



**van cortlandt
park alliance**

**Annual Report
FY20**



Our mission

Van Cortlandt Park Alliance preserves, supports, and promotes the recreational, ecological, and historical value of Van Cortlandt Park in close partnership with NYC Department of Parks and Recreation.



About Van Cortlandt Park

Third largest park in NYC

Located in northwest corner of the Bronx, the fastest growing borough

1,146 acres of recreational, historical, and ecologically important resources

Used by over 2.6 million visitors each year

600+ acres of forested land

25+ miles of hiking, walking, and running trails

Largest freshwater lake in the Bronx

8 cricket pitches, 11 soccer fields, 16 baseball fields, 12 tennis courts

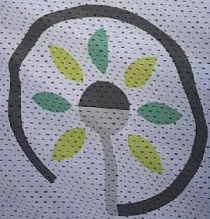
5 playgrounds, 2 public golf courses, basketball and handball courts



Van Cortlandt Lake House



Serving Our Community



**van cortlandt
park alliance**

vancortlandt.org





Covid Response

Van Cortlandt Park was more popular than ever before as a result of the NY State shelter-in-place order.

The local Bronx community continues to need the park with great intensity – as a haven for physical activity, stress relief, meditation in nature, and space! With restaurants, gyms, clubs, movie theaters, museums, etc. closed, Van Cortlandt Park was the primary venue for all activity in people's lives this past spring, summer, and fall.

Beginning in March, all programs needed to adjust or be cancelled to support Covid safety protocols.

Van Cortlandt Park Alliance staff did an amazing job shifting to provide blended in-park/virtual learning programs; volunteer opportunities; and seasonal assistance to keep the park clean and green. Programs like **Vital Volunteers**, **Urban Eco-Teens**, **Garden 2 Market**, and **Urban Junior Naturalists**, were safe, healthy ways for our community to get involved OUTSIDE, fighting the depression and anxiety associated with being indoors!

We are so proud of the work our staff has done during this most challenging time.

Left, summer interns mask up!

Urban Eco-Teens

Established in 2012, Urban Eco-Teens (UET) is a year-round paid internship for high school students that prepares a new generation of students for college, natural resource management professions, and lifelong stewardship.

All interns work in the park alongside horticulturists and natural areas restoration staff from Van Cortlandt Park. They also complete labs, go on nature-focused field trips, and explore green career opportunities with natural resource professionals.

Eligible summer participants attend a tuition free, accredited, rigorous college course in Environmental Science at Lehman College; returning interns develop and present a special project; and, each year, two college-aged students develop leadership skills by training as program supervisors (Crew Leaders).

In the fall, motivated interns become part of the Leadership Training series where they develop their own leadership skills through hands-on activities, and co-lead volunteer groups in the park.

Covid Response: UET staff pivoted in 2020 to create Covid-safe programming in the park and a virtual, synchronous learning college course.

Right top, Interns remove invasives from Van Cortlandt Lake

Right bottom, Eco-Teens welcome guest speaker Bronx Parks Commissioner Iris Rodriguez-Rosa, 2019





School Programs

Every year, the Van Cortlandt Park Alliance helps ecology and biology come alive for local school children who use the park as a science lab.

Kids learn first-hand about forest ecology, habitats, and the web of life: they plant trees and shrubs; hike through the woods on guided walks; and become aquatic biologists for the day to test water, collect insects and fish, and examine their findings under microscopes. They see how the data they collected compares to other student findings to understand the lake's health over time.

Covid Response: Educators provided virtual programs to local schools in spring and fall 2020 and created in-park After School programs for middle-school age kids in fall of 2020.

Left, students learning from their findings in Van Cortlandt Lake in 2019





Stewardship Programs

Every year, the Alliance brings volunteers into the park to garden, manage the forests and wetlands, and restore more than 25-miles of nature trails found throughout Van Cortlandt Park.

Trails welcome visitors for hiking, walking, running, and biking.

Covid Response: Visitation skyrocketed during the pandemic and Van Cortlandt Park Alliance's **Vital Volunteers** were there to keep the park clean and green.

With drastic cuts to the NYC Parks Department's budget, Van Cortlandt Park Alliance stepped up and hired 6 part-time, seasonal staff to assist with cleanup.

At left, a volunteer picks up trash.



Youth-Run Farm Stand

VCPA's Garden 2 Market internship makes it possible for young people to see firsthand how to run a farm stand, cultivate responsible work habits, and learn about healthy eating, all while providing a service!

Covid Response: Garden 2 Market Interns sold more produce this summer than ever before! Located along the southern border of the park, the market provided fresh fruit and vegetables to the community July through October.

At left, Garden 2 Market interns run a weekly Youth-Run Farm Stand providing locally grown produce at affordable prices to the community.





Cultural Programs

Since 2007, Barefoot Dancing features performers who play live instrumental music and present dance forms of their native ethnic tradition. The artists, skilled educators adept in engaging diverse audiences of adults and children, introduce the historical and cultural roots of each dance form, then draw the audience members in to join them.

COVID Response: Barefoot Dancing was put on hiatus in 2020.

At left, dancers enjoy the Van Cortlandt House Museum grounds.



Nature Programs

VCPA staff provide regular group hikes and tours of the park to engage visitors in the natural environment.

COVID Response: In 2020, in conjunction with NYC Audubon, we offered weekly Bird Walks with small groups.

Our annual Hiketoberfest celebration proceeded with adjustments that included smaller group size and appointed start and end times (established through an online ticketing process).

Left, Alliance staff guide hikers on the Old Croton Aqueduct trail, Hiketoberfest 2020.



Environmental Preservation



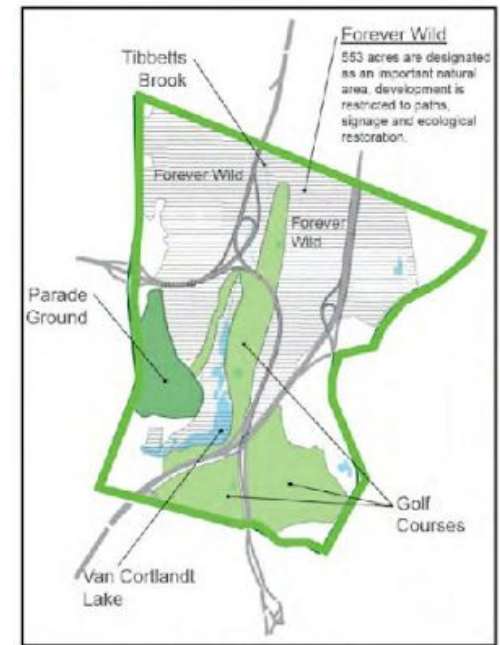
Natural Areas Management

Natural areas make up half of Van Cortlandt Park's 1,146 acres, and the Alliance is committed to managing these natural areas and improving the environment of the park.

The Alliance works throughout the year with volunteers from groups such as New York Roadrunners, local schools and corporations to improve the 25+ miles of trails that are central to the uniqueness of Van Cortlandt Park.

Alliance staff and volunteers are restoring the Tibbetts Brook Riparian Zone by removing non-native invasive plants and planting native trees, shrubs and groundcover to improve the overall health of this vital ecosystem.

And to better understand and protect Van Cortlandt Lake and Tibbetts Brook, Alliance staff and volunteers are monitor water quality and aquatic life.



Feature Project: Daylighting Tibbetts Brook

Tibbetts Brook ran from Van Cortlandt Lake to the Harlem River, but decades ago the brook was forced underground to accommodate urban development. Today, this means water from the lake enters the Broadway sewer at a rate of 4 to 5 million gallons of water per day — and that's on a dry day. Often when it rains, the combination of sewage, street runoff and the brook enters the combined sewer, bypasses the sewage treatment plant and flows directly into the Harlem River, degrading the health of the river. Bringing Tibbetts Brook back above ground ("daylighting") would remove this clean water from the sewer, reduce Combined Sewer Overflow (CSO) occurrences on the Harlem River, and help with flooding issues along Broadway and other areas of the Tibbetts Brook Watershed.

Daylighting Tibbetts Brook is a key project in the Van Cortlandt Park 2034 Master Plan. In 2016, the Alliance (Friends) helped spearhead efforts to create the Coalition for Daylighting Tibbetts Brook. Now with more than twenty members, the Coalition supports the efforts of the NYC Department of Parks and Recreation to daylight Tibbetts Brook and create a greenway south of Van Cortlandt Park down to the Harlem River. The project requires acquisition of an abandoned rail line still owned by CSX Railroad. The project would have tremendous economic, environmental, recreational and aesthetic benefits for the Bronx. Moreover, it would help connect neighborhoods that have been cut off from each other and from Van Cortlandt Park.

The Master Plan reflects community priorities, develops solutions to Van Cortlandt Park's environmental and social challenges, and enhances the park's natural assets.

The Master Plan calls for the following in Van Cortlandt Park:

- New York City's healthiest forest and brook ecosystem with scenic trails and paths
- Healthy and attractive Tibbetts brook that flows to the Harlem river
- Enhanced landscape beauty and historic countryside appearance
- Safe bicycle routes that connect the Putnam and East coast greenways
- Scenic path around the entire park for strolling or jogging
- Paths that make it easy and fun to cross the park
- Pedestrian bridges that knit the park together
- Shady and attractive park perimeter that encourages walking.
- Premiere cross country trail system
- Playgrounds, ball fields, and courts
- Covered active recreation areas for afterschool activities
- Skate park
- Small amphitheater
- Comfort station and cafe for the Parade Ground

Van Cortlandt Park Master Plan

NYC Parks finalized a twenty-year Van Cortlandt Park [Master Plan](#) that will guide the restoration of Van Cortlandt Park's natural beauty and provide solutions for the needs of all neighboring communities. The Master Plan charts a clear course of action to restore and improve this unique property. The Master Plan is intended to coordinate efforts between agencies, nonprofit partners, elected officials and community groups to complete capital projects in Van Cortlandt Park.



Capital Projects

Openings in 2020

Northwest Playground

Parks Without Borders

Putnam Greenway

Skate Park

Opening in 2021

Basketball Court Restoration

Indian Field

Funded Projects

Community Input Sessions Underway

Classic Playground

Woodlawn Playground

New Programs & Projects

Programs

Enslaved People Project

Urban Junior Naturalists

Capital Project Exploration

Birding Bridge

Red Steps Restoration & Wetland Garden

Projects

Strategic Planning

License Agreement Drafted

Stadium RFP to be released in 2021

Daylighting Tibbett's Brook - DEP-led process



The Organization



van cortlandt
park alliance

Van Cortlandt Park Alliance was formed in 2019 as a merger of the Friends of Van Cortlandt Park and the Van Cortlandt Park Conservancy.

As one organization, VCPA seeks to:

- Combine the strengths of the predecessor nonprofits to create a superior stewardship organization for Van Cortlandt Park
- Build a sustainable public/private partnership to preserve and enhance the park
- Offer effective educational programs
- Raise funds to implement the "2034 Van Cortlandt Park Master Plan"

Bringing together our strengths

Friends of Van Cortlandt Park (1992-2019)

Deep ties with the community

Over 25 years of advocacy on behalf of the park

Environmental education, market, and stewardship programs

Van Cortlandt Park Conservancy (2009-2019)

Official partnership with NYC Parks

Cultural programming

Urban Eco-Teens Youth Internship Program



Public-Private Partnership

Van Cortlandt Park Alliance and NYC Dept. of Parks & Recreation

VCPA works closely with NYC Parks to preserve, support, and promote the recreational, ecological, and historical value of Van Cortlandt Park.

Together, VCPA and Parks staff have made vast improvements to the trails within the park; kept the park clean with the help of volunteers and seasonal staff support; and shared resources to make repairs possible throughout our 1,146 acres.



VCPA and Parks staff were joined in 2020 by a seasonal crew of GOATS! Patches, pictured here, will return in 2021 to remove unwanted plants located near the Van Cortlandt House Museum.

“As for my use of Van Cortlandt Park, I must say that the last few years, I have seen some of the most incredible yet fairly subtle changes to areas of the park that once looked as though they were forgotten. The resurrection of many of the old trails, stairs, retaining walls, and water management features has not gone unappreciated. The new trail blazes on the Muir, Kieran, and Cass Gallagher trails have added a sense of order and civility to what once may have seemed the province of those looking for a place to hang out, away from prying eyes.

The addition of the many boxes for the avian wildlife are terrific for attracting and keeping a welcome habitat for those species that are native to the area. I look forward to seeing what will happen at the wetlands where the bridge is currently closed. There are great things going on in the park and they are much appreciated.”

~ Paul Cecere, community member and longtime park user



Short-term Goals



- **Raise the profile of the organization**
- **Secure additional general operating support to increase capacity**
- **Continue and grow our educational, research, stewardship, wellness, and cultural programs**
- **Take steps to secure a licensing agreement with the NYC Department of Parks & Recreation**
- **Support the implementation of the 2034 Master Plan**
 - **Identify capital priorities and raise significant funds for priority projects in the park**
- **Launch VCPA membership program**
- **Establish unified headquarters office near or in the park**

Board of Directors



Co-Chair: Carol Samol, Urban Planner, Government

Co-Chair: Nina Habib Spencer, Vice President for Talent, Civic Entertainment Group

Secretary: Teresa Grant Stoeth, Attorney

Treasurer: Stacey Wieder, Executive Director, J.P. Morgan Chase & Co

Gary Axelbank, Producer, Bronx Talk and ThisIsTheBronx

Robert Baron, Community Development Consultant

Claudia Bonn, Arts Administration Consultant

Linda Cox, Urban Parks and Planning Practitioner (retired)

Rabbi Binyamin Krauss, Principal, SAR Academy

Thomas Kelly, PhD, Head of School, Horace Mann School

Holly Leicht, Executive VP, Empire State Development

Eduvigis Marmolejos, Small Business Owner

Judy Mills-Johnson, Landscape Contractor (retired)

Brennan O'Donnell, PhD, President, Manhattan College

Amit Stern, Managing Partner, RBK Capital

Olga Luz Tirado, Executive Director, Bronx Tourism Council

Iris Rodriguez-Rosa, Bronx Parks Commissioners, *Ex-Officio*

VCPA launch picnic - June 11, 2019
Commissioner Mitchell Silver, NYC Parks
VCPA Co-Chair Nina Habib Spencer
Former NYC Council Member Andy Cohen
Bronx Borough Commissioner Iris Rodriguez-Rosa, NYC Parks
VCPA Co-Chair Carol Samol



Stephanie Ehrlich

Executive Director and Van Cortlandt Park Administrator

Since April 6, 2020

- **Professional Experience**
Central Park Conservancy
Wave Hill
Brooklyn Botanic Garden
Queens Botanical Garden
- **Professional Background**
Environmental education
Public programs and cultural events
Development
- **Education**
Kenyon College
Oxford University
Bank Street College of Education



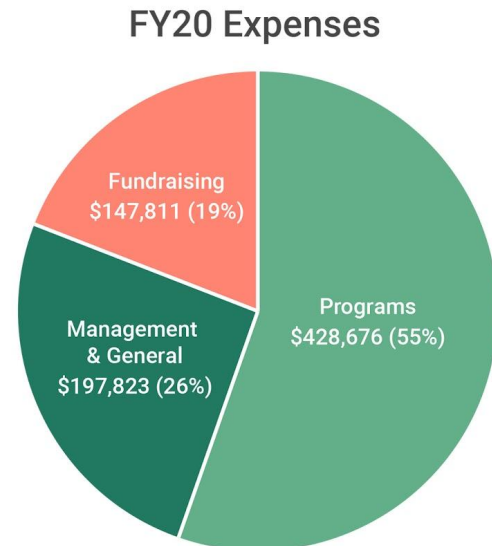
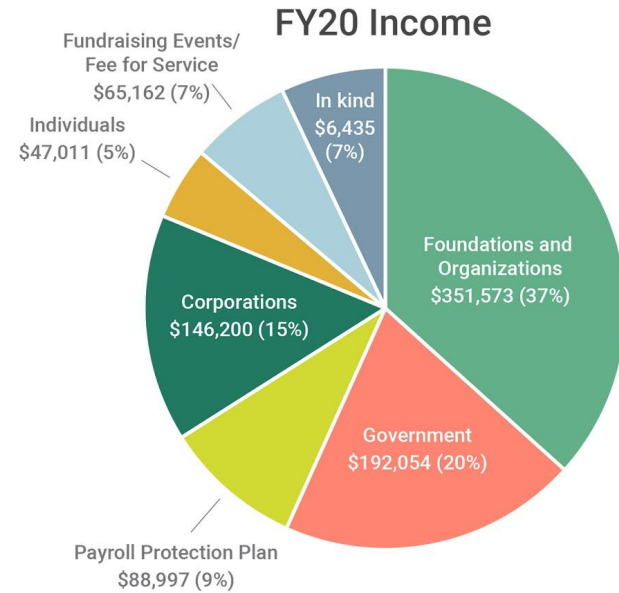
FY20 FINANCIALS

REVENUE	Amount	Percentage
Foundations and Organizations	\$351,573	36.68%
Government	\$192,054	20.04%
Payroll Protection Plan	\$88,997	9.29%
Corporations	\$146,200	15.25%
Individuals	\$47,011	4.90%
Fundraising Events and Fee for Service*	\$65,162	6.80%
In kind	\$6,435	7.04%
TOTAL	\$958,432	100%

*Includes interest of \$730

EXPENSES	Amount	Percentage
Programs	\$428,676	55.36%
Management & General	\$197,823	25.55%
Fundraising	\$147,811	19.09%
TOTAL	\$774,310	100%

PROGRAM EXPENSE DETAIL	Amount	Percentage
Cultural (Enslaved People Project)	\$9,734	2.27%
Environmental Education	\$203,755	47.53%
Fields & Trails	\$23,381	5.45%
Natural Areas	\$191,806	44.7%
TOTAL	\$428,676	100%





Acknowledgements

Van Cortlandt Park Alliance is grateful to our supporters:

The Achelis & Bodman Foundation
The Altman Foundation
Booth Ferris Foundation
Bronx Council on the Arts
Bronx Council for Environmental Quality
Central Park Conservancy Institute for Urban Parks
City Parks Foundation - Green Relief & Recovery Fund
The City Gardens Club of New York City
Con Edison
The Dorr Foundation
Dr. Robert C. and Tina Sohn Foundation
Horace Mann School
The Hyde & Watson Foundation
Jockey Hollow Foundation
Edward F. and Sheri G. Leonard Fund
Laura J. Niles Foundation
Lily Auchincloss Foundation
Lower Hudson Partnership for Regional Invasive Species Management
The New Yankee Stadium Community Benefits Fund
The New York Community Trust
Patagonia
The Pinkerton Foundation
Research Foundation - Lehman College
The Rudin Foundation, Inc.
Shandler Family Fund
SMPS Family Fund
TD Charitable Foundation
Urban Forestry Organization

With Deep Thanks to New York City & New York State:

NYC Civic Corp - NYC Service
New York City Council
New York City Department of Cultural Affairs
New York City Department of Environmental Protection
New York City Department of Parks & Recreation
New York City Service
New York State Department of Environmental Conservation
New York State Assemblyman Jeffrey Dinowitz





Follow us:
@vcpalliance



For more info:
vancortlandt.org

Contact:
80 Van Cortlandt Park South, Suite.E1
Bronx, NY 10463
info@vancortlandt.org
(718) 601-1553

