



# RIVERDALE NATURE PRESERVANCY

## *1995 Annual Report*

### *Directors and Officers*

GILBERT KERLIN  
*Chairman Emeritus*

PAUL J. ELSTON  
*Chairman*

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*President*

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*Vice President*

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HARVEY J. GOLDSCHMID

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KESSLER KATRIN

PHOCAS ROBERT

REICH ERIC A.

SEIFF

- MANON SLOME HERBERT

July 3, 1996

The qualities of Riverdale inure to the benefit of all of its residents, and also are a great benefit to the whole City. Since 1974 the natural features of the Riverdale Community have benefited from the protection provided by our designation as a Special Natural Area District. The Riverdale Nature Preservancy is dedicated to the preservation of those natural features, the residential character of our community, and our cultural heritage through the full enforcement to the Special Natural Area District regulations, support of historic preservation, and effective land use planning. The Board sees the potential for over-development as the primary threat to these values. During 1995 the Riverdale Nature Preservancy has strengthened its organization and its agenda.

The Preservancy has embarked on three major long term efforts to define and protect the special cultural, man-made and natural features of our community which are essential elements of our preservation strategy. At the same time we continue to act on an increasing number of site specific development issues which have immediate consequences for our community.

### **Long Term Focus**

To reduce the potential for site specific development conflicts, we have invested in the following three efforts to better define the features of our community which we seek to preserve and to strengthen the regulatory requirements and tools which protect those features. We currently have these efforts underway:

1. A **Planning Study** which has evaluated the potential for future development in the Special Natural Area District and the effectiveness of the existing regulations, and evaluated the potential for the creation of a Scenic District. The study found that:
  - Existing regulations would permit development within the District to triple, with 87% of those rights for new development being held by community facilities;
  - Because of preferential treatment in the zoning resolution; substantial incentives exist to encourage the conversion of sites from residential use to community facility use;

- Most trees are not protected because of loopholes in the regulations;
- Enforcement of the regulations is lax;

To address these problems, the Preservancy has proposed amendments to the Special Natural Area District regulations. The proposed changes will:

- Downzone the Special Natural Area District and remove the preferential development rights currently provided to community facilities. The proposed downzoning would leave room for 50% expansion.
- Create a Scenic District which would help protect the waterfront and existing public views of the Hudson and Palisades.
- Add more protection for trees and require special review procedures for large construction projects.
- Require off-street parking for new development.
- Set standards for perimeter fences and require perimeter maintenance.
- Strengthen enforcement of the regulations.

These proposals were submitted to the Community Board for consideration but it has not acted on them. We recently renewed our request for consideration and hope this will take place in the immediate future.

2. **A Cultural Resource Assessment** of the Special Natural Area District which will research and define the archeological and historical significance of the area, and the special architectural resources within the District including the existing Historical District, the twelve sites which have already been designated as Landmarks by the Landmark Preservation Commission, and approximately eighty additional sites which are significant and worthy of further study and consideration for landmarking. The preliminary survey has also identified the layout of the road system and the rock walls along the roads as worthy of consideration for landmarking. Based on the preliminary survey the Board approved funding for additional research with the expectation that it will lead to the publication of the survey, a proposal for a new Historical District, and proposals for the landmarking of additional sites. We expect this phase of work to be completed in 1997 and we are seeking foundation funding to help pay for publication.

3. **A Inventory of Natural Features** that will document the key natural features within the Special Natural Area District which are worthy of preservation. We anticipate locating on a map of the Natural Area District, the most important trees and rock

outcroppings which deserve special attention. We will examine the possibility of defining other features, such as steep slopes, for protection by the regulations. The Board has approved the concept of the study effort as an important compliment to our Cultural Resource Assessment and we are in the initial stages of defining the study effort and the resource requirements. We expect to enlist the support of an academic institution to assist us in the effort.

### **Project Specific Focus**

In addition to our long-term *efforts*, we have engaged in efforts concerning proposed developments which will immediately affect the Special Natural Area District or our nearby neighbors:

- **Russian Federation** -- The Federation has proposed to tear down their existing building and build a new 300,000 square foot residential complex. The new complex will be 50% larger than the existing building. Although the site is outside the Special Natural Area District, it is immediately adjacent to the Vinmount Housing. We have proposed that the Special Natural Area District be expanded to include the Vinmount Housing and other areas. The Russian Federation Proposal relies on its designation as a "community facility" to be able to build the larger building. This is a provision of law which our Board views as a major threat to the preservation of the Special Natural Area District. Therefore, the Board approved an expenditure of funds on a lawyer and an architect to examine the proposal and assist the Riverdale Community Association and Community Board No. 8 in evaluating the proposal.
- **Campagna Estate** -- This situation has been very quiet during 1995. The Preservancy has challenged in court the decision by the Landmarks Preservation Commission to approve a design which does not consider its impact on the Natural Features or the local community. Our court challenge is on hold pending further action by the Landmarks Preservation Commission. Once the Commission acts we expect the lawsuit to proceed.
- **Chapel Farm Proposal** -- A proposal to develop housing at the Chapel Farm site, in the north end of Fieldston, has been pending for over a decade. Recently, this project has shown new life with a new set of developers involved. The Board has agreed to treat this project as a priority and we are cooperating with the Fieldston Property Association in a joint review of the current proposals which would subdivide the property and create fourteen separate residences. The proposed construction involves the destruction of approximately 700 trees and substantial rock outcroppings, and the construction of a very steep road from the north side. We expect this project to be an active consideration during 1996.
- **Frances Schervier Home Proposal** -- The Frances Schervier Home has proposed to build approximately 80,000 additional square feet of nursing

home space. The proposal would not increase the number of nursing beds but simply improve the quality of the space for the existing number of residents. While half of the property is in the Special Natural Area District and half is outside, the proposed construction would be done entirely outside the Special Natural Area District. The site has been defined as a "sensitive" area from the point of view of the archeological resources. It is defined as significant in terms of its prehistoric value as well as its historic value. It was a site of the Spuyten Duyvil Fort One during the American Revolution war. The proposal is currently before the Landmarks Preservation Commission which will define a procedure for protecting the archeological resources during construction. The Board agreed that the Riverdale Nature Preservancy should be generally supportive of the project but should work to insure that the archeological resources are protected.

- **Blackstone Development** -- The site of ten newly constructed houses at 252nd Street and Independence Avenue, all of which are subject to the Special Natural Area District regulations that prohibit the destruction of specific trees and set limits on the change of grade. A recent inspection of one property by an architect representing the Preservancy showed that protected trees had been improperly removed, illegal fences built, and the grade changed without authorization. After our intervention, the Buildings Department stopped the work. The homeowner is now applying for approvals to legitimize his prior activity and to authorize the removal of additional trees and substantial change in the grade of this property. We are working with the Buildings Department, the City Planning Commission, the Community Board and the neighbors to alleviate the problems caused by these changes.
- **Croton Filtration Plant** -- Although this project is outside of the Special Natural Area District, the Board designated it as a project for the Preservancy early in 1995 because of the threat it could have become to Van Cortlandt Park and its potential effect on our neighbors in Kingsbridge Heights and because it is an important issue before our Community Board No. 8. We are evaluating the possibility of joining in a suit against the Westchester municipalities which are polluting the Croton water and creating the need for the filtration plant. This project has not required the expenditure of funds by the Preservancy and we do not expect to expend funds in the future.

### **Financial Report**

During 1995, the financial position of the Riverdale Nature Preservancy improved substantially. As you can see from the enclosed financial reports we ended the year with a positive balance of \$37,979. This is a substantial improvement over 1994 when we ended the year with a negative balance of \$40,414. We have already spent more than half of this amount (including \$13,156 on the Russian Federation Project). We now need to replenish our treasury. During 1995 we raised \$92,223 and we need to raise approximately the same this year.

Riverdale Nature Preservancy Financial Report (\$)

<b>REVENUE</b>	1994 Actual	1995 Actual
<b>Contributions</b>	99,031	92,223
<b>Foundations</b>	-	10,000
<b>Interest</b>	264	740
<b>Other</b>	=	=
<b>Total Revenues</b>	<u>99,295</u>	<u>102,962</u>
<b>EXPENSES</b>		
<b>1. Land Use Planning</b>	9,658	708
<b>2. Cultural Resource Assessment &gt;</b>	-	-
<b>3. Natural Resource Survey</b>	-	-
<b>4. Campagna Estate</b>	33,677	869
<b>5. Landmark Preservation Suit</b>	23,649	12,391
<b>6. Russian Federation</b>	-	-
<b>7. Blackstone Development</b>	-	2,409
<b>S. Croton Filtration Plant</b>	365	688
<b>9. Hebrew Home</b>	104	-
<b>10. Other Projects *</b>	-	443
<b>11. Chapel Farms</b>	-	331
<b>12. Frances Schervier</b>	-	-
<b>13. Kennedy House</b>	919	953
<b>14. Administrative Expenses</b>	<u>12,359</u>	<u>5,780</u>
<b>Total Expenses</b>	80,731	24,570
<b>Surplus / Deficit</b>	18,570	78,393
<b>Starting Fund Balance **</b>	(58,984)	(40,414)
<b>Ending Fund Balance **</b>	(40,414)	37,979

\* Hebrew Home for the Aged (Johnson Avenue), Jewish Federation, and other Small Projects

\*\* Cash on-hand less bills for services rendered during the period

Below is the breakout of individual contributions during 1994 and 1995, and our goals for 1996.

## Riverdale Nature Preservancy Contributions

AMOUNT CONTRIBUTED	NUMBER OF HOUSEHOLDS		
	1994 Actual	1995 Actual	1996 Budget
\$ 5,000 or More	9	8	10
\$ 1,000 - \$ 4,999	24	14	20
\$ 500-\$ 999	9	7	20
\$ 250-\$ 499	21	13	30
\$ 100-\$ 249	49	27	30
Less than \$ 100	<u>44</u>	<u>28</u>	<u>90</u>
Total Contributions	156	97	200

In order to achieve these goals we must expand our membership and receive continued generous support from our existing members.