

Riverdale Nature Preservancy  
Annual Report

2006

The Riverdale Nature Preservancy is a non-profit 501(c)3 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 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.

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 preservation projects, to ensure that community needs are heard and met, and to protect and enhance Riverdale's superb natural environment and community character.

**Highlights of 2006**

Five major issues were addressed by the Preservancy in 2006:

- landmarking of Fieldston as a historic district was approved by the City Council in the spring of 2006;
- recognizing that even the most restrictive residential zoning and Special Natural Area District zoning do not ensure that open space will be fully protected, the Preservancy joined with other community residents to investigate the feasibility of creating a conservation easement program for Riverdale;
- planning for the Hudson River Valley Greenway was revived by NY State through the New York Metropolitan Transportation Council;
- construction of a portion of the Hudson River Trail through Riverdale by the NYC Department of Parks and Recreation began to move forward; and
- the Preservancy's Henry Hudson Parkway Scenic Byway Task Force continued its efforts towards designation.

**Fieldston Historic District**

The City Council voted unanimously to approve the Fieldston Historic District in April 2006. Prior to the Council's vote, the Preservancy worked closely with the Fieldston Property Owners Association to inform the community of critical public hearings by the Community Board, the City Planning Commission, and City Council subcommittees. The Preservancy also wrote in support of landmarking to Council members and the City Planning Commission.

### **Conservation Easements**

As is often the case in New York City neighborhoods, Riverdale has developed at a density that is lower than the maximum permitted by its zoning. Despite increased zoning restrictions approved in 2005, there is still potential to lose to development a great deal of the privately-owned open space in Riverdale. Recognizing that even the most restrictive zoning still leaves open space vulnerable, the Preservancy board expressed interest in tools other than zoning, particularly conservation easements, to protect these spaces.

In 2006, the Preservancy was invited to consider entering into a partnership with the Open Space Institute to jointly manage a conservation easement program for Riverdale. We held an informational meeting with the Open Space Institute and endorsed the idea of a future partnership.

It will take time to develop a program that meets the federal requirements of a comprehensive conservation easement program. Over the next year, the Preservancy anticipates working to build support for a conservation easement program in the community and within affected government agencies, and developing a stewardship agreement that will lay out the specific responsibilities of the Preservancy and other partners.

### **Hudson River Valley Greenway**

In 1998, our community went through its first public planning process for a greenway along the Hudson River – part of the Hudson River Valley Greenway (HRVG) planned from Battery Park in Manhattan to The Battery in Troy, NY, just north of Albany. The Preservancy was fiduciary agent for, and contributed staff time to, that effort.

The responsibility for the HRVG in New York City has moved from the offices of the greenway Council and Conservancy in Albany to the New York Metropolitan Transportation Council (NYMTC), the downstate association of transportation and environmental agencies responsible for regional transportation planning and projects.

In June 2006, NYMTC issued a Request for Proposals (RFP) for a planning consultant to recommend design solutions for the HRVG through the Bronx. The Preservancy expects to be named to one of the two planning committees that will be created by the consultant in 2007.

## **Hudson River Trail**

In a project separate from the Hudson River Valley Greenway, the New York City Department of Parks and Recreation (Parks) is creating a bicycle trail along the west side of Manhattan and the Bronx.

Planning meetings with community groups, including the Preservancy, were held in 1999, and Parks put forth a draft Master Plan in January 2004. Despite consistent community opposition, Parks recommended that the bicycle path go through Riverdale Park.

The Preservancy has been informed that design review meetings are planned for the spring of 2007. We expect to work with Parks to see that the community's concerns about paving and irresponsible use of the park are dealt with effectively.

## **Henry Hudson Parkway Scenic Byway**

When a retaining wall alongside the Henry Hudson Parkway in northern Manhattan collapsed in 2005, the steady progress of the Preservancy's Henry Hudson Parkway Scenic Byway task force was slowed.

The collapse led the NYC Department of Transportation (DOT) to undertake a safety study of all city-owned retaining walls. Recommendations of the study are expected to be available in early 2007. Until then, the New York Metropolitan Transportation Council (NYMTC), which is the project manager and of which the NYC DOT is a member agency, has halted hiring of a consultant for the scenic byway project and funding to complete a report on Parkway resources by HAER (the Historic American Engineering Record).

Rebuilding of the wall could not begin for months, as the city and the owners of the wall, a large cooperative apartment complex, wrangled over responsibilities and liabilities. Like last year's difficulties over the redesign of Parkway overpasses in Riverdale, the collapse is another demonstration of the need for a Parkway management plan. Among other things, a scenic byway management plan will identify maintenance priorities, design considerations, management structures, and jurisdictional issues along the parkway, easing future conflicts and delays.

The volume of information already compiled, the momentum within communities along the Parkway, and the way the overpass project and the collapse have demonstrated the value of a plan for the Parkway all clearly argue for resumption of the scenic byway project as soon as possible.

This year, the Scenic Byway task force has communicated with the agencies and community advocates at the forefront of these new developments, to keep interest focused

on moving forward. Once the DOT recommendations are released in 2007, the task force will work to reestablish project funding.

### **Annual Meeting**

The Preservancy held its annual meeting in November 2006. Our featured speaker was Mr. Chuck Moerdler, chairman of the land use committee of community board 8. Mr. Moerdler spoke to the dynamism of Riverdale, its continuous changes, and the interplay of housing, landscape, demographics, and economics within the community district. He emphasized that the community board needed the assistance of strong community organizations to shape Riverdale's future and urged the Preservancy to continue to galvanize and lead preservation efforts.

Annual Financial Statement – 2006

**REVENUE (\$)**

Contributions/Membership dues	\$ 17,447
Interest/Other	1,439
<b>TOTAL REVENUE</b>	<b>\$ 18,886</b>

**EXPENSES (\$)**

Accounting Fees	\$ 1,775
Consulting Fees	11,113
Administrative Expenses	2,648
Project Expenses	5,654
<b>TOTAL EXPENSES</b>	<b>\$ 21,190</b>

<b>Surplus/Deficit</b>	<b>- \$ 2,304</b>
<b>Starting Fund Balance</b>	<b>\$ 35,087</b>
<b>Ending Fund Balance</b>	<b>\$ 32,783</b>