



RIVERDALE NATURE PRESERVANCY

Report for 1998 and 1999

Directors and Officers

GILBERT KERLIN
PAUL J. ELSTON
Honorary Chairmen

DONALD J.
COHN *Chairman*

BARRY WILLNER
President

BARBARA R. MICHAELS
Vice President

LORANCE J. HOCKERT
Treasurer

MARCIA ALLINA
Secretary

EDWARD A. AMES
RICHARD W. BALDWIN
TED CONOVER PETER
J. DAVIES
E. ALLEN DENNISON
JAMES H. FOGEL SARA
FOLLETT ROSEMARY R.
GINTY HARVEY J.
GOLDSCHMID
PETERJOSEPH
JEFFREY L.
KESSLER ROBERT
REICH ERIC A.
SEIFF
IAN SLOME

MARY BANDZIUKAS, AICP
Program Director

The past year saw the culmination of important programs of the Preservancy. We collected an enormous amount of data about the current state of our community, analyzed it, and made concrete proposals for the future. Now comes the more difficult task of bringing these plans and proposals to fruition.

We also continued to monitor development at individual sites in the Special Natural Area District (SHAD).

Our purpose is to:

Maintain our community's residential character—a living environment that is unique and of inestimable value to the City of New York;

Ensure that any future development can be accommodated by the existing infrastructure or roads, sewers, etc.

Collection of Data

The Preservancy has been studying local land use in our community for a number of years. In December 1993, the Preservancy issued the *Planning Study for the Riverdale Community's Special Natural Area District in Community Board 8*, which examines the effect that current zoning regulations could have on the future development of our community.

In 1996 and 1997, the Preservancy retained counsel to recommend changes to the zoning regulations which would strengthen the review process for projects in the SHAD.

In 1998, the Preservancy published *The Architectural and Historical Resources of Riverdale, The Bronx, New York: A Preliminary Survey*. Also in 1998, the Preservancy engaged in a major effort to expand and update the 1993 *Planning Study*.

Armed with these data, the Preservancy was able to make proposals and take positions, supported by solid facts, on issues confronting our community.

I. Community Board 8's Land Use (197-a) Plan

Section 197-a of the City Charter provides that community boards, among others, may sponsor land use plans (referred to as 197-a Plans) to guide the development, growth, and improvement of their communities. 197-a Plans, once adopted, represent the consensus of a community and the affected city agencies on a vision for the future of the community and how that vision can be realized. 197-a Plans themselves do not have the force of law. Separate procedures must be followed to implement any changes recommended in the plans. For example, recommended changes to an area's zoning require that the city's zoning law be changed, following a procedure set out in other city laws. The benefit of a 197-a Plan is to pave the way for these procedures.

By letter dated May 25, 1999, the Preservancy made several recommendations to Community Board 8 with respect to its proposed 197-a Plan. These are discussed in the following sections.

Zoning Changes

Our analysis of the RI -2 area of the SNAD disclosed that the area has been developed to a much lower density than legally permitted. If future development of residences and community facilities were built to the presently allowable limits, the appearance and character of Riverdale would be drastically changed, if not destroyed.

Consequently, the Preservancy studied four alternative rezoning scenarios for their ability to protect our community's character and four the realistic likelihood of their being adopted by the city. We ultimately recommended reducing the permitted floor area ratio and increasing the open space ratio in the R1-2 area of the SNAD. These recommended changes would allow for greater development than presently exists, but would better maintain existing conditions and prevent

the building of very large residences such as the Kennedy House and very large community facilities.

The Preservancy also restated its recommendation to strengthen the review process for projects in the SNAD, as developed in 1996 and 1997.

In the upcoming year we expect to begin to prepare a rezoning application to the NYC Department of City Planning (DCP). We also will be working with the DCP to formally submit changes to the zoning language regarding the process for reviewing projects in the SNAD.

Historic Landmark Districts

The Preservancy recommended three new Historic Districts: Hillside, an area across Independence Avenue from Wave Hill, and the old Dodge Estate. These areas are described in the 1998 Survey mentioned above.

Experience with the existing historic district along Sycamore Avenue has been favorable. Families who have purchased and/or improved homes in the district have found the Landmark Preservation Commission reasonable and dedicated to preserving the beauty of the area. The character and charm of the area has been preserved and property values, if affected at all, have appreciated.

The Preservancy will meet with families in the proposed districts. If there is substantial support, we will take the necessary steps to create these districts.

Scenic View Districts

The Preservancy recommended the creation of a Special Scenic View District (SSVD) along the Hudson River waterfront, with the establishment of view reference lines in Riverdale Park and at Wave Hill. The views of the Hudson and the Palisades from these vantage points on city-owned land are spectacular and unique.

In the upcoming year we will conduct the site analysis necessary for an application to the DCP for this mapping action.

We also believe the views from public land in Spuyten Duyvil justify mapping an additional SSVD there. If there is local support, we would assist in the creation of such a district.

II. Hudson River Valley Greenway

The Hudson River Valley Greenway is a state program to preserve and develop the natural, scenic, cultural, and recreational resources of the Hudson River Valley. One part of this program is to create a Greenway trail to connect Battery Park in New York City with Waterford, north of Albany.

In New York City, the Department of Parks and Recreation (DPR) is the agency responsible for planning and developing a trail plan and specific trail projects.

The Preservancy Board of Directors examined the issues raised by the trail project and, in brief, supports:

- Resolving existing problems with illegal usage of the waterfront;
- Cleaning up the waterfront;
- Exploring mapping the waterfront as parkland;

- Restoring and enhancing the wetland on the Spuyten Duyvil triangle;
- Creating an access point to the river at the Riverdale Metro-North station;
- Monitoring use of the access point for use in further planning;
- Creating a nature and bike trail along the Putnam line to connect with trails in Westchester and the rest of NYC.

In 1997 and 1998 the Preservancy also donated a great deal of staff time to the Committee to assist it in carrying out its public meetings and in preparing its written report. This staff time counted as part of the Committee's dollar-for-dollar match for a planning grant from the state Greenway office.

The Preservancy will continue to work closely with DPR and our elected officials as they create the trail.

A Phased Approach

DPR has proposed a series of phases for creation of the Greenway trail. In the Riverdale area, the first phase would see creation of a bicycle trail along Palisade Avenue and through Riverdale Park. DPR's interest in this route is due, in part, to the relatively low cost of construction and the trail's relationship with the waterfront. Wave Hill, the Preservancy, and local residents have voiced very

strong objections to this proposal, and are working to have an alternative route accepted by the DPR.

III. Campagna Estate/Yeshiva of the Telshe Alumni

After several hearings before the Land Use Committee of Community Board 8, and negotiations in which our President, Barry Willner, played a major role, the Yeshiva agreed to abandon its plans for a new west wing on its building across from Wave Hill and instead enlarge the eastern wing of the building. This change was approved by the Land Use Committee and is now being submitted to the Landmark Preservation Commission for approval and is proceeding through the ULURP process.

IV. Croton Water System Filtration Plant

The Preservancy took a strong position against the construction of the proposed filtration plant in Van Cortlandt Park at a Community Board hearing. Unfortunately, the City Council has approved the project. We will continue to oppose this invasion of the park in cooperation with the Friends of Van Cortlandt Park.

V. Other Individual Development Projects

The Preservancy will continue to monitor developments at the Kennedy House, the Delafield Estate, the Russian Mission, and any newly-proposed developments.

Financial Report

The Preservancy ended 1998 with over \$63,000 in the bank, after spending over \$120,000. The major effort was the development of our recommendations on the 197-a Plan. The 1999 budget reflects reduced administrative and payroll costs. We have closed the office and our program director will be based at home and will work part-time. See Attachment A for the 1997 - 1999 budgets.

Conclusion

There is a lot to do. With your support, we can ensure that our community continues to be a wonderful place in which to live. We look forward to working with you and other community groups such as the Friends of Spuyten Duyvil, the Friends of Van Cortlandt Park, and the Riverdale Community Association, to accomplish this goal. If you would like more information about any of the issues in this report, or wish to give us your views, please write.

The Preservancy expresses its deep appreciation and gratitude to Paul Elston who resigned as Chairman and is now an Honorary Chairman. Paul left us a sound financial and programmatic base on which to enter the new millennium.

Attachment A

Riverdale Nature Preservancy

	Annual Budgets 1997 -1999		
Expenses	1997 Actual	1998 Actual	1999 Proposed
Legal Fees	27,952.00	30,018.81	10,000
Other Professional Fees	29,401.00	17,691.16	25,000
Research	2,333.00	655.54	10,000
Administrative Expenses	28,583.00	30,505.09	20,000
Payroll	25,487.00	41,447.76	35,000.00
Total Expenses	113,756.00	120,318.36	100,000.00
Contributions			
Individuals	47,406.00	35,830.00	40,000.00
Foundations	52,500.00	54,500.00	55,000.00
Grants	0.00	24,130.17	5,000.00
Interest/Other	1,179.86	2,078.89	2,000.00
Total Contributions	101,085.86	116,539.06	102,000.00
Starting fund Balance	79,653.00	66,982.00	63,202.70
Ending fund Balance	66,982.00	63,202.70	65,202.70