

# Editorial comment

## This is a park: keep out

If you get a chance, stroll or drive over to the Riverdale train station this weekend. Take a peek at the postage-stamp park on the water, designed to be reached from a ramp down from the south-bound platform.

No fewer than three large and ugly signs loudly proclaim the park off-limits; no fewer than three locked gates enforce their injunction. But when you look at the park, you'll wonder: "What in the world is all the fuss about?"

The park is a tiny plot of land, enclosed in a handsome picket fence, with a bench where the shoreline bulges out a bit. Some landscaping remains to be done, but a few tough shrubs that have resisted the salt breeze and the drifts of railroad pesticide provide a bit of shade. It's a tranquil spot, one that should bring pleasure to people who, like Melville's Ishmael, find in the river "the image of the ungraspable phantom of life."

That this parklet should have set hundreds of Riverdalians quarreling, however; that it should have conjured images of hundreds or thousands of New Yorkers converging on West 254th Street to bask in it; that nearby homeowners should have believed that because of it they would be beset with noisy all-night revelers or would become more vulnerable to theft, now that it is an actual presence seems simply laughable.

That the park remains a source of contention, not between residents, but between state and city agencies, is ludicrous, as well. The state Department of Environmental Conservation, which built the park, Metro-North, its landlord, and the city Parks Department, which is to maintain it, cannot agree on who will be responsible if someone slips and falls. So, the minuscule park, the first few square yards of public access to the Hudson's shore in the Bronx, remains locked away.

Just as Riverdalians were at odds about this little riverside park, they have been at odds over the vision of a big one, running from the Riverdale station south to the Spuy-

ten Duyvil station, and, ultimately, connecting to the Hudson River Greenway in Manhattan and, perhaps, extending the entire length of Riverdale to the city line.

That's why finding a way to open the little park really matters. Its fate foreshadows the future.

Will our children be able to find in the river a living classroom? Will the Hudson be allowed to offer New Yorkers the sense of its power and beauty that only proximity affords, so that New Yorkers in turn will value the river enough to protect it? Or

will the Hudson continue to be a remote presence, observed without much feeling from the Riverdale ridge or the apartment windows of a few? Will the river's bounty of beauty and ease become a treasure for Riverdalians and for all New Yorkers, or will it continue to be locked away?

Today, Thursday, June 23, Community Board 8's parks committee, which has called on the Parks Department to live up to the commitments it made to assume responsibility for the park, is scheduled

to take up the issue again. Later this month, Bronx Borough President Adolfo Carrion Jr. is to meet with Parks Commissioner Adrian Benepe in an effort to resolve the liability issue and unlock the park gate.

Greenways and rail-trails now crisscross the nation in a growing network. Rail-trails alone traverse more than 13,000 miles, with another 14,000 miles soon to be added. The Hudson River Greenway covers 540 miles and growing. Under the same state program that built the park in Riverdale, eight other sites from Yonkers to Beacon are being developed. The issues of safety and liability have been faced and resolved countless times.

Can it truly be the case that the collective wisdom of our city and state cannot find a way out of this dilemma? Surely the participants can resolve this impasse if they can summon their energy away from defending their turf, and use it instead to lift their heads and see the future.

