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## MEETING MINUTES

To: Howie Mann, NYMTC

From: Janice Yuvan, RBA

Date: 6:00 pm – 8:00 pm, Monday, December 1, 2008

Subject: Hudson River Valley Greenway Link  
Technical Advisory Committee Meeting (TAC) # 1

Location: Van Cortlandt House Museum, Bronx, NY

Attendees: Bob Bender, Bronx Community Board 8  
Peter Ciaccia, New York Road Runners  
Mark Castiglione, NYS Hudson River Valley Greenway  
Beth Compochiaro, NYS Hudson River Valley Greenway  
Paul J. Elston, Friends of the Hudson River Greenway in the Bronx  
Laura Gourdine, Friends of the Hudson River Greenway in the Bronx  
Mathew McDevitt, College of Mount Saint Vincent  
Michael Oliva, East Coast Greenway  
AJ Pietrantone, Friends of Hudson River Park  
Laura Stockstill, Bronx Borough President's Office  
Courtney White, Wave Hill  
Gerry Bogacz, NYMTC  
Howie Mann, NYMTC  
Lee Ellman, City of Yonkers (Steering Committee)  
Lukas Herbert, Westchester County Planning Department (Steering Committee)  
John Mattera, NYC Parks (Steering Committee)  
Wallace Murray, NYC-DOT (Steering Committee)  
Gary Washinski, NYC-DOT (Steering Committee)  
Janet Jenkins, Eng Wong Taub (Consultant Team)  
Charu Kukreja, RBA Group (Consultant Team)  
Amy Ford Wagner, Parsons Brinckerhoff (Consultant Team)  
Ryan Walsh, Howard/Stein-Hudson (Consultant Team)  
Jackson Wandres, RBA Group (Consultant Team)  
Janice Yuvan, RBA Group (Consultant Team)

## Introductions

Howie Mann (NYMTC) opened the meeting by welcoming participants and offering a brief description of the planned agenda for the first Technical Advisory Committee (TAC) Meeting. Mr. Mann emphasized that the study is in early stages and that TAC participants had been invited because of their deep understanding of the issues involved in creating a Hudson River Valley Greenway Link. He explained that the project team would rely on the TAC for technical input.

Mr. Mann asked those in attendance to introduce themselves with name, affiliation, and identify if they are a member of the Consultant Team or Steering Committee. He added that this information would be distributed to the TAC and will be available through a project page on the NYMTC Web site

## Discussion of Issues

Gerry Bogacz (NYMTC) briefly described NYMTC and its role on the project. Mr. Bogacz explained that he would facilitate a discussion regarding project issues. He emphasized that any issue whether minute or global was up for discussion.

Paul J. Elston (Friends of the Hudson River Greenway in the Bronx) noted that the money for this project came from an earmark proposed by Senator Charles Schumer and called for a trail, "along the Hudson River." Mr. Elston described concern that the project team would step too far back and abandon a riverside trail. He explained that in his opinion the trail has to exist in the Hudson River drainage area. Mr. Elston also noted that one of the primary goals of the Senator in providing the funding was to see a greenway link that would bring people to the water because this will strengthen support for efforts to clean up the Hudson River.

Peter Ciaccia (New York Road Runners) inquired about the geography of the project area. Mr. Mann explained that the study area was roughly from Inwood in Manhattan across the Harlem River through the Bronx and ends in Yonkers. Mr. Mann added that the trail is envisioned as a non-motorized transportation path. Jackson Wandres (RBA Group) described the project as a link to connect Manhattan's Westside Greenway to recreational trail facilities in Yonkers. Mr. Wandres said the trail would ideally provide a 100 percent off-road route the length of the greenway from Saratoga County to the Battery in New York City. However, he mentioned that there are other configurations to consider and a phased approach may come out of the study with recommendations for some on-road and some off-road components. John Mattera (NYC Parks) noted that "off-road" means "off-street," and not necessarily unpaved.

Mark Castiglione (NYS Hudson River Valley Greenway) explained that a project such as this could take considerable time to implement and that the approach should be to seize

opportunities that arise with a 20-year commitment in place. Mr. Bogacz responded that this project has a shorter time horizon with earmarked dollars. Mr. Castiglione also brought up the concept of a “string of pearls” to describe the greenway. He said he envisions the greenway as a link connecting the features it passes through.

Mr. Elston explained that in prior efforts, the railroad lines proved to be a prominent obstacle. He noted that there is room for the trail on the west side of the tracks but acknowledged that in the past, the railroad was not interested in giving up that space – possibly due to the presence of toxins from electrical equipment. He posited that the project must come away with a measurement of the distance between the edge of the area that the railroad needs to operate and the top of the riprap at the edge of the waterfront.

Lee Ellman (City of Yonkers) explained that from the administration’s view in Yonkers, the trail is along the waterfront. Yonkers has already built roughly 3000 feet of their proposed 4-mile waterfront trail. Mr. Ellman’s desire is to use the trail to bring both sides of the community together and he briefly described the geographic and demographic divide in the community. Mr. Ellman also briefly described another on-going City of Yonkers sponsored trail project that targets a one-mile corridor on Alexander Street along a rail line.

Mathew McDevitt (College of Mount Saint Vincent) explained that a small parcel of the College’s property north of 261<sup>st</sup> street runs up against MetroNorth’s property. He explained that the top priority for the College and for the Sisters of Charity, who actually own the property, is to preserve that property. He explained that the school uses a footbridge owned by MetroNorth to reach a piece of property (that the Sisters of Charity own) known as, “The Point,” between the water and the MetroNorth tracks. Mr. McDevitt explained that the College frequently uses that property for events and the Sisters would not sell it.

Michael Oliva, Mid-Atlantic Trail Coordinator for the East Coast Greenway Alliance (ECGA) responded to a previous comment that referred to the project as a “bike path.” He suggested that the trail would not be merely a bike path but a multi-use trail whose route could ultimately coincide in-part with that of the HRVG, particularly from Van Cortlandt ParkWest at Broadway and 242<sup>nd</sup> Street South into Manhattan and over to the existing greenway path on the Hudson River. The East Coast Greenway is currently 20 percent off-road and 80 percent on-road. Mr. Oliva said it would be great to add more off-road segments in the Hudson Valley. He briefly described ideas for alignments for a trail that would enter Van Cortlandt Park from the north on the Old Croton Aqueduct Trail and exit on-road.

Laura Stockstill (Bronx Borough President’s Office) explained that the BBPO has prepared an existing bike facility assessment for the study area. Ms. Stockstill explained that topography and land use constraints pose significant challenges for the project. She also said it will be important to find a balance between the local and regional planning issues.

Courtney White (Wave Hill) expressed that from her perspective, the trail would be fantastic. Parking is an issue though. Wave Hill would like additional parking so drivers could bike into Manhattan. Another concern is preserving natural features and wildlife habitats.

Bob Bender (Bronx Community Board 8) explained that the Community Board's priority is to maximize public access to the river. He also mentioned the importance of coordinating with other trails in the area including the Old Croton Aqueduct Trail, the South County Trailway and the Putnam Rail Trail.

John Mattera gave an overview of the Putnam Rail Trail. He briefly described the history of the rail line. He explained that the trail is paved for five miles north out of Van Cortlandt Park and that Uniform Land Use Review Procedure (ULURP) applications have been submitted to prepare the way for acquisition of the Putnam RR ROW south of Van Cortlandt Park as far as 235<sup>th</sup> Street. Most NYCDPR Greenway trail projects thus far have been funded with Congestion Mitigation and Air Quality (CMAQ) money.

Lukas Herbert (Westchester County Planning Department) explained that Westchester County is committed to building a RiverWalk trail along the entire Westchester waterfront. One potential snag is the sewage treatment plant located immediately north of the Bronx / Westchester county line. The Westchester County Department of Environmental Facilities owns the plant. Coming up with a feasible design solution for routing the trail around the plant will prove to be a significant challenge but it is the county's largest sewage treatment plant and cannot be disrupted.

NYCDOT asked if the goal of the project is to link the water to the community or to link trails to trails. Mr. Mann suggested that there is no pre-conceived notion of the trail's ultimate purpose. Mr. Wandres added that the study is supposed to be a link in the greenway. He suggested that the study will present a full range of options complete with descriptions of what it would take to implement those options.

Mr. Elston noted that the earmark specifies a trail along the river. He asked if it would be legal to spend the money on an inland trail. Mr. Bogacz said that he understood it would be legal.

Mr. Ciaccia asked if the multi-use trail would be paved or dirt. Mr. Wandres suggested that it would likely be paved but that it doesn't have to be- there are a full range of design options. Mr. Ciaccia suggested that the project team should consider runners in the design and have unpaved sections.

Laura Gourdine (Friends of the Hudson River Greenway in the Bronx) asked if the trail would be a free facility. Mr. Ellman suggested that there would not likely be a fee to users but he

described a menu of public-private arrangements for trail ownership and described an instance of a trail on private land with an easement.

NYCDOT asked if the project team had reached out to the MTA. Mr. Mann answered that as a NYMTC member organization, the MTA is on the steering committee.

Mark Castiglione noted that the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation may be changing its evaluation criteria based on a recognition of the effects that global warming are having on the rise of sea level which may in turn reduce the available right-of-way. Mr. Wandres clarified by speculating that DEC may adjust their definition of “mean high water.” Ms. White added that Wave Hill deals with erosion.

Ms. Gourdine suggested that bus routes in the Bronx should connect to the Trail to provide residents in the eastern Bronx access to the waterfront. Mr. Mann noted that transit service is to be considered in the scope of services for the project. Mr. Bogacz added that a goal of this effort is to get HRVGL projects listed on the five-year Transportation Improvements Program (TIP) for New York City and Westchester County.

### Task Description

At this point, Mr. Mann walked the TAC through the Scope of Services and Project Time Line. Then he assigned two “homework” tasks to the TAC. He asked participants to review the list of TAC invitees and the citations in the Literature Review and to make any suggested additions that the project team should reach out to or review. He instructed the TAC to communicate through Mr. Mann, not directly with the consultant team. Mr. Mann pledged to keep relevant parties informed of comments.

Mr. Elston asked if the Steering Committee meeting would be subject to the “open meetings law.” Mr. Bogacz was not sure that the law would necessarily apply but stated Steering Committee meetings would be open to the TAC. Mr. Bogacz reiterated that NYMTC wants the project to be transparent. Mr. Elston requested that TAC members receive adequate notice of the Steering Committee meetings.

### Discussion of Goals

Mr. Bogacz facilitated a discussion of Goals and Objectives for the project. He introduced the discussion with the restating of goals heard previously in the evening. Those goals included linkage into a greenway system and access to the waterfront. He then opened the floor to discussion of goals.

NYCDOT expressed that functional transportation access to employers should be a goal.

Mr. Oliva suggested that mobility (wheelchair accessibility) issues should be considered.

Mr. Mattera stated a desire for safe recreation. He used the standard of “would I teach a child to ride a bike here?” as a means of measuring safety. He also suggested that the trail should be accessible to baby carriages.

Ms. Gourdine restated her goal for the trail to be transit accessible for eastern Bronx residents. She highlighted the importance of east/west routes.

Ms. White stated a need for signage. She specified east/west signage and the need for safe access, particularly for children. Ms. White also suggested finding safe routes from local schools to the waterfront.

Mr. Bogacz asked the group if “Multipurpose” should be a goal. Mr. Elston answered that the Trail should have places to sit; that the Trail should be a place for both active and passive recreation. Mr. Wandres asked if the trail should offer park-like features. Mr. Elston responded that Manhattan’s Cherry Walk is the model he had in mind. He also expressed the need to restore the old pedestrian bridges that once existed in the Bronx that connected residents east of the railroad tracks to the waterfront.

Mr. Ellman stated that the Trail could be an incredible resource and bring people out of the city to Yonkers. He explained that Yonkers is looking at making connections. He said the City of Yonkers has an agreement with Scenic Hudson, an environmental group focused on the Hudson River Valley, to provide public access to the river. Mr. Ellman envisions a path along the Hudson that could be used as both a trail and a park where you can sit and watch the sunset. He noted that the RiverWalk in Yonkers is used by different users at different times – the facility takes on its own organic life. Mr. Ellman also suggested the use of trail markers, like those distributed to hikers and climbers on trails in Japan as an economic development tool.

Ms. Gourdine mentioned Stowe, Vermont as an example of a successful multi-use trail along the water. It is used for cycling, running and cross-country skiing and it also has benches.

Jackson Wandres mentioned that landscapes can be used to interpret the history of an area.

Mr. Ellman noted that the Sugar Factory Site could be a fascinating destination with tourism potential.

Mr. Castiglione noted that the Trail is a great opportunity for education – one that cannot be passed.

Ms. White mentioned the proposed “No Child Left Inside” bill and suggested that there may be educational grants that could work in tandem with the Trail. She discussed the possibility of creating east/west lines on the streets leading to the Trail or markers that discuss bird species found along the Trail.

NYCDOT asked if snow would be removed from the trail and about maintenance in general.

Mr. Ciaccia suggested that there may be opportunities for businesses along the trail. As an example he mentioned kiosks where runners could stop for a beverage or snack.

Other goals mentioned included safety and incorporating principles of environmental sustainability.

### Gap Analysis

Janice Yuvan introduced a map exercise wherein participants were invited to mark up two maps of the study area. They were encouraged to draw obstacles and challenges as well as valuable resources and other features that the study team should be aware of. For the purposes of the exercise, Ms. Yuvan defined a gap as either a physical gap in the trail or a gap in information about the project area.

Mr. Ellman pointed out several features along the Yonkers shoreline. He highlighted the Sugar Factory pointing out that it is private property and an industrial use that will be difficult to get around. He also mentioned the Glenwood Power Station. With black lines drawn on the map of Yonkers he indicated sections of waterfront that are difficult or impossible to access.

Mr. Elston drew features on the Bronx portion of the Study area. In his estimation, getting the trail across the Harlem River will be the most difficult challenge. He described the Spuyten Duyvil swing bridge with only one railroad track but room for two. He said he believed a cantilever structure could be attached relatively easily. He also mentioned the Henry Hudson Bridge as an option for crossing the Harlem River. Mr. Elston discussed removing Track 6 along the waterfront north of the Spuyten Duyvil and detailed its two entry points (the locations of the two switches that allow a rail car to move from the main track to the Track 6 spur). He mentioned that in previous efforts, he had met with MetroNorth and usage of Track 6 right-of-way seems feasible to him but MetroNorth is not interested in giving it up because they argue they need it in case a train breaks down. Mr. Elston was not convinced by the argument. He mentioned Track 6 as a potential way around the sugar factory and around Riverdale Station. He also discussed at least five old bridges over the tracks that have either fallen into disrepair or been demolished and stated that they should be repaired or replaced, as required. Howard Mann asked if in his previous meetings with Metro-North the concept of

“Rails with Trails” was ever discussed. Mr. Elston said that was the concept they were pushing but never used that language.

Mr. Wandres pointed out to the group that the map mark-ups and comments offered by Mr. Ellman and Mr. Elston for Yonkers and the Bronx waterfronts, respectively, serve as a good example of the type of input that the consultant team would like to receive more of in the future from the TAC, and not just for the waterfront. Mr. Wandres explained that the study area is loosely defined as northern Manhattan north to a connection with the Old Croton Aqueduct Trail in Yonkers , from the Hudson River waterfront to Broadway, and that the consultant team welcomes input from the TAC consisting of thoughts and ideas about opportunities for and/or constraints to trail development, on-street or off, anywhere within that area, at any time.

### Next Steps

Mr. Mann wrapped up the meeting by thanking the participants and discussing the next steps of the project team. He mentioned that draft documents for Task 2 and 3 would be forthcoming. The group agreed the public workshop could be held after the holidays, in approximately six weeks. He also discussed the launch of the project Web page on the NYMTC Web site. Mr. Mann asked the TAC about meeting times and locations. Possible locations for future meetings were discussed by TAC member including Yonkers City Hall and Wave Hill. Ms. White of Wave Hill mentioned that her facility would be able to host a future TAC meeting but noted that it would have to be scheduled mid-afternoon in order to take advantage of transit options. Several TAC members offered tours of their facilities as they coincide with the study area. These locations included Wave Hill and the Yonkers waterfront.

The meeting ended shortly after 8:00 pm.