

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

Annual Report
2005

The Riverdale Nature Preservancy is a non-profit membership organization in Community District 8 in the northwest Bronx. 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 our low-density and Special Natural Area District (SNAD) zoning and because of the landmarking of a historic district and a number of individual buildings in the area.

The Preservancy monitors local development projects to ensure full compliance with zoning and historic preservation regulations. We also initiate and participate in long-term planning and public improvement projects, to ensure that community needs are heard and met.

Highlights of 2005

The year 2005 saw two substantive changes to land use regulations affecting Riverdale: the strengthening of SNAD regulations and the rezoning of a large portion of the SNAD to R1-1, the lowest residential zoning district in the city. Both changes arose from Community Board 8's 197-a Plan, which itself was crafted in response to the urging of the Preservancy and other neighborhood groups.

This year our community also celebrated the opening of a new waterfront park, at the Riverdale Metro-North rail station. The park has proven to be a peaceful and relaxing site for park users and has not created a disturbance within the community. The Preservancy has consistently viewed this park as a pilot project for more extensive riverfront access projects under discussion for the future.

The Preservancy launched its new website in April 2005. The website will be a way for residents to stay informed and take action on community issues. It will include background details and Preservancy positions and actions on issues and projects, notices of meetings and events, and ways for residents to make their voices heard.

Strengthening SNAD Regulations

New SNAD regulations were approved by the City Council in February 2005. The Preservancy worked with a citizens' task force on Staten Island and with the Department of City Planning (DCP) during the drafting and review process, and supported the changes during the approval process.

A major change to the regulations closed a loophole that previously exempted properties of 40,000 square feet or less from review for changes in grade, removal of trees and bushes, and other actions defined as "site alterations". In Riverdale, over 85 percent of residential properties qualified for this exemption; removal of the loophole greatly increased the effectiveness of the regulations.

The City had no plans to formally notify property owners in the SNAD of the changed SNAD requirements. The Preservancy Board produced a booklet summarizing the changes and new requirements. The booklet was reviewed by DCP and distributed widely through the community. The text remains available on the Preservancy's web site.

Downzoning to R1-1

Most of the SNAD west of the Henry Hudson Parkway was rezoned from R1-2 to R1-1. The rezoning was adopted by the City Council in October 2005.

The rezoning was recommended in Community Board 8's 197-a Plan of 2003. The Preservancy was able to argue successfully for inclusion of the rezoning in the Plan, based upon its own extensive analysis of the properties in the SNAD, the threats to neighborhood character, and the potential for rezoning.

The R1-1 zoning district requires larger lots with wider street frontages than the former, R 1-2 zoning district. It is the most effective zoning tool the DCP has at present to preserve the large lots in the area.

Riverdale Station Park

A park on the shoreline of the Hudson River was opened to the public in August 2005. The opening was a major success for the community. Park plans were originally presented to the community in February 2001. These plans were changed in response to criticisms of certain features by the Preservancy and other community groups long involved with riverfront access issues. With the physical design altered, the Preservancy continued to press community concerns for adequate security, safety, and maintenance. A change in administration in the Bronx office of the Department of Parks and Recreation nearly derailed the commitments the City had made for park operations. A concerted effort by Preservancy Board members and others in the community resulted in new discussions and commitments and allowed the park to open.

The park, with the unwieldy official name of Riverdale Riverfront Promenade and Fishing Access Site, consists of several small sitting areas overlooking the River and the palisades on the far shore. It is accessed from the Riverdale station of Metro-North's Hudson Line.

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Henry Hudson Parkway Scenic Byway

In 2005, the Preservancy agreed to act as fiduciary agent for community groups interested in obtaining small grants to rehabilitate parkland related to the Parkway in upper Manhattan. Several grants totaling less than \$2,000.00 were obtained for clean-up of the neglected parkway landscape and structures at Foot Park, south of the George Washington Bridge.

Monitoring and Neighborhood Activities

Residents continued to contact the Preservancy with concerns about work on specific sites. These included cracks in a house next door to a site with extensive blasting, concerns about the future of several properties, and problems with storm water runoff. In some cases, the Preservancy can only refer the caller to the appropriate city agency, in other cases, the problems bring to light shortcomings and weaknesses in existing regulations that will become the foundation for future preservation efforts.

The Preservancy spread the word within the community about volunteer opportunities with a shoreline cleanup next to the Marble Hill Station, spearheaded by Metro-North, and with a street tree census, conducted by the Department of Parks and Recreation.

Communications

A major advance in the Preservancy's ability to communicate with its members and the community in general was made with the launch of the Preservancy's website in April 2005. The timeliness and flexibility of the website is an improvement over the Preservancy's newsletter, which was discontinued.

Annual Meeting

Our annual meeting was held on May 19, 2005. Board members briefed attendees on the status of projects recent, current, and future: Chapel Farm, The Putnam Line, Hudson River park, Empire Connection, and the Henry Hudson Parkway Scenic Byway.

The featured speaker was Tony Cassino, Chairman of Community Board 8. Mr. Cassino summarized the major changes to the Special Natural Area District regulations. He noted that the changes grew out of the 197-a Plan, and stressed that the Plan would not have come to be without continuous community involvement and support.

Annual Financial Statement – 2005

REVENUE (\$)

Contributions/Membership dues	\$ 16,746
Grants	11,825
Interest/Other	821
TOTAL REVENUE	\$ 29,392

EXPENSES (\$)

Accounting Fees	\$ 1,725
Consulting Fees	14,250
Administrative Expenses	4,456
Project Expenses	9,459
TOTAL EXPENSES	\$ 29,890

Surplus/Deficit	- \$ 499
Starting Fund Balance	\$ 35,586
Ending Fund Balance	\$ 35,087