNP speaks.
June 8, 2018	Meeting between community partner counsel and chair of Community Board 8 land use committee.
June 11, 2018	Community Board 8 Land Use committee meeting. No public testimony is heard. A compromise position is presented by Community Board 8. No vote is taken, to allow time for community coalition to review compromise and for further negotiations.
June 13, 2018	Meeting between community coalition, representatives of Hebrew Home and City Council member. No additional agreements or changes to compromise position are reached at this meeting.



June 16, 2018	Proposed compromise submitted by Hebrew Home.
June 17, 2018	Community coalition counsel sends to members of Community Board 8 a summary of all points of the compromise and a draft restrictive declaration.
June 18, 2018	Community Board 8 full board meeting. Board votes NO to the Hebrew Home application; compromise on the table does not include details of heights of buildings.
June 28, 2018	Community coalition sends to Bronx Borough President a summary of all points of the compromise.
July 10, 2018	Meeting of community coalition and Hebrew Home results in draft Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) that specifies details of proposal and binds members of the coalition to certain restrictions in future opposition to negotiated compromises.
July 12, 2018	Borough President (BP) public hearing. RNP statement asks BP to wait to issue a determination until the MOU has been executed.
Aug. 6, 2018	MOU and Restrictive Declaration are signed by Hebrew Home, Riverdale Nature Preservancy, Skyview Homeowners, Riverdale Community Coalition, and Sigma Place Homeowners. The points of the agreement are spelled out in the Borough President's report to City Planning.
Aug. 8, 2018	City Planning Commission public hearing. Community coalition engages attendees to oppose the original plan and support the MOU. It is noted that Hebrew Home is preparing changes to the application and to the environmental assessment statement.
Sept. 26, 2018	City Planning Commission votes to approve the application with requirements; they modify the restrictive declaration such that any development on the south site (R1-1 lot) must go through ULURP.
Nov. 14, 2018	City Council votes to approve the plan with additional restrictions.

# Long-term planning and preservation

## Changes to Special Natural Area District zoning regulations

Community dissatisfaction with outcomes of the Special Natural Area District (SNAD) regulations prompted both Bronx Community Board 8 and the NYC Department of City Planning (DCP) to begin in 2015 to examine effectiveness of the special district zoning.

The Preservancy and other members of DCP's Bronx Advisory Committee met four times during summer and fall of 2015, and during summer 2016 city planners presented their preliminary approach to the Preservancy board and to the Bronx Community Board 8 Land Use Committee.

In September 2017 city planners came back to the Preservancy board for a detailed presentation and discussion. While the Preservancy was supportive from the start of DCP's new, ecosystem approach to natural feature protections, the discussion focused on details of implementation and enforcement.

Among the concerns was a major goal of the text amendment to create a regulatory environment that is "homeowner-friendly", with robust as-of-right rules for development and enlargement of single- and two-family homes. The Preservancy appreciates that this type of change will greatly reduce the cost to homeowners of complying with SNAD regulations and will also reduce the time city planners must now spend on discretionary review of projects with straightforward protection requirements. However, there remain concerns that the new approach and new as-of-right rules will not adequately identify natural features worthy of protection.

Indian Pond in Fieldston illustrates the dilemma. According to the proposed rules, properties adjacent to city parkland will be assigned the highest category of protection, with properties decreasing in importance with distance from parkland. Indian Pond is not a city park nor adjacent to one, and therefore is not afforded the highest level of protection by the new regulations.

The Preservancy joined with the Fieldston Property Owners Association in 2012 to request that New York State designate Indian Pond a freshwater wetland. While the request was denied, Indian Pond remains a magnet for local wildlife and a vital habitat for birds as well as a popular field site for environmental education programs. Indian Pond appears to be a blind spot in the revised regulations, and there are likely to be others.

Another important area of concern with the current regulations is the lack of follow-up with new plantings. The Preservancy's experience in the community is that there is no consequence if trees or other plantings, newly installed as a result of discretionary review, do not survive.

The Preservancy suggested that the new zoning regulations require maintenance of new plantings and replacement of plantings that die, for a time period to be determined, with monetary consequence for non-compliance.

It was clear that enforcement would not be appreciably changed, with the community still taking on a "watchdog" roll. The Preservancy understands the importance of regular education of property owners and offered to help disseminate and reinforce DCP's planned informational materials.

In 2018, the Preservancy attended three public meetings on the SNAD held by DCP:

October 2018  
first Open House

November 2018  
second Open House

December 2018  
scoping hearing for the Draft EIS (DEIS) related to the SNAD text amendment

### ***SNAD street signs***

In its role as educator and community watchdog, the Preservancy recognizes that education and widespread awareness of the SNAD regulations among property owners is especially critical to the protection of Riverdale's irreplaceable great trees. Throughout the latter part of 2018, the board discussed installing specialty street signs throughout the SNAD, to clearly identify where the SNAD is mapped.

As with Historic District signs, the community – possibly the Preservancy – would be responsible for paying for the signs and for maintenance of them. The Director of the Bronx Office of City Planning expressed official support for the idea.

To be discussed is how to coordinate the historic district and SNAD signs. A possible alternative is SNAD District Markers along its periphery, which could include maps and descriptions.

### **Hudson River Valley Greenway**

The Preservancy was represented at a meeting on October 10, 2018, of the Bronx Community Board 8 Special Committee on the Hudson River Greenway.

The final report from Metro-North's feasibility study for a path along the Hudson was discussed. The next step is an engineering study, which is projected to cost approx. \$1 M.

The community is disappointed with designs for security and safety features that Metro-North deems necessary due to proximity of the trail to high-speed rail. Access at the Hebrew Home site has been agreed to by the President and CEO of RiverSpring Health, Hebrew Home's parent company.

### **Progress on pesticides/herbicides**

In 2014 the Preservancy raised awareness among community residents, members of Bronx Community Board 8, the NYC Council and representatives of the NYC Departments of Sanitation and Parks & Recreation, about health hazards potentially related to the use of herbicides and pesticides, particularly the use of the herbicide glyphosate, commonly sold under the brand name Round-up

In September 2017, the Health Committee of the New York City Council sponsored Local Law 800, which will ban the use of toxic pesticides in City properties including parks. The law would restrict the use of synthetic pesticides in favor of integrated pest management and biological pesticides proven to be safe and effective.

Discussion through 2018 questioned application of the law to problems such as infestations in public housing or to spraying for West Nile virus.

## **Henry Hudson Parkway listing in the National Register of Historic Places**

In 2016, the State Historic Preservation Officer (SHPO) and the Preservancy discussed next steps to resolving the discrepancy in the site boundary between the application for eligibility and the application for listing, and both parties remained interested in pursuing formal listing in the Register.

At the end of 2017, SHPO again expressed willingness to move the application forward. The Preservancy could continue to argue for adoption of the revised boundaries through submittal of additional supporting documentation or, may return the application to its original scope with the boundaries originally developed in partnership with SHPO. In light of pressing issues in 2017 and 2018, the Preservancy tabled this project for a future time.

# Provide Information and Strengthen Communication

## **Annual Meeting – April 6, 2017**

The topic of the Preservancy’s annual meeting on April 6, 2017 was environmental regulations and development issues affecting the community.

Approximately 50 persons attended, including six board members. The Preservancy Chair outlined the issues facing the community and noted some of the Preservancy’s actions on these issues.

Featured speaker Council Member Andrew Cohen spoke about several issues, focusing on the proposed development of a Continuing Care Retirement Community (CCRC) by the Hebrew Home at Riverdale and on revisions to the Special Natural Area District regulations.

A lively and informative dialogue followed on issues regarding the Hebrew Home draft proposals and on ways to keep the community informed. The Preservancy committed to maintaining up-to-date information on its Facebook page, and attendees were encouraged to opt in to the Preservancy’s contact list to receive email blasts.

## **Riverfest 2017 and 2018**

This annual event is now sponsored by the Kingsbridge Riverdale Van Cortlandt Development Corporation (KRVC). The Preservancy continued to support Riverfest in 2017 with a monetary contribution of \$500. In 2018, the Preservancy board agreed that the focus

of Riverfest has changed and declined to make any financial support or to otherwise participate.

## **Community Energy Fair October 22, 2017 & October 14, 2018**

The Earth Ministry of Christ Church Riverdale in the NW Bronx sponsors this annual event. The Preservancy supported the event each year with a \$500 contribution, dissemination of a flier to our email mailing list and presence at a table on the day of the event.

The fair in 2018 reportedly attracted more attendees and participating organizations than in 2017.

## **Email blasts**

The Preservancy currently follows a strictly opt-in policy of email list growth. In 2017 and 2018, 47 email addresses were added to the list. After the removal of bounced addresses 227 names remained, representing no net growth over the previous total of 230 addresses.

## **Email alerts**

In 2017 and 2018, 18 email alerts were sent, double the number in the previous 2-year period. The open and click rates are shown in Table B. In general, an open rate between 20% and 40% is considered average. The Preservancy’s open rate is generally at the high end of average. The email marketing industry does not cite an average click-through rate.

Table B  
Summary of 2017 and 2018 email blasts

Date	Topic	#Sent	% Open Rate (count)	% Click-through Rate (count and description)	Number of Social Media Shares		
					Fb	Tw	LI
Feb. 14, 2017	Announcement of Mayor's Town Hall	223	35.43 (82)	0.90 (1 to home page of website, 1 like us on facebook)			
Mar. 12, 2017	Hebrew Home letter writing campaign	225	51.13 (113)	7.24 (9 to download a sample letter, 6 to website for info and a sample letter, 1 to home page)		1	
Mar. 31, 2017	Announcement of April 6 Annual Meeting	222	39.19 (87)	1.35 (3 to home page of website)			
May 1, 2017	Announcing updated Facebook page	222	31.08 (69)	10.81 (13 to facebook, 7 to homepage of website, 4 to like us on facebook)			
May 29, 2017	Announcement of June 1 community meeting on Special Permits	242	40.91 (99)	3.31 (3 to opt in to mailing list, 3 to like us on facebook, 2 to home page of website)			
Oct 12, 2017	Announcement of Oct 22 Bronx Community Green Fair	242	32.23 (78)	0.41 (1 to homepage of website)			
Dec. 20, 2017	RNP Fundraising	240	23.75 (57)	1.67 (2 to Hebrew Home, 1 to donate now, 1 to SNAD text amendment)			1
Jan. 22, 2018	Community Board 8 Land Use Committee Hebrew Home info meeting Jan 25	245	28.57 (70)	7.76 (7 to sample language for letter, 5 to zoning map, 4 to map of College of Mt St Vincent, 2 to flow chart of ULURP process, 1 to home page)	1		
May 3, 2018	Community Board 8 Land Use Committee Hebrew Home ULURP application presentation May 7	212	43.4 (92)	2.36 (5 to Hebrew Home page of website)			

June 4, 2018	Community Board 8 Land Use Committee Hebrew Home ULURP public hearing June 7	212	41.51 (88)	7.55 (12 to Hebrew Home page of website, 4 to home page)			
June 11, 2018	Reminder for Community Board 8 Land Use Committee Hebrew Home ULURP discussion and vote June 11	210	32.38 (68)	2.38 (4 to Hebrew Home page of website, 1 to home page)			
July 10, 2018	Borough President Public Hearing Hebrew Home July 12	210	28.57 (60)	1.9 (3 to Hebrew Home page of website, 1 to home page)			
Oct. 9, 2018	SNAD Open House Oct. 15	211	33.65 (71)	2.37 (5 to DCP zoning maps)			
Oct. 10, 2018	Announcement of Oct 14 Bronx Community Green Fair	210	32.86 (69)	0.95 (2 to RNP website)			
Dec. 4, 2018	Public comment on Draft Scope of Work for Draft EIS associated with SNAD text amendment, Dec. 13	221	33.48 (74)	12.67 (24 to environmental scoping documents on DCP website, 2 to RNP website, 1 to donate now, 1 to opt in to RNP email list)			
Dec. 15, 2018	RNP fundraising	219	26.03 (57)	6.39 (5 to Hebrew Home, 4 to Donate Now, 2 each to SNAD Open House info and Hebrew Home, 1 to website home page)			
Dec. 26, 2018	RNP fundraising, round 2	218	24.31 (53)	0.46 (1 to Hebrew Home)	1		
Dec. 31, 2018	RNP fundraising, round 3	222	21.62 (48)	1.80 (4 to Donate button)	1		

# Annual Financial Statement 2017

## REVENUE (\$)

Contributions/Membership dues/grants	\$ 12,115
Interest/Other	16
<b>TOTAL REVENUE</b>	<b>\$ 12,131</b>

## EXPENSES (\$)

Professional Fees	\$1,700
Consulting Fees	7,225
Administrative Expenses	614
Project Expenses	800
Conferences and meetings	1,725
Printing, postage, shipping	1,050
<b>TOTAL EXPENSES</b>	<b>\$ 13,114</b>

**Surplus/Deficit** **\$ - 983**

**Starting Fund Balance** **\$ 14,622**

**Ending Fund Balance** **\$ 13,639**



# Annual Financial Statement 2018

## REVENUE (\$)

Contributions/Membership dues/grants	\$ 25,799
Interest/Other	34
<b>TOTAL REVENUE</b>	<b>\$ 25,833</b>

## EXPENSES (\$)

Professional Fees	\$1,275
Consulting Fees	4,438
Administrative Expenses	854
Project Expenses	10,925
Conferences and meetings	480
Printing, postage, shipping	1,057
<b>TOTAL EXPENSES</b>	<b>\$ 19,029</b>

**Surplus/Deficit** **\$ 6,804**

**Starting Fund Balance** **13,639**

**Ending Fund Balance** **\$ 20,443**

## Board of Directors 2017 & 2018

Sherida E. Paulsen	Chairman
Peter S. Kohlmann	Co-President
Rob Lynch	Co-President
Sandy Shalleck	Treasurer
Mary Bandziukas (non-voting)	Secretary

### *At large exec committee members*

Jodie Colon  
Ann Rauch

Nada Marie Assaf-Anid  
Elizabeth Haase  
Jessica Haller  
Peter Joseph  
Barbara R. Michaels  
Aaron Mittman  
Susan Morgenthau  
Meryl Nadel  
Franz Paasche  
Elizabeth Schulz  
Dart Westphal  
Barry Willner

Gilbert Kerlin	Founding Chairman
Paul J. Elston	Honorary Chairman