

Park Place – Underhill Avenue Block Association Monthly Meeting

Approved Minutes

04/15/2026

Attendees:

Mitch Baron *
Phyllis Brody
Sharon Combs
Adrian Gately
Den Gordon
Marc Gordon
Olexa Hewryk
Randy Jackson
Robin Ketchum
Bruce McInnes
Joe Ostwald
Diana Regan
Ed Regan
Camilla Rothenberg
Teddy Theoharis
Koreen Valtierra
Gib Veconi
Stacey Weinstein

Street Tree Planting Process and Strategy

Den Gordon introduced Mitch Baron, a Senior Forester and Project Manager in the NYC Department of Parks. Den has been working with Mitch regarding tree replacement needs following the water and sewer project that resulted in tree removals in the neighborhood.

Mitch presented on New York City Parks Tree Planting operations, explaining the approach to planting street trees across the city. He described how the Parks Department plants 15,000-18,000 trees annually across the city. Mitch outlined the transition from a multi-pronged approach based on 311 requests and environmental justice priorities to a new cyclical system where the entire city will be systematically serviced over 9 years, with part of each Community Board being serviced every 3 years. He detailed the technical considerations for tree placement, including spacing requirements around intersections, utilities, and other trees, as well as species selection based on growing conditions and diversity needs.

Mitch discussed the department's approach to fall hazard planning, explaining that proper dormant harvesting can eliminate fall hazards, particularly for trees like oaks. Marc Gordon raised specific concerns about tree planting at 296 Park Place and tree trimming at 302 Park Place, which Mitch agreed to follow up on separately. The discussion also covered jurisdiction over rain gardens, with Mitch explaining that while DEP maintains rain gardens initially, NYC Parks takes over maintenance of trees within rain gardens after two years.

Mitch explained that participatory budgeting funding for tree guards in District 35 would go to his team for implementation in the upcoming fiscal year, with installation based on general guidance from the Councilmember's office rather than specific addresses. He clarified that while the city has procurement requirements for tree guards, homeowners can install their own guards without permits, though the agency may intervene if the installation could

harm the tree. Mitch acknowledged that tree guards have received less attention than tree planting, with costs remaining higher due to limited dedicated funding and fewer cost-reduction initiatives compared to tree planting programs.

Ideas and planning for additional PPUABA social events

Koreen Valtierra re-visited her March presentation, focusing on ideas for social events other than paper crafting, which the group has already decided will be the first of the additional events and will be scheduled for a date in June. A straw poll among the attendees revealed that the next most popular idea was a movie event, followed by a "PowerPoint night" (also described as "mini-TED talks"); a trivia event with a specific theme; a games event; and a music jam (again with a specific theme or genre). The conversation ended with plans to distribute a survey about event preferences and hosting availability.

Block Party Planning Update

Stacey reported securing a magician and face painter for the event, and that Salwa Jabado and Drew Higginbotham had agreed to run the grill operation, including shopping, food preparation and use of their grill. Marc reported a good response of volunteers through the volunteer survey to staff the various stations, except for coordinating children's activities, for which there have so far been no volunteers. Marc and Teddy stated their intention to fully document the steps and processes for coordinating the block party, and to track metrics like weather conditions and food sales to simplify planning for future events.

Growing Our Community updates: rain gardens, spring clean-up

Den Gordon provided updates on maintenance of the 6 rain gardens on PPUABA blocks. She requested, and the group voted to approve, a budget of up to \$300 to purchase basic tools for new rain garden stewards as well as for rose bushes to re-plant the rain garden in front of 331-333 Park Place.

Den also discussed the upcoming spring cleanup to be held on April 25th, in conjunction with a neighborhood-wide cleanup. PPUABA will have a resource table, which Joe Ostwald will coordinate, for borrowing tools and picking up supplies.

Review and approval of March minutes

The March minutes were unanimously approved. Den Gordon stated that she would be willing to stand for re-election as Recording Secretary if she could change the meeting minutes format to more closely align to the AI-generated minutes, thus requiring less work to write up the minutes. The attendees approved that approach.

New Business

Gib Veconi reported on upcoming Grand Army Plaza redesign community engagement events and encouraged participation. Marc Gordon reminded the group about upcoming plans for stoop sales scheduled for June 6th, with potential participation from multiple neighboring block associations.

Adjournment

The meeting was adjourned at 8:55pm.