

**BRONX BOROUGH PRESIDENT'S RECOMMENDATION
ULURP APPLICATION NO: C 190508 MMX
BRIDGE PARK SOUTH MAPPING**

DOCKET DESCRIPTION

IN THE MATTER OF an application submitted by the Department of Parks and Recreation, pursuant to Sections 197-c and 199 of the New York City Charter and Section 5-430 *et seq.* of the New York City Administrative Code, for an amendment to the City Map involving:

- The elimination, discontinuance and closing of Exterior Street between the High Bridge and the Alexander Hamilton Bridge;
- The elimination, discontinuance and closing of West 171st Street between Exterior Street and the U.S. Pierhead and Bulkhead Line;
- The establishment of a public park;
- The adjustment-block dimensions and grades necessitated thereby;

Including authorization for any acquisition or disposition of real property related thereto, in Community District #4, Borough of The Bronx, in accordance with Map No. 13144 dated June 24, 2019 and signed by the Borough President.

BACKGROUND

Bridge Park is currently composed of 7.16 acres. It runs from Roberto Clemente State Park on the north to West 171st Street on the south. The Harlem River is to the park's west and the Metro North Railroad and portions of Exterior Street on the east. The Major Deegan Expressway is located immediately east of the Metro North right-of-way. Included in Bridge Park is a 0.34 mile greenway which runs parallel to the Harlem River. Additional amenities include bicycle racks, drinking fountains, landscaping, benches and lighting. Beyond the northern boundary of Bridge Park (which is owned by City of New York's Department of Parks and Recreation), an additional 1-mile of greenway construction within Roberto Clemente State Park (which is owned by the State of New York) will facilitate a seamless bicycle venue between the city owned and state owned properties. The paved area for bicycle and pedestrian purposes is no less than 15 feet wide. This width is required in order to provide emergency-vehicle access to Bridge Park.

Pedestrian access to Bridge Park is available on the north through Roberto Clemente State Park. Access from the south is via the Depot Place ramp where it intersects Sedgwick Avenue. Development of the surrounding community includes Metro North Railroad's Hudson Division right-of-way and the Major Deegan Expressway (Interstate 87) to the east. The Harlem River defines the western boundary. The Metro North Railroad full-service maintenance facility is situated south of Depot Place, occupying a multi-acre site running parallel with the Harlem River on the west and the Major Deegan Expressway to the east. This facility is strictly off-limits to all but those employed by the railroad, thereby establishing a "hard barrier" against any access to the Harlem River south of Depot Place.

Residential development is found on Sedgwick Avenue and is typified by low and mid-rise residences. River Park Towers, a residential complex composed of two high-rise buildings, is located at the southern end of Roberto Clemente State Park. These two buildings are the only residences located to the west of what is the Harlem River Greenway within Roberto Clemente State Park.

Additional development includes the Highbridge Green School. Located on West 167th Street, this elementary school is approximately three blocks east of Sedgwick Avenue/Depot Place. Two homeless facilities located in privately owned motels (The Red Carpet Inn and The Stadium Motel). They are located within a 50 foot distance from the intersection of Sedgwick Avenue and Depot Place.

The New York City Police Department (NYPD) operates a strategic operations center in the former headquarters for the 44th Precinct building. The presence of this facility requires the parking of NYPD vehicles on both Depot Place and Sedgwick Avenue, including on pedestrian right-of-ways. No retail activity or access to bus or subway service is available within approximately one mile of the proposed extension to Bridge Park. The Hudson Division of Metro North Railroad offers access at University Heights and at the East 153rd-Yankee stations. These stations are approximately ½ mile from the proposed extension of Bridge Park. Pending the reconstruction of the Highbridge steps connecting Sedgwick Avenue to Highbridge Park, access to the Highbridge will be available. No reconstruction is taking place at this time and consequently this step street remains closed.

ENVIRONMENTAL REVIEW AND ULURP CERTIFICATION

This application has been reviewed pursuant to SEQR and CEQR and received a Negative Declaration. This application was certified as complete by the New York City Planning Commission on September 23, 2019.

BRONX COMMUNITY BOARD PUBLIC HEARING

Bronx Community District #4 held a public hearing on this application on October 7, 2019. A unanimous vote recommending approval of this application was, 31 in favor, zero opposed and zero abstaining.

BOROUGH PRESIDENT'S PUBLIC HEARING

A public hearing was convened by the Bronx Borough President on November 14, 2019. Representatives of the applicant were present and spoke in favor of this application. There being no other speakers present, the hearing was closed.

BRONX BOROUGH PRESIDENT'S RECOMMENDATION

In FY 2018, my administration allocated \$1.7 million for construction of the Greenway located south of West 171st Street and up to the High Bridge. Given my continued support of this project, I favor approval of this application. Additionally, I have allocated \$3 million to facilitate construction of the Highbridge Park step-street which will connect Sedgwick Avenue to the historic Highbridge.

The full build-out of Bridge Park and its inclusion of the Harlem River Greenway, will provide thousands of residents of the Highbridge community in the West Bronx with much-needed open space. The fact remains that a vast majority of mapped parkland in Community District #4 is situated east of Jerome Avenue. This is further complicated as the hilly topography of Highbridge discourages easy access to those parks. Therefore, to ensure a comprehensive planning process, there must be consideration for this phase of construction to create some form of attraction that would facilitate and entice visitors and cyclists to the greenway. Many years ago, Starr Whitehouse Associates proposed a plan featuring a variety of options and amenities, including a boat dock, and perhaps even a dining venue. Given the close proximity of the Highbridge Green School, I ask that we consider these and other possible ideas that will make it an inviting venue for all members of the community. I also anticipate that when Bridge Park is complete, it will augment the many recreational offerings found at Roberto Clemente State Park. I make this point mindful of the fact that for residents in Bronx Community District #5, where the state park is located, the ratio of mapped, city-owned park space is 5,000 residents per one-acre of open space

A related challenge is advancing the reconstruction of the step-street connecting Sedgwick Avenue to the Highbridge, which as previously noted, I am subsidizing. The reconstruction of this historic step-street was initially proposed under the Bloomberg Administration over ten years ago. To date, the project is still out for bid. Accelerating the completion of the step-street is crucial for access to Bridge Park, in lieu of a future full-length buildout of the Harlem River Greenway.

While considering this application, I would be remiss if I did not take the opportunity to comment on numerous unresolved challenges and propose opportunities for their resolution and the overall betterment of the community. The most significant of these includes the reconstruction of the Depot Place ramp, which flies over the Major Deegan Expressway from Sedgwick Avenue. Improving access to the Harlem River Greenway from Depot Place has long been sought by my office and numerous community organizations, most notably the Harlem River Working Group. Although this may not be directly related to the proposed mapping being considered by this application, it is a vital and pertinent objective that aligns with the Parks Department efforts to generally improve connectivity and access. As currently planned, New York City's Department of Transportation will commence the reconstruction of Depot Place in (2021). My proposed, auxiliary recommendations include:

- a. Inclusion of a bicycle-pedestrian ramp or stairway to be constructed on the north side of the Depot Place ramp, connecting it to the Harlem River Greenway.

Given that Depot Place does already allow for vehicular passage and is therefore ADA compliant, this new addition need not to be ADA compliant.

- b. The breakdown of safe, pedestrian access and vehicular movement along Sedgwick Avenue and on the Depot Place ramp. This is caused by the parking of many New York Police Department vehicles within walking distance of the department's Strategic Response Group on Sedgwick Avenue. This fact demonstrates a critical shortage of off-street parking facilities for these vehicles as well as the private cars owned by police department personnel. Furthermore, as these parked cars hamper pedestrian sidewalk access, unnecessary vehicular congestion on Sedgwick Avenue sometimes occurs.
- c. Traffic congestion on the Major Deegan Expressway. This chronic condition invites motorists to use Sedgwick Avenue as a viable alternative. This fact further compounds the safety concerns of those who are walking on Sedgwick Avenue, or who in the future would be walking or biking to Bridge Park and the Harlem River Greenway. By way of improving traffic flow and the safety of cyclists and pedestrians, the city's Department of Transportation should consider making Sedgwick Avenue one-way, the actual direction being determined by the outcome of this study. This would allow for the creation of a dedicated bike lane. Likewise, a traffic signal at the intersection of Depot Place at Sedgwick Avenue should also be studied.
- d. The close proximity of the Highbridge Green School located on West 167th Street to the newly mapped Bridge Park offers students a unique opportunity to be part of the park's planning process. It also means that upon completion, these young people will feel a direct link to this park and thereby become some of the park's most outspoken and proactive caretakers.
- e. Metro North Railroad's Harlem River maintenance facility. There is a substantial amount of vacant and/or underused land belonging to the City of New York, (roughly over one acre), apparent on this site. I would also propose that the railroad work with the both the Departments of Transportation and Parks to determine how the Harlem River Greenway might extend south of the High Bridge. Only by so doing will an uninterrupted greenway along the Harlem River be possible.

I urgently recommend that these matters be immediately considered and that they be part of any holistic, finalized plan that is related to the reconstruction of the Depot Place ramp. The simple fact is, conditions today are dangerous and therefore unsustainable, meaning they must be remedied.

Across the City of New York, access to the waterways that define our town are being planned and constructed. While I am aware of the challenges that we face in The Bronx, I am also confident that with everyone at the table - most notably those stakeholders who have jurisdiction

of or own sites along the Harlem River, Bridge Park and the Harlem River Greenway – this will be a most successful endeavor.

I recommend approval of this application.