



# RIVERDALE NATURE PRESERVANCY



## Annual Report 2011

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The Riverdale Nature Preservancy is a non-profit 501(c)3 membership organization 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 the steep 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.

In 2011, the Preservancy was active in the following areas:

## Monitor Local Development

### **Continue to explore additional protection for Indian Pond in Fieldston**

Indian Pond is protected under both New York City Special Natural Area District zoning regulations and Landmarks Preservation Commission historic district regulations. In the fall of 2010, three new houses were proposed for a large property bordering Indian Pond. Indian Pond is a natural source of fresh water for wildlife, and a focal point in the community that is visited by dozens of residents and local school children daily. As a result of questions from the community, the project was put on hold.

In early 2011, the Department of City Planning and the Landmarks Preservation Commission decided to review the project jointly, given substantive issues raised by the community. While the pond itself serves as a source of fresh water for wildlife and a haven for local residents, together with its immediate environs -- rock outcroppings, top soil, mature trees and other vegetation -- it provides several important environmental services including flood control, erosion control, and cleansing of storm water. The community questioned whether the new construction would degrade these functions.

At the close of 2011, the project remained on hold and the Preservancy and other community groups were seeking wetland status for the pond and its environs.

### **Begin a positive conversation between local institutions and community members on the topics of creating, enhancing and preserving the cultural, social and natural assets of our neighborhoods as the community and institutions grow**

Riverdale is home to many educational and other institutions that value the benefits which the bucolic setting of the area can bring to their services. Yet high-use destinations like these place higher demands on neighborhood public facilities such as roads and sewers than do their low-density neighbors. Additionally, they will modify the amount and placement of paving, vegetation, playing fields and other

landscape elements according to changing needs. These tensions between intense uses and their surrounding communities are well-known throughout New York City.

In late 2010 and early 2011 the Preservancy and many other community members worked in conjunction with the community board to mitigate changes proposed for its campus by the Salanter Akiba Riverdale Academy on West 254<sup>th</sup> Street. Issues ranged from storm water management, to trash collection, to traffic, to preservation of trees.

In the fall of 2011, the Preservancy began to plan for a community forum on the topic of Riverdale institutions and their neighbors, to be held in spring 2012. The meeting is envisioned as the beginning of a series of conversations between local institutions and community members on the topics of institutional growth, creating community, and preserving natural assets.

## Initiate and Participate in Long-term Planning and Preservation

### **Continue to seek listing in the National Register of Historic Places for the Henry Hudson Parkway, from north of 129<sup>th</sup> Street to the city line.**

In 2011, the Preservancy continued to develop an application package for the State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO) and the National Park Service to list the Henry Hudson Parkway from West 129<sup>th</sup> street to the City line in the National Register of Historic Places. The section to the south is already listed.

The application will include an updated history and inventory of significant features. The SHPO's declaration of eligibility identified 1934 -1937 as the period of significance. As a result of continuing research, the Preservancy is seeking to expand this range, from 1904 (when Riverdadians George Perkins, Cleveland Dodge, John D. Rockefeller, Jr. organized to get the City to fund the design of the Henry Hudson Bridge and begin acquiring land in Inwood) to 1957 (which will capture the addition of all of the parks that were built in Riverdale as part of the parkway).

Additional photographs and updated maps are required for the application. The photographs were taken in the fall of 2011 by professionals with the National Park Service's Historic American Engineering Record (HAER). Maps are expected to be produced over the winter of 2011/2012, and the application is expected to be submitted to SHPO and the National Park Service in early 2012.

While funding for much of the work was in place in early 2011, additional funds were needed, and a special fundraising appeal was made to the Preservancy membership in June 2011. Preservancy members responded enthusiastically to the appeal, demonstrating the community's unwavering commitment to preserving the Henry Hudson Parkway as the linear park and scenic drive it was meant to be.

### **Win concessions from the NY State Department of Transportation on Henry Hudson Parkway signage**

Since 2008, the Preservancy has been urging transportation agencies involved in planning new signage along the Parkway to choose and site the signs with sensitivity to the park context. Due to federal design

guidelines, the new signs will be larger than the current ones. However, the State DOT agreed in 2011 to reduce the number of structures supporting the signs, including large ones planned for the service roads. The DOT is also considering whether to paint the structures dark green, as they do on suburban parkways. The Preservancy continues to work for sensitively-sited signs along the Parkway.

### **Seek input from Riverdale residents regarding their priorities and expectations for the Hudson River Valley Greenway**

In late 2010, planning consultants completed the process of ranking several potential routes for the greenway and selecting a preferred alternative that will undergo in-depth analysis. Two preferred routes were selected: the highest ranking route is referred to as the River Route, and the second highest ranking route is known as the Palisade Avenue Route. In the next stage of this planning process, the consultants will develop conceptual designs and order of magnitude costs for the capital projects needed to realize these options.

To obtain a clear sense of the viewpoints of its members at this stage in the planning process, the board of directors of the Preservancy developed a questionnaire that was distributed with its December 2010 fundraising letter and emailed to some 100 members who have provided their email addresses to the Preservancy. To increase community outreach, the questionnaire was also posted on the Preservancy's website and made available at Riverfest in June 2011. A total of 65 responses were received between December 2010 and July 2011, the vast majority coming from Preservancy members.

Preliminary results were presented at the Preservancy's Annual Meeting in April 2011, and final results were posted on the Preservancy's website in the fall. The results will inform the Preservancy's continued participation on the project Technical Advisory Committee.

## **Provide Information**

### **Continue to support the annual Riverfest celebration in Riverdale**

June 2011 saw the second annual Riverfest celebration in Riverdale, a day of fun for families and anyone interested in access to the Hudson River. The Preservancy was a major supporter of Riverfest 2011 as well as a participant. Several copies of the Greenway questionnaire were completed by visitors to the Preservancy's table, and information about the Preservancy's Henry Hudson Parkway National Register nomination application was distributed. Twenty-seven new households were added to the Preservancy's mailing list.

### **Provide a forum for local issues at Annual Meeting in April 2011**

The Preservancy's Annual Meeting, April 7, 2011, provided a forum for members to discuss a variety of local issues with Preservancy Directors.

Of high interest to participants was the impending sale of a 14-acre riverfront site, owned by the Passionist Fathers, to the Hebrew Home for the Aged and the anticipated expansion of the Hebrew Home. Early in 2011, the community and a large local school successfully addressed impacts of the school's

operations on the community. The sale to the Hebrew Home was expected to be another issue needing community attention. Participants identified an overarching need for improved lines of communication between local community facilities and residents with a goal of creating a climate of transparency and neighborliness between them. The Preservancy is planning an open forum on this topic in spring 2012.

Participants also revisited the Preservancy's interest in setting up a demonstration rain garden or native planting garden in the local area. Several types of support were suggested by speakers: NYC Council funds, the NYC Million Tree Initiative, which can assist in setting up and training a local tree care network (Stewardship Corps), and a green infrastructure grant from the NYC DEP. These and other options were explored in 2011, but by the close of the year a site and community partner had not been identified.

Additional issues of interest included expansion of bicycle lanes in the city, the legal limit for apartment houses to blow their stacks and transit cuts.

## 2011 Financial Statement

### REVENUE (\$)

Contributions/Membership dues/grants	\$ 19,540.
Interest/Other	3.
<b>TOTAL REVENUE</b>	<b>\$ 19,543.</b>

### EXPENSES (\$)

Accounting Fees	\$ 1,100
Consulting Fees	10,550
Administrative Expenses	3,431
Project Expenses	4,427
<b>TOTAL EXPENSES</b>	<b>\$ 19,508</b>

<b>Surplus/Deficit</b>	<b>\$ 35</b>
<b>Starting Fund Balance</b>	<b>26,213</b>
<b>Ending Fund Balance</b>	<b>26,248</b>

## Board of Directors

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