

Riverdale Nature Preservancy
P.O. Box 239
Bronx, NY 10471

Annual Report
2001

The year 2001 was a very active one for the Preservancy. We assisted Bronx Community Board 8 in responding to issues raised by the NYC Department of City Planning during threshold review of the Board's 197-a Plan, participated in review of concept plans for a proposed park at the Riverdale Metro-North railroad station, initiated actions to preserve the Chapel Farm property in its natural state, and advocated for community interests with respect to expansions at three neighborhood community facilities: the Horace Mann School, the Hebrew Home for the Aged, and Riverdale Country School.

Much of the work in these efforts was undertaken by members of the Board of Directors through the Board's newly-created task forces. Task forces address the various issues of concern to the Preservancy, with guidance and approval of the full Board. New task forces are created as issues arise and existing ones may alter their focus or scope, as circumstances dictate.

Below is a list of standing task forces with a short description of their range of activities. They reflect on-going, site-specific issues and broad planning initiatives. Only a limited number of task forces are expected to be active at any one time.

Task Forces

- Communications* - develop a newsletter and web page; update the Preservancy brochure; establish relationships with local newspapers; assist other task forces with creation of written materials
- Zoning changes* - study zoning text changes proposed by the NYC Department of City Planning and prepare Preservancy comments; work on rezoning in the Special Natural Area District (SNAD)
- Putnam Line* - generate community support for and work with city officials on a plan to create a nature and bicycle trail from the Harlem River to Westchester County, along the old Putnam freight line
- Hudson River Research Project* - monitor this NY State research project; comment at public hearings; bring granting opportunities to the attention of the Board

197-a Plan - Prepare the Preservancy's comments on draft Plans; gather and present materials for the Community Board in support of recommendations pertaining to the SNAD

Landmark Districts - host a tour of existing and potential new landmark districts in Riverdale for the Chairman of the Landmarks Preservancy Commission; educate local residents on the potential for and benefits of landmarking

Hudson River Park/Greenway - Liaison with city and state greenway planners; participate in design meetings; put forth community visions of the greenway; monitor before and after usage of greenway areas

Croton Reservoir Filtration Plant - Monitor the City's actions in site selection and Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) scoping; prepare Preservancy comments; participate in coalition activities to strengthen watershed protection and have federal water filtration requirements waived

Scenic View District - develop application for a Special Scenic View Zoning District that will protect views of the Hudson and Harlem Rivers

Chapel Farm - monitor development applications; educate city officials about the site's importance as open space; explore options to maintain the property in its natural state

Outreach - reach out to environmental groups throughout the Bronx and the city to provide support; lobby elected officials for projects

Task Forces have also been established to monitor development activities at several individual sites: the Kennedy House, Horace Mann School, the Hebrew Home, and the College of Mount Saint Vincent

In addition, four committees were created to address vital administrative functions:

Fundraising and Membership Committee - develop materials and strategies for membership drives and the annual fundraising appeal.

Nominating Committee - solicit nominations for new directors and officers and recommend nominees to the full Board of Directors for election

Annual Meeting Committee - plan and hold the annual membership meeting

Finance Committee - track Preservancy finances

197-a Plan

The NYC Department of City Planning (DCP) began its threshold review of Community Board 8's 197-a Plan in the summer of 2000. During threshold review, DCP assesses a Plan's conformance with standards for form and content and consistency with sound planning policy, as set forth in the City Planning Commission's "Rules for the Processing of Plans Pursuant to Charter Section 197-a", Article 4.

As a result of the review, DCP requested a variety of additional information from the Community Board, including clarifications and background material related to recommendations for the SNAD. To reduce the cost of responding to the DCP's request,

the Community Board asked the Preservancy if it could supply any of the requested information.

The Preservancy prepared photographs, key maps, photo descriptions, and narratives for four topics:

Proposed special scenic view zoning district along the western and southern areas of Riverdale and Spuyten Duyvil. Our presentation illustrated the views that would be protected, including views of the Hudson River from Riverdale Park and West 254th Street, of the Harlem River from Spuyten Duyvil Shorefront Park and the surrounding public streets, and the dramatic view of the confluence of the Hudson and Harlem Rivers from Half Moon Overlook and identified privately-owned properties that could generate development that would block these views.

Expansion of the Special Natural Area District. The Plan recommends that five areas adjacent to or near the existing SNAD be included in the SNAD. Our presentation described the characteristics of the natural features in these areas and discussed the benefits these features provide to the community and the region.

Strengthening the SNAD regulations to increase protection of natural features. The need to strengthen the SNAD regulations was demonstrated through description of a number of projects that would have removed important natural features, diminished neighborhood character, or overloaded the existing infrastructure had local residents not initiated compromise solutions. Several ongoing conditions that continue to threaten the long-term stability of the natural and built environments were also described.

Increased protections for steep slopes in the SNAD. The Preservancy submitted topographic maps of sufficient scale to allow calculation of the slopes in the areas proposed for increased protection, and photographs of the slopes under consideration.

River Access

The Preservancy joined other community groups in meeting with Community Board 8, city officials, Metro-North, and the NYS Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC) to consider concept plans for an access point to the Hudson River at the existing Riverdale Metro-North railroad station. The plans are part of an ongoing effort to create river access in New York City, as part of the Hudson River Valley Greenway.

Creation of the access point will be a cooperative venture of multiple public agencies and community groups. The DEC is the agency responsible for design, and has revised its concept plans to respond to community comments. The access point is envisioned as a small park dedicated to passive enjoyment of the river and views.

The Preservancy formally supported the revised concept plans at a public hearing sponsored by the Community Board Parks Committee, but restated its concerns that adequate maintenance, security, and safety measures be developed and fully-funded.

The Preservancy Board of Directors has discussed potential conflicts between the design elements that will be necessary for safety and security, particularly fencing that separates park users from the tracks and controls access, and the community's vision of a "natural" shoreline park. The Preservancy subsequently reached agreement on the following points:

- There is an important role for the Preservancy to play in monitoring present activity.
- A "score card" should be developed to distinguish the anecdotal from reality
- The community needs to be consulted on signage, patrols, and gates
- Maintenance and security need to be coordinated among myriad agencies. A state level coordinating office might be a good option.
- It is worth trying to have the non-electrified rail north of the station removed, at least part of the way, to make a wider corridor for park use.

Individual Development Projects

The Preservancy monitored developments at a number of sites in the Special Natural Area District and advocated for changes where necessary to maintain the character of the community and protect natural features.

Hebrew Home for the Aged. The Hebrew Home for the Aged planned to construct a new building with underground parking. The Preservancy supported the project, as it complied with the Hebrew Home's master plan.

Riverdale Country School. The school proposed to move a landmarked building to extend a football field. The Preservancy raised issues of traffic and blasting at the site and monitored the school's responsiveness to other community concerns. The Preservancy ultimately supported the school's application for a special permit to allow blasting.

Horace Mann School. The school proposed to demolish a building on the corner of Tibbett Avenue and W 246th Street and replace it with a much bulkier building that would extend to the lot line on both streets and be higher than the existing building. Unlike the Hebrew Home for the Aged and Riverdale Country School, Horace Mann School did not consult with the community before announcing its final plans. Horace Mann also refused to adapt its plans to community objections. The community was concerned about a grave negative impact on neighborhood character and continual unresponsiveness by the school to community complaints regarding traffic generated by the school. The Preservancy joined other neighborhood groups in opposing the school's application for a special permit, which was ultimately granted.

Chapel Farm. The developer of the Chapel Farm property proposed to build four single-family detached homes on the property, just part of the thirteen homes ultimately proposed for the site. The Community Board and Borough President both disapproved the developer's ULURP applications, with the Borough President stating his belief that

the property should be maintained as open space, and the City Planning Commission approved them on the condition that the NYC Dept. of Environmental Planning approve the developer's sewage plan.

At the City Planning Commission public hearing, the Preservancy presented its position that the site was one of the last, if not the last, unspoiled mature oak forests in the Bronx and all of New York City and should be preserved in its natural state. After the hearing, the Preservancy committed itself to move ahead as rapidly as possible to preserve Chapel Farm in its natural, unspoiled state. To that end, the Preservancy, the Riverdale Community Association, and the New York City Parks Council together sponsored a study identifying the important natural and historical features of the site and recommending actions for its preservation and maintenance. The report is expected to be completed in early 2002.

At a City Council Land Use subcommittee public hearing on this project, the Preservancy stated its position on three fronts: that the unique features of the site merit its preservation, that the application should require an EIS, and that stormwater runoff from the newly-developed site will be a significant threat to residents downhill. The Preservancy also informed the Council of the ongoing site study and of community interest in acquiring the property.

Annual Meeting

The Preservancy's annual members' meeting was held at Wave Hill on September 13, 2001. The meeting opened with a solemn statement honoring those who lost their lives and their loved ones on September 11.

After brief addresses by the chairman and president, presentations were made by representatives of the Preservancy's four most active task forces: Chapel Farm, Putnam Trail, Hudson River Access, and the 197-a Plan.

The Chairman summarized the future direction of the Preservancy. He noted that the Preservancy would strive to increase communication with its members through a newsletter, web site, and speaker series. He invited community members to volunteer to work on the Preservancy's task forces. Finally, he noted that the Preservancy would broaden its involvement in Bronx environmental issues by reaching out to fellow Bronx environmental groups.

Annual Financial Statement - 2001

REVENUE (\$)

Contributions/Membership dues/ Foundations	22,250
<u>Interest/Other</u>	<u>1,747</u>

TOTAL REVENUE **23,997**

EXPENSES (\$)

Accounting/Legal Fees	3,338
Other Professional Fees	8,058
Consulting Fees	4,000
Administrative Expenses	4,497
<u>Project Expenses</u>	<u>11,265</u>

TOTAL EXPENSES **31,158**

Surplus/Deficit	\$ -7,161
Starting Fund Balance	\$ 78,453
Ending Fund Balance	\$ 71,292