



RIVERDALE NATURE PRESERVANCY



Annual Report 2012-2013

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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

Riverdale continues its strong legacy of protection and preservation

- ***River to Reservoir* – Riverdale's "197-a Plan" provides a vision for balanced growth**

A vision for balanced growth and development in Community District 8 was articulated in 2003 in a community land use plan entitled *CD 8 2000: A River to Reservoir Preservation Strategy*. *River to Reservoir* was sponsored by Bronx Community Board 8 and involved discussion and study by city agencies, residents, and business owners. The plan was adopted by the New York City Council on November 19, 2003. *River to Reservoir* is one of some 15 similar plans in effect in New York City. It is often referred to as a "197-a Plan", because it is authorized under Section 197-a of the City Charter. The Riverdale Nature Preservancy was a leader in shaping the recommendations for Riverdale's Special Natural Area District (SNAD).

- **Increased zoning protections preserve Riverdale's neighborhood character and natural features**

River to Reservoir emphasizes protecting the scale and unique character of area neighborhoods as well as the area's sensitive natural features and their surrounding contexts. A number of zoning changes were approved in 2005 and 2006 to implement the plan's recommendations—among other changes, the regulations for the SNAD have been strengthened and parts of Riverdale have been rezoned to R1-1, the lowest residential zoning district in New York City. Both of these changes were strongly supported by the Preservancy.

These protections are the latest in a long legacy of careful stewardship of Riverdale's natural and historic resources by local residents. Founders of the Preservancy were leaders in early preservation efforts, beginning in the 1950s. The Preservancy organized in 1986 and continues to monitor development for consistency with the community's vision, needs and zoning regulations.

Hebrew Home proposes expansion

In April 2012, a proposal was made for development on a 14-acre parcel along the Hudson River that was completely out of character with the *River to Reservoir* recommendations and R1-1 zoning.

The Hebrew Home for the Aged at Riverdale proposed an expansion of its facility along the Hudson River. The Hebrew Home's existing facility is zoned R4 and is densely developed with buildings ranging from 4 to 8 stories. The Hebrew Home proposed 300 new, independent-living apartments arranged in several mid-rise buildings on an adjacent 14-acre site, which it had recently acquired. The new site, formerly a religious retreat house with ample open grounds, is zoned R1-1 and is developed with a 3-story, Victorian mansion and a 3-story, U-shaped brick retreat facility that is set back from the street. There are also several smaller buildings on the site.

Visually, the R4 property presents a massive development to the street and the R1-1 site presents a vista of hilly topography and trees, with the Hudson River visible from the south end of the property and the buildings visible through the trees.

- **Value of protections is at issue**

It became evident fairly quickly to community residents that the question was not as simple as whether Hebrew Home should be required to keep their R1-1 zoning or be allowed to rezone to R4. New York City zoning laws include mechanisms that might possibly enable Hebrew Home to achieve its goals while keeping the R1-1 zoning.

The issue became one of upholding and valuing the goals and purposes of the 197-a Plan and zoning. Changes on the Hebrew Home property that are vastly outside of the vision of *River to Reservoir* and the expectations of zoning regulations would call into question the value of these protections.

Short-term, not only did the expansion portend a stark change in appearance of the R1-1 property, it raised the likelihood of worse traffic congestion and hazards on narrow Palisade Avenue and increased noise from air conditioning units and service vehicles, particularly at night.

Long-term, the out-of-character changes would prime conditions for additional, incremental changes in the neighborhood that when taken together over time will irretrievably alter Riverdale's character.

- **Actions open dialogue and increase transparency**

Hebrew Home informally introduced the community to its plans at the Riverdale Nature Preservancy Annual Meeting on April 4, 2012. The theme of the meeting was *Institutional Growth, Creating Community, Preserving Natural Assets*. The need for dialogue and transparency between institutions and the community were common threads of presentations and discussion. Residents were encouraged to understand that community facilities must evolve, and institutional management and boards were encouraged to acknowledge their responsibilities to their host neighborhood and to proceed with transparency

Two weeks after the meeting, a group of concerned neighbors wrote to the Preservancy expressing concerns about negative impacts of the development and asking for help and advice in mitigating or stopping those impacts.

Starting in late 2012 and extending through 2013, the Preservancy's main effort has been directed to upholding the vision and purposes of Riverdale's 197-a Plan and zoning, and increasing dialogue between Hebrew Home and the community.

- **Timeline**

April 2012	Local residents submit a Request for Evaluation of the Allien Estate House (the Victorian Mansion) on the R1-1 property to the NYC Landmarks Preservation Commission (LPC). However, the LPC does not consider the application a priority at this time. The Preservancy discusses with the residents that landmarking is a less powerful tool for preservation in this case because Landmarks would be more likely to landmark an individual house than the whole property and Landmarks does not designate landscapes.
April 2012	The Preservancy Board encourages Hebrew Home to host a site walk and open meetings to solicit community input regarding their initial plans.

Nov. 1, 2012	Community members attend RNP board meeting to express concerns with respect to Hebrew Home expansion.
Nov. 4, 2012	Some 50 local residents and consultants for the Hebrew Home, including members of the Preservancy board, tour the site and discuss the proposed development.
Dec. 15, 2012	Preservancy distributes questionnaire via SurveyMonkey to solicit comments and concerns from the community.
Jan. 7, 2013	Community Board 8 Land Use Committee meeting, at which Hebrew Home presents concept drawings in an informational meeting. Hebrew Home proposes a community design meeting, or charrette, at which attendees can identify problems and issues and propose areas for study.
Jan. 15, 2013	Pre-charrette community meeting hosted by the Preservancy. Approximately 30 people attend. The Riverdale Community Coalition is formed.
Jan. 2013	Hebrew Home posts its concept drawings and other supporting materials on its website. Riverdale Nature Preservancy posts a fact sheet on the NYC land use application and approval process on its website.
Jan. 28 and Feb. 12, 2013	Hebrew Home hosts Open Houses where community members raise questions and concerns to Hebrew Home's consultants. However contrary to the concept of a charrette, plans are already in an advanced stage of development.
Jan. 29, 2013	Preservancy writes to City Council, City Planning Commission and Community Board, outlining the proposal and issues.
Feb. 2013	Preservancy board agrees not to support zoning change to R4.
Feb. 12, 2013	Preservancy passes a Resolution that outlines the vision of the 197-a Plan, the purposes of the R1-1 and SNAD zoning in Riverdale, and the ways in which the proposed development does not comply with these protections. The resolution is disseminated to members of the City Council, City Planning Commission, Community Board, and NYC Landmarks Preservation Commission, as well as leaders of the Historic Districts Council, state officials, additional city officials, and the New York Metropolitan Transportation Council, which is working on plans for another project in the area.
Mar. 12 and June 11, 2013	Recognizing that the 197-a Plan pre-dates many current members of Community Board 8, Preservancy board members speak at the gallery sessions of two Community Board meetings about the vision and effort that led to development of the Plan.

Mar. 15, 2013	Preservancy asks its members for funds to support its Hebrew Home efforts. In a very strong showing of support, members donate nearly \$10,000.
April 8, 2013	Preservancy and Riverdale Community Coalition boards meet with the Bronx Office of the Department of City Planning.
April 10, 2013	Hebrew Home presents a revised plan to Community Board 8 Land Use Committee; Preservancy board members attend.
Spring 2013	The Riverdale Community Coalition retains Mr. Albert Butzel and Mr. Michael Kwartler to assist in evaluating the proposed development. The work involves determining what can be built on the property under the existing R1-1 zoning as well as under other possible zoning scenarios such as a large-scale development plan. In June 2013, The Preservancy contributes \$3,000 to this effort.
June 5, 2013	Preservancy and Riverdale Community Coalition boards meet with Hebrew Home CEO and consultants. Hebrew Home is interested in meeting community objections. Hebrew Home commits to develop alternate scenarios over the summer and to return to the community board in August or September.
Sept. 9, 2013	Hebrew Home presents alternate plans to Community Board 8.
Oct. 7, 2013	Preservancy and Riverdale Community Coalition boards meet for a second time with the Bronx Office of the Department of City Planning (DCP). DCP is attentive to all that has transpired and the ideas regarding density and massing that are contained within both the community's and Hebrew Homes most recent concept plans.

- **Ahead for 2014**

When the project application is submitted to the NYC Department of City Planning, the Preservancy will remain engaged on all fronts during the City's Uniform Land Use Review Procedure (ULURP) and will continue to solicit and put forward input from the community.

Indian Pond development offers another test of existing protections

Indian Pond, located in the heart of Fieldston, 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. In the fall of 2010, three new houses were proposed for a large property bordering the pond. The property is within the Fieldston Historic District, zoned R1-2, and subject to SNAD zoning.

In early 2012, the Preservancy wrote to the Director of Region 2 of the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation to support an application by the

Fieldston Property Owners Association to have Indian Pond designated a protected wetland under the New York State Freshwater Wetlands Act.

In its letter, the Preservancy not only referenced the many species of wildlife that depend upon the Indian Pond habitat, but also stressed the ecosystem services—flood control, erosion control and storm water management—that are provided by the pond and adjacent soils and vegetation.

The application for wetland status was not approved. Aquatic features are protected under SNAD zoning, but the effectiveness of the zoning remains to be seen. The zoning language protects “wetlands, including, but not limited to State and Federal, mapped or designated, freshwater or tidal wetlands.” (NYC Zoning Resolution, Section 105-11 (c))

At the close of 2013, the applicant is proceeding with the application to build three houses. One house has been moved farther away from the pond. The first step in the review process will be the Landmarks Preservation Commission. The Preservancy will continue to monitor this application.

Initiate and Participate in Long-term Planning and Preservation

Hudson River Valley Greenway planning is completed and design issues rise to the fore

Final recommendations for a route for the Hudson River Valley Greenway in the Bronx were released by the New York Metropolitan Transportation Council (NYMTC) at the end of 2013.

As a member of the Technical Advisory Committee (TAC) for the greenway planning project, the Preservancy has consistently conveyed the interests and concerns of community residents to NYMTC and their planning consultants.

The Preservancy attended TAC meetings on:

- April 10, 2012, to comment on implementation phase maps and the implementation table
- May 28, 2013, to discuss the final draft report

In May 2013, the Preservancy communicated to the chairman of the Community Board 8 Transportation Committee support for the general

concepts of the interim on-street route and the final waterside route. This support recognized that many design details needed much deeper scrutiny.

In two letters, one to NYMTC on October 15, 2013 and one to the Community Board on December 19, 2013, the Preservancy outlined areas of safety, security, accessibility and environmental protection that must be addressed as the Greenway is implemented.

- October 16, 2013, the final meeting of the TAC
- **November 2013 Walking Tour raises issues along the south end of the route**

The October TAC meeting raised questions about recommendations for the on-street, interim route. A walking tour of the route was held on November 3, 2013. Members of the Preservancy board were among the 40 – 50 participants. Representatives of several homeowner associations from the southern section of the route were among those who contributed new information to the project.

A variety of thorny issues were raised during the November walking tour, including but not limited to: design along Palisade Avenue, alternatives to Palisade Avenue, connection to the Henry Hudson Bridge and varying design standards for bicycle paths/multi-user paths.

- **Access to the Henry Hudson Bridge is examined**

The Henry Hudson Bridge has been identified as the most desirable way to carry the Hudson River Valley Greenway across the Harlem River. At present pedestrian access is via a narrow walkway, partially obstructed by bridge supports, on the lower level. Greenway planners have proposed a new, cantilevered walkway added to the bridge.

In early 2012, the Preservancy learned that the MTA planned to dismantle an unused pedestrian promenade on the upper deck of the Henry Hudson Bridge as part of bridge reconstruction. The promenade had been another option for the greenway crossing. The Preservancy initiated swift intervention by the community, informing the MTA that the bridge had been determined eligible for the National Register and convincing the MTA to submit its plans to SHPO for review. However, the promenade had not been explicitly identified as a contributing factor to the historic nature of the bridge, and in the end it was dismantled.

Despite the loss of the walkway, the community was gratified that the new review process for historic resources was followed.

- **Ahead for 2014**

The Friends of the Hudson River Valley Greenway in the Bronx is expected to focus on implementing the long-term greenway route along the Hudson River waterfront. As noted above, the interim route raises complicated issues. In its letter to NYMTC

of October 15, 2013, the Preservancy proposed a series of open community design meetings during implementation of the interim route, and offered to facilitate them. However, the issues raised during the November walking tour showed that this effort might require more resources than are available to the Preservancy.

Preservancy Continues to Support a Multi-use Path along the Putnam Line

The Preservancy continues to support the goals of the Putnam Line—to provide needed recreational facilities to under served Bronx neighborhoods and to connect to the South County Trailway in Westchester, to other Bronx trails and to Manhattan.

In June 2013, the board decided not to take a formal position on trail surface materials. The community is debating the merits of stone dust and paving as two alternative surfaces. Members of the Preservancy board share views on both sides.

Preservancy nominates Bronx section of the Henry Hudson Parkway to the National Register of Historic Places

In August 2012, the Preservancy submitted to the New York State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO) an application to have the Henry Hudson Parkway from West 72nd Street to the city line listed in the New York State and National Registers of Historic Places. The application was developed with assistance from the National Park Service, and its submittal marks 12 years of work by the Preservancy Henry Hudson Parkway Task Force to acquire the tool to preserve the Parkway—the bridge, highway, service roads, overpasses, sidewalks, retaining walls and landscaping and adjacent parks—as the linear park and scenic drive it was meant to be.

- **Approval is needed by SHPO**

Review of the application by SHPO began in late 2013. The process may be longer than usual because the application includes some properties that were not included in SHPO's determination of eligibility. While people today tend to think of a parkway as a roadway, the original concept of a parkway was of a park with a roadway passing through. For example, the section of the Parkway in Manhattan is already listed in the National Register and includes both Riverside Park and the Parkway. The Scenic Byway Task Force seeks equal treatment for the Henry Hudson Parkway in the Bronx.

Through research and documentation, working in concert with the National Park Service, which administers the National Register, the Task Force has expanded the boundaries of the parkway in the application to include all of the retaining walls and parkland that were acquired for the parkway (Phyllis Post Goodman, the 231st St sitting mall, Hackett Park, and the natural areas and green spaces that line the roads). This effort has been, for the past few years, the mammoth task of one

Preservancy board member, who is carrying on the work of the Henry Hudson Parkway Scenic Byway Task Force.

Provide Information and Strengthen Communication

April 2012 community meeting

The Preservancy has long been concerned with the relationship between Riverdale's many institutions and their neighbors. In April 2012, the Preservancy hosted a community discussion to 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 local neighborhoods as the community and local institutions grow. The meeting was well-attended by local residents, representatives of local community facilities and elected officials or their representatives.

A panel presented individual perspectives on issues associated with the growth of institutions and framed the evening's discussion. The panelists included:

- Paula Luria Caplan, Principal at PLC Urban Planning & Policy and former Deputy Director of Planning and Development for the Bronx Borough President;
- Damian McShane, Former Chairman, Bronx Community Board 8;
- Howard Waldman, Science Teacher, Green Dean, Ethical Culture Fieldston School; and
- Helen Morik, Vice President, Government & Community Affairs, New York-Presbyterian Hospital.

Discussion moved among the themes of communication, transparency, mutual respect for the needs of institutions and their host neighborhoods, examples of successful mediations of development and ways to create community relationships.

Website redesign and traffic

The Preservancy launched a redesigned website in June 2013. The website supports the Preservancy's mission to provide information about important meetings and events, to educate, and to represent the interests of members in matters that affect the natural features, historic resources, and neighborhood character of the community.

Website statistics are tracked by google analytics.

Email communications

The Preservancy's website does not include a blog, but visitors are encouraged to contact the Preservancy via email. Topics raised in emails are considered for inclusion on the website.

Email alerts

The Preservancy continues to grow its email address list. In 2013, the Preservancy began to manage mass emailings with Vertical Response, an email marketing service that is free to low-volume non-profit organizations.

Email alerts are kept to a minimum, due to general email fatigue among Preservancy members.

In 2013, three email alerts were sent. The open and click rates are shown below. In general, an open rate between 20% and 40% is considered average. The Preservancy's open rate is slightly above average. The email marketing industry does not cite an average click-through rate.

Date	Topic	#Sent	Open Rate	Click-through Rate
January 2013	Community Survey about Hebrew Home	156	47% (74)	30% (46) clicked the survey link.
October 2013	Announcement of Greenway walk	164	42% (69)	18% (30) clicked a link to read the Preservancy's letter or NYMTC's report.
December 2013	Annual fundraising	161	42% (68)	5% (8) made a donation.

LG Electronics

The Preservancy sent a letter of support to the coalition seeking to preserve the vista of the Palisades through redesign of a building proposed by LG Electronics.

Hudson River Park Cleanup

The Preservancy partnered with Riverkeeper to clean up the pocket park at the Metro-North Station on Sunday, May 11, 2013. Trash and lack of maintenance are persistent problems at this park.

Riverfest

The Preservancy has been a participant in Riverfest since its inception in 2010. The Preservancy has also been a sponsor of Riverfest, contributing \$3,000 each year in 2012 and 2013.

Riverfest 2012 was held on Sunday, June 24. The main feature of the Preservancy's display was a 5-foot long map of the Henry Hudson Parkway, depicting the historic and natural resources for which the Preservancy is seeking greater protection through listing in the National Register of Historic Places. The Preservancy purchased promotional mugs and tote bags as well as a banner and shade tent for this event. Several donations were received and nine names were added to the Preservancy mailing list.

Riverfest 2013 was held on Sunday, June 30. The Preservancy table hosted representatives from NYC°CoolRoofs who educated the community about Mayor Bloomberg's initiative to apply specialized coatings to roofs in order to reduce roof temperatures, cooling costs and carbon emissions. Twenty-two names were added to the Preservancy mailing list.

Annual Financial Statement ó 2012

REVENUE (\$)

Contributions/Membership dues/grants	\$ 12,446.
Interest/Other	2.
TOTAL REVENUE	\$ 12,448.

EXPENSES (\$)

Accounting Fees	\$ 950
Consulting Fees	7,925
Administrative Expenses	3,400
Project Expenses	7,069
TOTAL EXPENSES	\$ 19,344

Surplus/Deficit **\$ - 6,896**

Starting Fund Balance **26,248**

**Disbursement from City Parks
Foundation Grant** **- 1,637**

Ending Fund Balance **\$ 17,715**

Annual Financial Statement ó 2013

REVENUE (\$)

Contributions/Membership dues/grants	\$ 22,201.
Interest/Other	1.
TOTAL REVENUE	\$ 22,202.

EXPENSES (\$)

Accounting Fees	\$ 950
Consulting Fees	13,688
Administrative Expenses	3,316
Project Expenses	8,237
TOTAL EXPENSES	\$ 26,191

Surplus/Deficit **\$ -3,989**

Starting Fund Balance **\$ 17,715**

Ending Fund Balance **\$ 13,726**

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