

Riverdale Nature Preservancy
P.O. Box 239
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Annual Report
2002

Highlights

In 2002, the Riverdale Nature Preservancy continued to expand its focus from issues restricted primarily to the Special Natural Area District to those affecting a wider region. We remained active in monitoring the City's selection of a site for a filtration plant for the Croton water supply system, and initiated an effort to apply to the state for scenic byway designation for the Henry Hudson Parkway. We met a major goal of increased communication with our membership through the inauguration of a newsletter. Preservancy activities were carried out under the new task force structure. To meet increasingly complex organizational needs, we created an executive committee and adopted a number of new managerial procedures.

Henry Hudson Parkway Scenic Byway

The Preservancy launched a major effort this year to win New York State Scenic Byway designation for the Henry Hudson Parkway, from its terminus at W. 72nd Street in Manhattan to the NYC/Westchester line.

The effort is in response to increasing installation of signs and safety features that are inconsistent with the rustic and scenic character of the Parkway, and to the degradation of the parkway buffer, particularly in the Bronx. In Riverdale, graceful stone bridges have been marred by huge signs. The parkland buffer is paved over or eroded, if not altogether gone. The once landscaped median is now miles of Jersey barriers topped with chainlink.

Scenic byways are roadways recognized by the state as having distinctive characteristics that merit protection. As a scenic byway, the parkway will have a master plan to guide its future. It will be eligible for state and federal funding for enhancements, and there will be increased public input into management and project design.

In 2002, the Henry Hudson Parkway Scenic Byway task force won support for the scenic byway concept from Bronx Community Board 8, the New York State Department of Transportation, the Bronx regional offices of the NYC Departments of Transportation and Parks and Recreation, Riverdale's elected officials, and various community civic groups in the Bronx. Efforts will turn to generating similar levels of support in Manhattan.

The designation process involves extensive research and public outreach. The task force will seek to fund most byway activities through a variety of grants. To date, the task force has received a grant of \$5,000 from Con Edison for public outreach and an in-kind contribution from the Gaia Institute for development of a plan to handle storm water on the parkway.

The Byway designation process will take several years. In the interim, the task force will monitor current Parkway projects to seek to minimize additional disruptions to the Parkway's historic design and function.

Late in the year, the task force was able to review the NYC Department of Transportation's (DOT) designs for reconstruction of the Parkway overpasses in Riverdale. Task force members were alarmed to see that the plans include installation of concrete jersey barriers over the stone parapets, with chain link atop the concrete. The task force contacted the DOT to request that they consider alternative designs. The concern is not only the aesthetics of the jersey barriers, but the possibility that their installation will reduce the parkway's eligibility for historic and scenic byway designations.

This task force is the first to draw its membership from outside the Preservancy board of directors. The majority of members are community residents who are volunteering their time and talents toward the preservation and enhancement of the Parkway. This is the first of many opportunities for interested community members to participate more closely in Preservancy activities.

Hudson River Park at Riverdale Metro-North Station

A new park is being created along the Hudson River at the Riverdale Metro-North train station, as part of the Hudson River Valley Greenway. Design and construction are concurrent with extensive renovations at the station and are a cooperative effort of the NYS Department of Environmental Conservation, the NYC Department of Parks and Recreation, and the Metropolitan Transportation Authority.

In 2002, Community Board 8's Parks and Recreation Committee held a public hearing on the park. The Preservancy was represented by President Robert Lynch, whose testimony focused on safety concerns.

The Preservancy subsequently submitted the following position paper to Community Board 8 and the NYC Department of Parks and Recreation:

Position on Bicycle Path through Riverdale Park

The Riverdale Nature Preservancy (the Preservancy) opposes the proposed bicycle path through Riverdale Park for the following reasons:

1. Having attended the public meeting, heard community input, and reviewed the NYC Department of Parks and Recreation's (the Parks Department's) plans for the proposed path, the Preservancy believes that the Parks Department's plan is flawed.
2. Our membership insists that the "Forever Wild" status of Riverdale Park be preserved, and is concerned that the Parks Department's plan would jeopardize this status. The removal of vegetation, improvement and widening of the path to accommodate bikes, and erection of a fence cannot be allowed in the park.
3. Riverdale Park should continue to be used for passive, not active, recreational purposes.
4. Our previous concern for the safety of the alternate bicycle route via Spaulding Lane was allayed by the testimony of the bicycle representatives, who conceded that it was a viable option.

We conclude that the Parks Department should pursue alternatives for a bike route that do not include a path through Riverdale Park.

Chapel Farm

The Chapel Farm property, nearly 16 acres in size, is the last privately-owned remnant oak forest of its size or quality in New York City. Development of 13 houses is being proposed for the property. The Riverdale Sanitary Commission manages the private sewers to which the developers would like to connect. Board member Gilbert Kerlin, who is president of the Commission, and the developer discussed the connection issue several times over the year. By the end of the year, the Chapel Farm Task Force was continuing to explore options to maintain the property in its present, undeveloped state. In 2001, the Riverdale Nature Preservancy, in partnership with New Yorkers for Parks (formerly The Parks Council) and the Riverdale Community Association, sponsored a report on the natural and cultural resources of the Chapel Farm property. The report was finalized in autumn 2002.

Croton System Water Filtration Plant

The Board remains vigilant on the site selection process for the proposed water filtration plant. Sites are currently being considered in Van Cortlandt Park and on the Harlem River. A site in Van Cortlandt Park will involve loss of parkland, and a site on the Harlem River will interfere with the Bronx Borough President's plans for a bicycle and nature trail along the Old Putnam Rail line.

The Croton water supply system currently meets federal water quality standards. The Federal Environmental Protection Agency maintains that as development continues to

surge in the Croton watershed and when water quality standards are tightened, the Croton system will fall out of compliance. The Preservancy joins local advocates who contend that policies to control point and non-point sources of pollution into the reservoirs can keep the system in compliance.

Board Structure and Operation

With the broadening of the Preservancy's activities and the institution of a task force system of operation, Board members recognized the need to adjust Board policies and procedures to meet evolving organization needs. The Board of Directors devoted one full meeting to questions of board structure and operation. Major decisions included the creation of an executive committee—to consist of officers and two at-large members elected from the board—and a 3-year term limit for officers. A variety of procedures related to the monthly board meetings and management of the Task Forces were approved. It was also agreed that the board would review the Preservancy's mission statement and annually evaluate the organization's fulfillment of its mission .

Public Outreach

Newsletter

In its effort to increase communication between the board of directors and Preservancy membership, the Preservancy successfully launched its newsletter this year. The inaugural issue of *Preservancy News, The Newsletter of the Riverdale Nature Preservancy*, was distributed in June. A schedule of three to four issues each year is anticipated. The newsletter will include informational articles on current planning and preservation issues within the community, educational articles on local natural and historical resources, and announcements of board decisions and events.

Annual Meeting

The annual meeting was held on October 22, 2002. The nearly two-hour meeting included updates on the Preservancy's priority projects, a brief discussion by Dr. Paul Mankiewicz of the Gaia Institute about the costs and benefits of restoring the soils and plantings along the Henry Hudson Parkway and the potential for the City to save millions of dollars in stormwater management costs, and remarks from NYS Assemblyman Jeffrey Dinowitz and NYC Councilman Oliver Koppell.

After the public session, board members held a short business meeting to elect officers and directors. The full slate was reelected unanimously.

Annual Financial Statement - 2002

REVENUE (\$)

Contributions/Membership dues/ Foundations	58,475
<u>Interest/Other</u>	<u>878</u>

TOTAL REVENUE **59,353**

EXPENSES (\$)

Accounting/Legal Fees	3,750
Consulting Fees	17,026
Administrative Expenses	4,955
<u>Project Expenses</u>	<u>27,656</u>

TOTAL EXPENSES **53,387**

Surplus/Deficit	\$ 5,966
Starting Fund Balance	\$ 71,292
Ending Fund Balance	\$ 77,258