



**RIVERDALE NATURE PRESERVANCY**  
**2019-2020 ANNUAL REPORT**

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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, our website, and on social media to enable local residents to be active and engaged in environmental and planning issues.

# Monitor Local Development

## **Preservation of Brust Park**

In 2019, a developer purchased a single family home adjacent to Brust Park with plans to build a 6 story, 29 unit apartment building in its place. A community group, the Coalition to Save Brust Park (“CSBP”) was formed. The Preservancy has used its social media to support CSBP’s work as it closely monitors development on the property and advocates for enforcement of local codes which protect the parkland. This work continues through 2020.

## **Preservation of Historic Properties**

In 2019, the Villa Rosa Bonheur was demolished by a developer with plans to construct a large luxury residential building in its place. Unfortunately, the property was not protected with landmark status or designated as an R-1 lot under local zoning. The developer was entitled as-of-right to demolish the unique historic home and increase density on the site. The Preservancy supported local initiatives to rename the adjacent street in honor of this lost historic home. Going forward, the

Preservancy will continue to share information with local residents about the status of properties, as unprotected properties of unique historical and architectural value are often presumed to have landmark status without confirmation. Armed with knowledge, the community can move forward to seek regulatory protection for these properties.

In 2020, the Preservancy remained vigilant and observed properties at risk for development outside of local preservation goals. Monitoring included observation of trees tagged for unclear purposes on the Schervier property at Independence Avenue, unauthorized removal of mature trees at 625 W. 246th Street, and observation that the Esmerelda House at 3111 Henry Hudson Parkway, part of General Ewen’s original estate, is on sale and not protected by a landmark status or R-1 zoning. Compliance concerns have been addressed to City Planning or the Department of Buildings, as well as CB8, as appropriate.

# Long-term planning and preservation

## Changes to Special Natural Area District Zoning Regulations

In 2019, the Preservancy continued its four years of work with NYC and the local community toward improving proposed changes to the Special Natural Area District (“SNAD”) regulations. The Preservancy had several concerns about the proposed changes. Critical issues included provisions which reduced oversight by Community Board 8 (“CB8”), increasing as-of-right permissions to build on property and alter the natural environment. While original SNAD rules required property owners to receive approval from CB8 to begin a project, the revised rules would permit property owners with less than an acre of land to bypass the community board and procure project approval directly from the Department of Buildings (“DOB”). **As CB8 is more directly accountable to the**

**public than the DOB, it is the position of the Preservancy that CB8 oversight of development is essential to meeting the community’s needs.**

Throughout the public review of the proposed SNAD updates, the Preservancy attended hearings and community discussions. The Preservancy provided comments and suggestions to CB8 and local elected officials with the aim of creating an improved regulatory scheme. Preservancy positions and concerns were shared ongoing with the community via Eblasts, at CB8 meetings, and at public hearings. By the fall of 2019, the Department of City Planning withdrew the proposed changes to the SNAD regulations from ULURP, holding that the differences between the city’s goal of streamlining the permitting process for owners of smaller properties could not be resolved in consideration of the community’s expressed preferences.

## **Revising Our 197-a Plan**

The Preservancy has engaged with CB8 in support of updating our 197-a Plan to reflect the changing needs of the community.

**The Preservancy is committed to participating in each phase of the process to guide the community toward an improved regulatory scheme.**

Specific goals for an updated 197-a Plan include improved enforcement of building permits, discussion of expanding the SNAD to protect historic and natural features east of Henry Hudson Parkway and in Kingsbridge, and working with climate and affordable housing advocates seeking an end to R-1 zoning in NYC to design solutions which take into account sensitive ecology and ensuring equitable access to green spaces.

## **Hudson River Greenway**

The Preservancy has continued engagement in 2019 and 2020 with city agencies and community groups charged with finalizing plans for this project. As planning the Greenway intersects with

complex issues of ecology, the needs of multiple communities, resilience to climate change, and issues of land ownership on proposed pathways, significant work will be required to reach the goal.

## **Support of Composting Initiatives**

In 2020, pandemic related budget cuts in NYC led the Department of Sanitation (“DSNY”) to end its Curbside Composting program as well as reduce funding for educational programs supporting community food scrap recycling. The Preservancy advocated for City Council to thoughtfully consider the resulting structural losses to these programs due to these temporary cost saving measures, and urged the public to communicate its interest in resuming support of these programs as soon as possible with local elected officials and CB8.

## **Daylighting Tibbetts Brook**

The Preservancy has been supportive of efforts to daylight Tibbetts Brook in ongoing CB8 discussions. In 2019, the Preservancy supported the Van Cortlandt Park Alliance's petition to NYC Parks and Recreation requesting continued study and

planning toward this goal. In 2019 and 2020, the Preservancy attended CB8 meetings to collaborate with community members toward the goal of daylighting and shared information with its network via Eblasts and social media.

# Provide Information and Strengthen Communication

## Annual Meeting

In January 2019, the Preservancy's annual meeting provided local residents with a presentation on the SNAD regulations, including some history of how they have evolved to the present form. **This community discussion became the basis of our suggestions to improve the City Planning Committee's proposal for updating the SNAD regulations, and formed the framework of the Preservancy's positions as it engaged with the Department of Buildings later in the process.**

Due to the Covid-19 pandemic, no annual in-person meeting was planned in 2020. In its place, the Preservancy began planning a Candidates' Forum on Zoom for candidates in the upcoming 2021 City Council Special Election for our district. The forum provided an opportunity for candidates to share their positions on issues of preservation and planning.

## Updated Communications

In 2019, the Preservancy created a plan for updating communications to reach members and the general community more effectively. Phase one included increasing communication through Facebook, and transitioning to a new Eblast host. Phase two is to include updating the Preservancy's website to a new hosting service which will be simpler to update and keep current, and which will be functional and appealing on the variety of internet connected devices used today.

In 2020, the Preservancy launched a community education campaign as its annual project. **The Preservancy created fliers, providing information on how residents can participate in preserving local ecology.** The fliers were distributed to the Preservancy's network via social media and the email list, a most effective communication during the Covid-19 pandemic. Flier topics



included explaining the value of favoring native plants, local sources of native plants, and ecologically sound gardening tips tailored to the SNAD. Additionally a flier outlined the Preservancy's goals for long term development as CB8 has begun a conversation about updating our 197-a Plan.

## **Facebook Communication**

### *Increasing Facebook Following*

On Facebook, "followers" are analogous to content subscribers. Followers receive updates when the group they have followed posts information. The Preservancy's Facebook page had about 25 "followers" at the beginning of the initiative. To improve communication with the community, the Preservancy sought an increased number of "followers." **By the end of 2020, the Preservancy's Facebook page had over 500 "followers."**

### *Increasing Facebook Communication*

On social media, regular posting is critical to maintaining interest in a group page and in gaining

followers. **The Preservancy began posting regularly on the Facebook page in 2019.** Material included: content of Eblasts, newspaper articles relevant to the Preservancy's mission, notices about important CB8 meetings, photography highlighting the natural and historical features of our local area, and fundraising notices including a "Giving Tuesday" campaign.

The Preservancy's Facebook posts were shared with its followers, as well as any user who may view the page but choose not to follow. To expand the Preservancy's visibility on Facebook, posts were selectively shared with local community groups. The Riverdale area has about a dozen active Facebook groups which include the Preservancy's targeted membership. Sharing the Preservancy's posts with these groups reaches community members with information and is a source of "followers" for the Preservancy's Facebook page.

## **Eblast Communication**

In March of 2020, the Preservancy transferred to Constant Contact as a host for its email communication.

**Constant Contact provides a variety of easy to use templates for Eblasts, which it automatically updates for**

**functionality and pleasant aesthetics on the variety of internet-connected devices used by our community.**

Constant Contact also provides convenient functions like “automatic resend to non-openers” which increase the open rate of Eblasts.

# Annual Financial Statement 2019

| <b>Bank Accounts</b>                           | <b>Starting Balance</b> | <b>Ending Balance</b> |
|--|-------------------------|-----------------------|
| Checking                                       | \$20,443.00             | \$23,957.00           |
| Restricted Funds (City Parks Foundation Grant) | 2,192.59                | 2,192.59              |

**BUDGET SURPLUS: \$3,514.00**

## REVENUE (\$)

|                                      |                  |
|--------------------------------------|------------------|
| Contributions/Membership dues/grants | 14,997           |
| Interest/Other:                      | 42               |
| <b>TOTAL REVENUE</b>                 | <b>15,039.00</b> |

## EXPENSES (\$)

|  |                  |
|--|------------------|
| <b>Professional Fees</b>               |                  |
| Accounting                             | 1,350            |
| Consulting                             | 7,198            |
| <b>Sub total</b>                       | <b>8548</b>      |
| <b>Administrative Expenses</b>         |                  |
| Grants/donations paid                  | 200              |
| Advertising                            | 0                |
| Print and mail costs                   | 1,836            |
| Meetings: room rental, storage, travel | 629              |
| Administrative expenses                | 50               |
| Website & online services              | 262              |
| <b>Sub Total</b>                       | <b>2977</b>      |
| <b>TOTAL EXPENSES</b>                  | <b>11,525.00</b> |

# Annual Financial Statement 2020

| <b>Bank Accounts (\$)</b>                      | <b>Starting Balance</b> | <b>Ending Balance</b> |
|--|-------------------------|-----------------------|
| Checking                                       | 23,957.00               | 19,751.74             |
| Restricted Funds (City Parks Foundation Grant) | 2,192.59                | 2,192.59              |

**BUDGET DEFICIT: \$4205.26**

## REVENUE (\$)

|                                      |                |
|--------------------------------------|----------------|
| Contributions/Membership dues/grants | 6,922.75       |
| Interest/Other:                      | 9.60           |
| <b>TOTAL REVENUE</b>                 | <b>6932.35</b> |

## EXPENSES (\$)

|  |                  |
|--|------------------|
| <b>Professional Fees</b>               |                  |
| Accounting                             | 1,375            |
| Consulting                             | 8490             |
| <b>Sub total</b>                       | <b>9865</b>      |
| <b>Administrative Expenses</b>         |                  |
| Grants/donations paid                  | 0                |
| Advertising                            | 300              |
| Meetings: room rental, storage, travel | 480              |
| Print and ship costs                   | 247.35           |
| Administrative                         | 0                |
| Website & online services:             | 245.26           |
| <b>Sub Total</b>                       | <b>1272.61</b>   |
| <b>TOTAL EXPENSES</b>                  | <b>11,137.61</b> |

# Board of Directors 2019 & 2020

|                    |              |
|--------------------|--------------|
| Sherida E. Paulsen | Chairman     |
| Peter S. Kohlmann  | Co-President |
| Sandy Shalleck     | Treasurer    |

## *At large exec committee members*

Jodie Colon  
Ann Rauch

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

|                |                   |
|----------------|-------------------|
| Gilbert Kerlin | Founding Chairman |
| Paul J. Elston | Honorary Chairman |

## **In Memoriam**



### **Sandy Shalleck (1943-2021)**

Sandy was a community leader throughout the Bronx. Her contributions to the Preservancy include many generous years of service as a board member and officer. During her life, Sandy's service extended to several organizations, including the Bronx Children's Museum, the Riverdale Yacht Club, and Riverdale Mental Health. She was a lifelong athlete, with a particular enthusiasm for tennis. Sandy leaves two sons, David (Laura) Hess and Daniel Hess, as well as grandchildren Lucy, Harry, Lizzy, and Teddy Hess. Sandy was a devoted and talented community leader - she will be greatly missed.