

Mayor unlocks gates to riverfront access

By Alisa Opar

As Mayor Michael Bloomberg celebrated the opening of the gates that had barred access to a park on the banks of the Hudson River at the Riverdale train station, several local officials called the tiny park the first step to more extensive riverside recreation.

Mr. Bloomberg returned to Riverdale on Aug. 4 to keep the promise he made here in June when he said he would cut the bureaucratic tangle that had kept the public locked out of the park, which was built by the state Department of Conservation on land controlled by Metro-North, but will be maintained by the city Parks Department.

"Thanks to an agreement between Parks and Metro-North, this community will have one more vantage point from which to experience the beauty of the Hudson River," Mr. Bloomberg said, referring to the park as "a place to come and reflect."

Tony Cassino, the chairman of Community Board 8 and Ari Hoffnung, the chair of the board's parks committee, said they foresaw a day when a waterfront park would run from the Riverdale to the Spuyten Duyvil station.

The park's opening is the "beginning of a trend," Mr. Cassino said.

"Our waterfront is an underutilized resource," said Mr. Hoffnung, who is seeking the Democratic nomination to become Riverdale's representative in the City Council. At the ceremony he renewed his call for increased access to the shore, and a day later issued a plan for "cleaner and greener parks" and took a swipe at his opponent, Councilman Oliver Koppell, saying, "We need elected officials who believe that our waterfront belongs to everyone, and who will make a commitment to this community and grant everyone the access we deserve. Oliver Koppell has failed in that regard."

Mr. Koppell, who did not attend the ceremony, said he would be back in the community. (Continued on page A2)



Photo by Siobhan Egan

MAYOR MICHAEL BLOOMBERG flanked by Board 8 parks committee chairman Ari Hoffnung, Assemblyman Jeffrey Dinowitz and Congressman Eliot Engel at the opening of the park at the Riverdale Train Station.

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emony, said in a telephone interview on Monday that building an unsupervised riverfront park running between the stations would be "irresponsible." Mr. Koppell said he is not opposed to increasing access to the waterfront, but that "it requires a great deal of study and thought."

At last Thursday's ceremony, Rep. Eliot Engel said he was "ecstatic" about the opening of the park. "This is lifting the fences and saying to the community 'Come and enjoy

your community,'" he said.

Assemblyman Jeffrey Dinowitz was also on hand to share in the celebration. "This is something we've dreamed of for several years and now it's a reality," he said.

While the sweeping view from the small park, which includes a bench and a fishing platform, is striking, residents have long been able to glimpse the Hudson River and Palisades from Wave Hill or Riverdale Park. What's been lacking is public access to the waterfront. "This is the first direct

access in the Bronx to the Hudson River for the general community," Mayor Bloomberg noted.

On Tuesday, the first visitors walked along the paths, admiring the plantings, taking note of the signs and sighing with relief whenever a gust of cool air blew off the water, offering temporary relief from the sweltering heat.

The narrow park, which is 20 feet wide by 600 feet long, is reached by a ramp from the train station's southbound platform. It is one of nine access sites being

developed over Metro-North tracks in New York City, Westchester, Putnam and Dutchess counties, on orders of Gov. George Pataki.

The state Department of Environmental Conservation completed the \$375,000 park in February, but a dispute over which agency—Metro-North or the Parks Department—would accept responsibility for its maintenance kept the gates locked.

Last month, the agencies announced that they had reached an agreement, but said before the

park could open some final touch-ups were needed. According to the agreement signed by the city, Metro-North and the state Department of Environmental Conservation, the Parks Department will maintain the park, which will be open daily from 8 a.m. to dusk.

Other officials at the ceremony included Barbara Fratianni, the special assistant to the DEC's Hudson River Estuary Program, who oversaw the construction of the park, and Community Board 8 district manager Grace Belkin.