



RIVERDALE NATURE PRESERVANCY
2014 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 and our website, to enable local residents to be active and engaged in environmental and planning issues.

Monitor Local Development

Growth and development in Riverdale are guided by our local 197-a land use plan, *River to Reservoir*, our base zoning and Special Natural Area District zoning, and regulations for the Riverdale and Fieldston historic districts.

Historically, the core of the Preservancy's work has been to monitor local development to ensure full compliance with zoning and historic preservation regulations. Since flexibility is built into some regulatory processes, the Preservancy also engages neighbors, organizations and city agencies when necessary to achieve outcomes that accommodate growth while preserving community resources and character.

In 2014, the Preservancy monitored and maintained community voice in several ongoing projects:

Hebrew Home for the Aged in Riverdale

Two years ago, in 2012, the Hebrew Home for the Aged in Riverdale proposed a high-density development for a property it acquired adjacent to its existing facility along the Hudson River. The property is zoned R1-1, NYC's lowest-density residential zoning district. Hebrew Home proposed some 300 residential units, in several multi-story buildings, as part of a proposed Continuing Care Retirement Community (CCRC). The proposed development was vastly out of compliance with the zoning.

By the fall of 2013, after extensive interaction throughout the year, the community and Hebrew Home had developed separate concept plans expressing different visions of the appropriate level of density and massing on Hebrew Home's two sites.

2014 saw a continuation of communication between Hebrew Home architects and planners, the Preservancy, the Riverdale Community Coalition (RCC), Bronx Community Board 8, NYC Department of City Planning and elected officials. In August 2014, the Preservancy and the Riverdale Community Coalition met with the NYC Department of City Planning (DCP), including DCP general counsel. Throughout 2014, an attorney retained by the RCC—with financial support in 2013 from the Preservancy—obtained some 500 pages of communications as a result of Freedom of Information Law (FOIL) requests made in 2014 to city and state agencies. The information contained in these communications is assisting the community in its actions.

Hebrew Home continues to explore options to develop some 300 residential units, in multi-story buildings, as a health care facility. The designation of health care facility must come from New York State.

Salanter Akiba Riverdale Academy

In December 2014, Salanter Akiba Riverdale Academy (SAR) applied to the NYC Planning Commission for authorizations to change the steep slopes, trees and other vegetation on its property in order to enlarge its main school building and extend a playground.

The Preservancy viewed the request as an example of how natural features in the community remain vulnerable to destruction despite the Special Natural Area District zoning regulations designed to protect them. The Preservancy prepared comments to address the specific application and the broader preservation issues at a meeting of the Community Board Land Use Committee in early January.

Bloomfield Development

The Bloomfield Development in the Fieldston Historic District consists of 3 houses originally proposed for construction in 2010. In that and subsequent years, the Preservancy and other community organizations outlined concerns for the environment and about the design to the Community Board and asked the NY State Department of Environmental Conservation to designate an adjacent pond, known as Indian Pond, a freshwater wetland. The request was denied.

In 2014 the NYC Department of City Planning issued a negative declaration under its environmental review and determined that the project meets the requirements of Special Natural Area District (SNAD) zoning regulations.

Going forward, the Preservancy will hold up this proposal as yet another illustration of the weaknesses in the SNAD and the need for reform of these regulations. The Preservancy will also bring its concerns regarding design to the attention of the NYC Landmarks Preservation Commission at the Commission's public hearing.

Initiate and Participate in Long-term Planning and Preservation

Hudson River Valley Greenway

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.

Presentation of Plan to Community - February 26, 2014

The plan was presented to the community at a joint meeting on February 26, 2014 of Bronx Community Board 8 Parks & Recreation and Traffic & Transportation committees. The Riverdale Nature Preservancy was one of four invited presenters on the plan and was represented by Preservancy Chair Sherida Paulsen. The other speakers were Gerry Bogacz of the NYMTC planning team, Frank Anelante, chairman of the Riverdale-Spuyten Duyvil Coalition, and Paul Elston, Chair and President of Friends of the Hudson River Greenway in the Bronx.

It was expected that the community board would pass a resolution on the plan at this meeting, but due to the large number of speakers and the length of the meeting, the vote on the resolution was postponed until the Parks & Recreation Committee's March meeting.

The Preservancy has participated in community planning for a route for the Hudson River Valley Greenway through the Bronx since the first planning effort in the late 1990s. The board has heard from its members at many turns during the first and now this second planning effort.

Some of NYMTC's recommendations are contentious.

The board agreed to support parts of the plan that have been described in some detail, and to withhold support for and endorsement of sections for which the plan did not develop design solutions.

Preservancy statement at February 26 meeting

Our position on the Greenway has been consistent: to encourage a route and design plan that preserves Riverdale Park, retains our unique narrow, winding streets, and acknowledges our varied terrain. We believe that our principles and values have been tested through the community process and planning study, and have remained the measures of any successful Greenway Link, whether interim or final. The only modification of our previously stated positions is our recognition that bicycle riders can be accommodated along Palisade Avenue, and that is achieved by using the most current design standards for the shared-lanes approach. We have not supported an

intrusive bicycle path through the park at any time, and reiterate that we do not support one now.

We would like to reiterate our support for the creation of the Greenway Link, and would like to clearly outline our concerns for its implementation.

- 1. A waterfront route for both pedestrians and bicycles is the pathway that will provide the greatest access to the waterfront, has the greatest potential for links to the north, and responds to the community's desires as expressed throughout the planning process. We understand that this route will require lengthy discussion with Metro North and the MTA, and that long range timing will allow for careful planning and design work that is required to connect a waterfront route to both the Henry Hudson Bridge and the potential path to the north. The timetable will also allow for a design that addresses impacts to the waterfront due to climate change.*
- 2. Connection from the Henry Hudson Bridge to the waterfront pathway must be resolved by a more detailed design study that includes a community planning process. The plan included in the Final Report is not feasible as drafted, we believe, but with further investigation into properties that could provide a connection we are hopeful that a solution can be found. We would urge that funding be secured to commission this work as part of the waterfront path development.*
- 3. An interim route that can provide a pedestrian only pathway along with a separate bicycle route should be included in the plan. The addendum presents a revised segment labeled Palisade Avenue and Riverdale Park Pathway that we could support with revisions:*
 - a. Palisade Avenue to Spaulding Lane should follow the Option A proposal, which includes repair and improvement of the existing pedestrian walkway, and a Class 3, or shared-lane for bicycle and automobile access. This design should include additional traffic calming elements to slow cars traveling along Palisade.*
 - b. Spaulding Lane to West 254th Street should include the existing pedestrian pathway through Riverdale Park and a completely separate bicycle route along Spaulding Lane, Independence Avenue to West 254th Street.*
 - c. These recommendations are consistent with our position paper presented to the Parks Department in 2002 regarding a proposed bicycle path through Riverdale Park, which we opposed.*
 - d. Again, a connection route from the Henry Hudson Bridge to Palisade Avenue needs further study. The recommendations for Kappock Street and West 232nd Street are not complete, and require better base information before proceeding to any implementation.*

- e. *Lastly, we oppose any attempt to introduce a portion of the Greenway Link along Palisade Avenue north of the Riverdale Station to West 261st Street. We believe that the waterfront pathway north from the station should be the primary focus of any planning and implementation.*

- f. *The interim route should be largely within NYC mapped streets, which will put this project largely in the sphere of the NYC Department of Transportation. The agency has been at the forefront of developing plans to slow traffic and increase pedestrian safety, while encouraging increased bicycle ridership. We recommend close communication between the community board and DOT regarding any effort to implement an interim plan, and that any funding for an interim route be constrained by the community's objections to widening of streets, reduction of on-street parking, and our concern for environmentally sensitive design elements and surface treatments.*

The Preservancy would like to thank you again for the opportunity to speak, and we remain committed to participating in community dialogue regarding the Greenway Link.

Subsequent Community Board meetings

The Preservancy was represented by a member of the board at each of the subsequent Community Board meetings:

February 26, 2014 Bronx Community Board 8 Parks & Recreation and Traffic & Transportation committees	As described above, final plan presented by NYMTC. Preservancy one of four invited presenters. Preservancy statement is provided above.
March 26, 2014 Joint meeting of Bronx Community Board 8 Parks & Recreation and Traffic & Transportation Committees	A resolution was passed and sent to the full board for consideration and vote on April 8.
April 8, 2014 Meeting of the full Community Board	Resolution tabled for 60 days.

June 10, 2014 Meeting of the full Community Board	The full Community Board voted to accept a new resolution on the Greenway. The new resolution resulted from a meeting between several Community Board 8 members and the MTA. It rejected alterations to streets and sidewalks and supported engineering studies of a potential route along the riverfront. It also supported, among other things, study of the Henry Hudson Bridge lower level to create an interim bike lane, until a permanent river crossing with easier connections North and South can be devised.
Oct. 22, 2015 Meeting of Bronx Community Board 8 Parks & Recreation Committee	The Committee discussed historic and archaeological artifacts in Riverdale Park. The Chair of the Preservancy referenced pages 35 and 36 of <i>Architectural & Historical Resources of Riverdale, the Bronx</i> , prepared by the Preservancy in 1997-1998, which discuss archaeological sites in the Park.
December 1, 2014 Meeting of Bronx Community Board 8 Special Committee on the Greenway	The Committee discussed a Metro-North objective to fortify the shoreline in the wake of flooding from Super Storm Sandy. Metro-North is planning an engineering study. It would be cost effective to incorporate from the start a greenway path atop any future fortification. The Committee is soliciting community input that can be taken into consideration from the beginning of the planning process, starting with the engineering study. Federal funding related to Super Storm Sandy may be available.

Implementation of the Plan

NYMTC planners required an official response to the plan from the Community Board before they could forward the plan to the NYMTC board for a vote. Implementation will require NYMTC to complete traffic and engineering studies for NYC DOT as part of a future work plan.

Provide Information and Strengthen Communication

Raise awareness of connections between gardening chemicals and health

Riverdale and Fieldston enjoy a park-like setting—a canopy of trees and open, green yards surrounding single-family homes and apartment buildings alike. Yet concern has arisen in the community about the routine use of pesticides and herbicides in home gardens and the routine application in city parkland by the NYC Department of

Parks and Recreation of the herbicide glyphosate, commonly sold as the product Round-up.

Annual Meeting panel discussion

On April 3, 2014, the Preservancy hosted a panel presentation and community discussion about the use of pesticides and herbicides on the landscape, potential harmful impacts on health and the environment, and alternative practices. The panelists included:

- Dr. Maya Shetreat-Klein, integrative pediatric neurologist, who shared fascinating research on the effects of pesticides, herbicides, and cleaning chemicals on developing children and pets, and suggested cleaning tips that save money and health.
- Jack DePietro, organic gardener, who shared insights on the ecosystem in the garden and how to nourish it, as well as ways to communicate with landscaping services about a healthy lawn and plantings.
- Ken Almstead, certified arborist and organic land care professional, who emphasized organic methods of caring for trees and shrubs, from planting to protection and preservation.

NYC Council Member Andrew Cohen attended the meeting. He noted that he is on the Council Parks Committee and has raised the issue of the use of Roundup by the NYC Department of Parks and Recreation.

Community Action

Partnerships with experts

Dr. Shetreat-Klein, one of the panelists at the Preservancy's Annual Meeting on April 3, 2014, and researchers at the Mount Sinai Pediatric Environmental Health Specialty Unit (PEHSU) partnered with the Preservancy to prepare arguments against continued use of lawn chemicals, particularly glyphosate, in city parks and on private properties. The Mt. Sinai PEHSU is serving as the Region II PEHSU Program for New York, New Jersey, Puerto Rico and the US Virgin Islands, which is funded through a cooperative agreement between the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry (CDC/ATSDR).

NYC Council

In October 2014, the Preservancy wrote to NYC Council Member Andrew Cohen urging him to look seriously at legislation enacted in cities around North America that limit or ban use of pesticides and herbicides on public and private properties. Existing laws in Seattle, Chicago and Canada as well as pending measures across multiple areas of California, Oregon and the Midwest were cited as models for study

by NYC. Council Member Cohen informed the Preservancy that he raised the question of use of pesticides and other chemicals in NYC Parks with the chair of the NYC Council Parks Committee.

Bronx Community Board 8

The October letter was copied to the Chairman of Bronx Community Board 8 as well as the Chairs of the Community Board Committees on Parks & Recreation and Environment & Sanitation.

In November 2014, the Preservancy addressed the Bronx Community Board 8 Environment & Sanitation Committee, expressing concern about the impact of pesticide and herbicide use on the environment and human health and urging New York City to eliminate use of these chemicals in city parks and playgrounds and on private lawns.

With the help of experts from the Children's Environmental Health Center at Mt. Sinai Hospital, the Preservancy presented a comprehensive argument that summarized current NYC laws governing the use of pesticides on property owned or leased by the City, the quantity of pesticides applied in public areas by NYC agencies and the increase in use of glyphosate since other pesticides were phased out under Local Law 37. Despite assertion in a May 2014 report by the Division of Environmental Health, Bureau of Environmental Surveillance and Policy New York City Department of Health and Mental Hygiene (a copy of which was provided to the Committee), that glyphosate is safe, the Preservancy cited recent studies and other literature specifically connecting glyphosate as well as other pesticides and herbicides with health risks, including increased risk of certain cancers. Specific efforts to reduce pesticides and herbicides in Westchester County, NY; Takoma Park, Maryland; Boulder, Colorado; and the Canadian Provinces of Ontario and Montreal were cited.

The presentation was well-received by the Committee and attendees, including the Chair of the Community Board Parks & Recreation Committee and a representative of the NYC Department of Sanitation. A representative of the NYC Department of Parks & Recreation was also in attendance.

Community Residents

Going forward, the Preservancy recognizes the need to inform local residents about lawn care practices that do not use toxic chemicals.

A member of the Preservancy board completed free training by Landscape for Life (LFL), a new initiative by the Lady Bird Johnson Wildflower Center and the US Botanic Garden. LFL aims to teach sustainable gardening practices and is based on the principles of the Sustainable Sites Initiative Program. Having received the training, the Preservancy will work to devise a way to reach a core group of individuals and companies interested in implementing these topics in the community.

Riverfest

Riverfest 2014 was held on Sunday, June 15, from 12:00 PM - 6:00 PM. The Preservancy supported Riverfest with a contribution of \$1,000, down from \$3,000 in previous years, and with an email blast to its membership asking for volunteers and

other forms of support. The Preservancy's table focused on pesticide use in the garden and in NYC parks.

Million Trees NYC

Million Trees NYC is an annual, city-sponsored tree give-away to NYC residents, in support of NYC's effort to plant 1 million trees in parks and private spaces. Friends of Van Cortlandt Park host one of the local give-away sites in Community District 8, and in 2014 held their give-away on Saturday, May 10. The Preservancy supported the Friends by creating and distributing a flyer promoting the event, by sending an promotional email blast to its members and by providing three volunteers at the site on the day of the give-away.

The People's Climate March

The People's Climate March took place in Manhattan on Sunday, September 21 2014. The event drew activists concerned with all aspects of climate change, from sustainability to climate justice. The Preservancy distributed to its members materials advertising the march and pre-march activities sponsored by local organizations. The Preservancy registered for the march, and five board members attended.

Attracting new members and contributors, and growing the email list

It remains imperative to attract new members and contributors to the Preservancy. In 2014, the Preservancy implemented changes to its website and email strategy with the goals of providing useful information to a broader population, increasing presence in the community, and attracting members.

Website and Facebook

The Preservancy is a policy and planning organization. Therefore, the Preservancy's website and Facebook page reflect the thoughtful attitude and slow pace of our work. Unlike websites and Facebook pages that present photos and testimonials about weekend community activities and events, the Preservancy's on-line presence is a trove of documents and reports plus summaries of policy decisions and community engagement activities. The pool of readers/users of this material is understandably small.

In an effort to increase visitation to the website, the website was reorganized to make it easier to find documents and the current status of projects in the community. Functional changes to the website in 2014 included prominent display on the homepage of logos and links to local civic and environmental community organizations, addition of a site-wide search function and more prominent donate and opt-in (to email list) buttons, and reorganization of several pages to offer clearer access to documents.

In an effort to keep the RNP Facebook page current, all interested board members were made administrators of the Facebook page. These board members are able to post current happenings.

Ahead in 2015

The Preservancy plans to reach out to local colleges to discuss the possibility that students can create tools for the website; the Preservancy has been interested in creating a set of walking maps through Riverdale, with information on hours, terrain, accessibility, etc. Additionally, the Preservancy is interesting in mapping "green" community sites such as community supported agriculture sites, specimen trees, community composting sites and sites that use organic landscape management. These tools will potentially draw a larger user group to the website.

Email Communication

The Preservancy agreed in 2014 to increase its presence in the community by increasing the frequency of email alerts to approximately one per month. Board members volunteered to write a series of articles on environmental themes. Announcements of meetings and events would continue.

The Preservancy currently follows a strictly opt-in policy of email list growth. In 2014, 31 addresses were added to the list, resulting in a total of 191 names and a net growth rate of 19%. Going forward, the Preservancy will consider acquisition and sharing of email lists with other local environmentally-focused non-profit organizations.

Email alerts

In 2014, nine email alerts were sent. The open and click rates are shown in the table on page 11. In general, an open rate between 20% and 40% is considered average. The Preservancy's open rate is at the high end of average. The email marketing industry does not cite an average click-through rate.

Email alerts sent in 2014 - Description and Statistics				
Date	Topic	#Sent	% Open Rate (count)	% Click-through Rate (count and description)
March 24, 2014	April Annual Meeting invitation	162	40.1 (65)	7.4 % (12 - 6 went to RNP home page, and 6 viewed the flyer)
May 5, 2014	Million Trees NYC - Pick up a FREE tree this Saturday	162	42.6 (69)	12.4 % (20 - 13 registered, 4 went to RNP home page, and 3 viewed tree planting guides)
June 6, 2014	Riverfest - Riverfest 2014 needs you	164	38.4 (63)	5.5 % (9 - 6 went to Riverfest website, 2 went to RNP home page, 1 donated to RNP)
July 18, 2014	Environmental Information - Take Simple Steps for a non-toxic yard	178	39.9 (71)	6.2 % (11 - 4 viewed guide to grass alternatives, 3 went to BeyondPesticides.org, 1 went to compost page of NYC Wasteless, 1 went to Safelawns.org, 1 went to Union of Concerned Scientists gardening page, 1 went to RNP home page)
August 20, 2014	Environmental information - Webinars, a new law, and an invitation	172	40.1 (69)	4.1 % (7 - 2 registered for webinar, 2 went to RNP home page, 2 went to RNP page on gardening in the SNAD, 1 opted in to RNP email list)
September 12, 2014	Announcement - Climate Week	172	41.9 (72)	5.8 % (10 - 6 went to peoplesclimate.org/logistics, 3 went to climateweeknyc.org/events, 1 went to RNP home page)
November 6, 2014	Announcement - Greenway Walk Nov 2014	174	39.1 (68)	13.2 % (23 - 16 went to RNP greenway current planning page, 6 went to RNP home page, 1 opted in to email list)
December 1, 2014	Fundraising - 2014 Dec. fundraising	22	54.6 (12)	13.6 % (3 - 2 went to RNP page on zoning, 1 donated to RNP)
December 4, 2014	Fundraising - 2014 Dec. fundraising	176	35.2 (62)	9.1 % (16 - 7 went to RNP home page, 6 donated to RNP, 1 opted in to email list, 1 went to RNP page on Henry Hudson Parkway, 1 went to RNP page on Hebrew Home)

2014 Financial Statement

REVENUE (\$)

Contributions/Membership dues/grants	\$ 7,530
Interest/Other0	
TOTAL REVENUE	\$ 7,530

EXPENSES (\$)

Accounting Fees	\$ 950
Consulting Fees	9,263
Administrative Expenses	722
Project Expenses	1,000
Printing,postage, shipping	1,422
TOTAL EXPENSES	\$ 13,357

Surplus/Deficit **\$ - 5,827**

Starting Fund Balance **13,726**

Ending Fund Balance **\$ 7,899**

Board of Directors

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