

West 104th Street

JUNE 2026

BLOCK ASSOCIATION NEWSLETTER

Riverside Park's Projects and Pleasures

Conservancy president Merritt Birnbaum shared the latest park news at the Block Association's annual meeting.



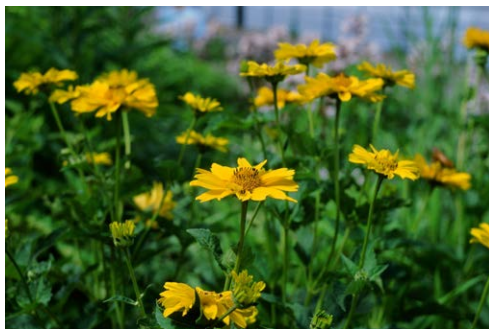
Ellington in the Park, above; daisies by the tennis courts, below.

At the annual Block Association meeting on May 18, block residents had the opportunity to get an informative and up-to-the-minute report on several of Riverside Park's major projects from Merritt Birnbaum, Riverside Park Conservancy's President and CEO.

The Conservancy partners with the New York City Parks Department to maintain and repair the park's six miles and 400 acres. One of the Conservancy's top priorities has been to improve the park's drainage system. The entire park was built on landfill and much of it suffers from extreme runoff and the erosion that it causes.

With help from the Conservancy's lobbying for funding, the NYC Parks Department has begun work on a stretch from West 108th Street to West 116th to install new drainage piping and channels, and to repair the eroded hillside

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Come Celebrate the Block!

The Yard Sale returns on September 26



David Ostwald New Orleans style jazz band will play at the Yard Sale.

There's nothing quite like it. On Saturday September 26 from 10 am to 5 pm the block will host some 68 vendors selling pretty much everything from jewelry to clothing to kitchenware to childrens' toys--a wonderful array of second-hand treasures. The West Side Rag calls it "massive" and Upper West Siders know it's the quintessential neighborhood event.

You can enjoy live music, homemade treats at the bake table, browsing the book table's extensive selections, the What-a-Bargain table (a find can cost \$1), a Silent Auction and the celebrated Split-the-Pot raffle. Last year's first place winner took home more than \$3000.

Keep an eye out for flyers on how to donate to the book table, Silent Auction, bake table and What-a-Bargain. We need your contributions. Details and drop-off information will be shared after Labor Day. Interested in volunteering at the event or sorting books before? Please email Mary Jo Gennaro at mjgennaro@gmail.com.

Interested in a vendor space? They are going fast—we already have sold nearly half the slots. The cost is \$85 and you supply your own table and chairs. Go to www.bloomingdale.org to reserve your space now.

The Yard Sale is our signature event. It's a great chance to meet your neighbors, hang out and have a quintessential Upper West Side experience. We look forward to seeing you there. Come by our tables and say hi.

WE NEED YOUR HELP SELLING RAFFLE TICKETS

The Block Association needs some volunteers to help sell raffle tickets in the weeks before the Yard Sale. We need help setting up and breaking down the raffle table as well as with ticket and merchandise sales. Please contact Mary Koval with your availability at mtkoyal@aol.com.

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Contributors to the June Issue:

Karen Gershenhorn, Stephen Helman, Mary Koval, Joyce Mann, Hanna Rubin (editor), Larry Stern, Green columnist: Sharon Waskow. Newsletter designer: Brian Hajjar. Advertising: Jennifer Jones.

W 104 ST BLOCK ASSN FINANCIAL REPORT

1ST QUARTER FINANCIALS - 2026

Starting Balance.....	\$21,148.30
Dues	\$19,962.78
Newsletter Ads	\$1,320
Co-op Contribution.....	\$475.00
Contributions	\$2,211.00
Merchandise	\$226.34

Ending Balance.....	\$32,696.54
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Summer Pleasures

A daisy in bloom beside the 105th Tot Lot.



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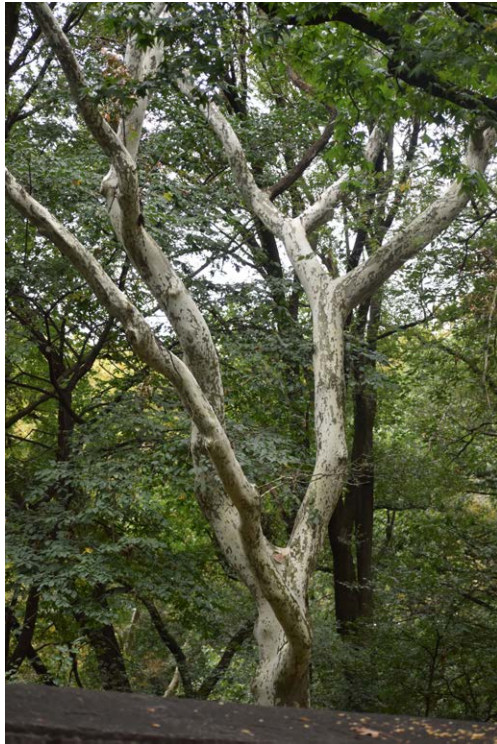
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Riverside Park

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“I always try to pick up litter. Every little bit does help. It’s the small acts that add up when we’re good neighbors. It has a ripple effect.”



with jute matting and coconut fiber. They are also installing new green infrastructure in the form of “wet meadows” to help address areas of standing water after rain storms.

The Conservancy has advocated for other park improvements. It launched a campaign for “More Trees, Less Trash,” which has helped to get trees replaced that have been lost on Riverside Drive and more solar-powered trash compactor devices installed throughout the park. It has opened a solar-powered visitor center at 97th Street. And it has brought in a beloved and popular herd of goats to chomp on invasive species and undergrowth in parts of the park in need of their appetites and care.

Ms. Birnbaum shared more information about park and Conservancy projects in an interview after the meeting.

Can you give some more details on the wetlands plantings project?

We don’t have exact timing because the work is being done in phases but it’s on the Parks Department schedule to continue working over the next several months. They have not finalized the plant palette yet and the areas to be planted will be small, garden bed size. They will be like a depression engineered to hold water and plant material to help with absorption. It will be a collection of native plants that thrive in a wetter environment, like sedge grass and blue violets. We will put up some educational signage.

What is being done to shore up the Amtrak tunnel under the park?

My understanding is that DOT does regular safety inspections and assessments all the time and addresses immediate concerns. There is no imminent safety risk. The concern about not wanting to have additional weight on the roof of the tunnel like cars and trucks is also precautionary.

You flagged that the 108th Street park staircase needs repairs. What are the problems and is there a schedule to fix them?

The rebuild is not our project but we have advocated for City Council discretionary funding for it. It’s a complicated and expensive project because the wall itself has to be reconstructed and the cost is likely in the \$2.5-\$3 million range. We hope to have news soon from Councilmember Sean Abreu, who put in the request for this project.

What are some parts of the park near us that you especially like and why?

I have a special bench on the promenade near 110th Street where I go very regularly. We adopted it for my grandmother when she passed away. There was a quote on it from Cole Porter’s “Begin the Beguine.” I sit on that bench and think of her. She had been to New York several times but never visited the park. She was very excited when I started at the Conservancy. She loved to people watch and right there is a great place.

What do you wish blocks like ours would do to help the park?

Your block has this connection of community members who are taking care of each other and being good neighbors and that’s so much of what we love to see in park visitors.

Some of it is being a good neighbor to the park. Thinking of your dog who is the love of your life which is why we have rules about dogs off leash and dog runs. I also always try to pick up litter within reason. Every little bit does help. It’s the small acts that add up when we’re good neighbors. It has a ripple effect. Our staff loves when the community says hello. It makes them feel like their work is valued. So say hi when you see someone from the Conservancy.

In terms of volunteers, we have lots of opportunities for different availabilities. Our website is a great resource, here are one-off weekend events. And then if people can make a regular commitment we have these place-partner opportunities like the islands on the Drive.

We are always adding more opportunities so check the website. We are also looking for ways to engage volunteers outside of horticulture. In the future we will focus more on docent opportunities like leading tours that talk about the park, the monuments and the neighborhood. There are so many historic elements on Riverside Drive.

One last question. Will Mallomar be returning with the goat herd when they are installed at 138th Street this summer?

I can neither confirm nor deny but as he is reigning champion in the G.O.A.T. contest it would be hard to deny him the opportunity to defend his title.

For more information about the Riverside Park Conservancy, park events and volunteer opportunities, go to <https://riversideparknyc.org/>.



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Visit the Secret Garden

Up a staircase and over a garage, you will discover blooms, birds and koi.

By Karen Gershenhorn

For over 40 years, the Lotus Garden has quietly hidden away at the top of a staircase on W. 97th Street between West End Avenue and Broadway, rewarding all who make the trek up the stairs. A active group of gardeners tend their 28 individual plots, resulting in an always-changing variety of flowers, trees, and grasses--all grown in 30 inches of soil above a parking garage. The koi pond showcases the namesake lotuses during summer's heat and humidity (and the very popular koi).

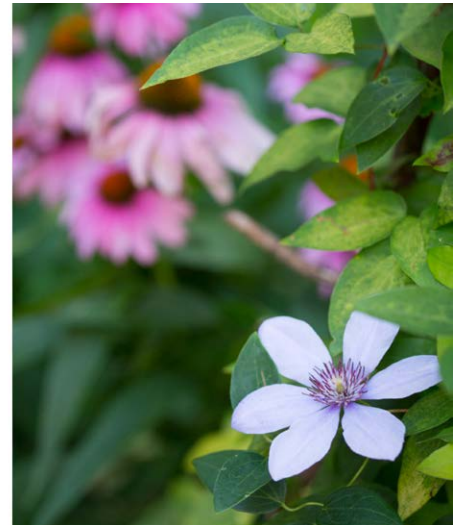
The location was originally occupied by the Riverside and Riviera Theaters. When the buildings were demolished, guerilla gardeners came together to create a garden. When the Columbia Condominium went up in the 1980s, activists Carrie Maher, a horticulturist, and Mark Greenwald, an architect, worked with the developer to install a garden on the site. Their original layout and many original plantings are still intact, including a full-size peach tree. Fun little-known fact: The Lotus Garden is a "cousin" of the Garden People (of "You've Got Mail" fame) in Riverside Park. After guerilla gardening that became the Lotus Garden, several of the gardeners moved into the park, and proceeded to set a high standard for making a wonderful community garden out of absolutely nothing.

The garden was honored to receive the 2024 Page Dickey Grant for American Gardens from the Garden Conservancy and was the first New York City garden ever to participate in that organization's Open Days. While often appearing in lists of "favorite secret gardens" in New York City, in 2025, the garden and its history were featured in the UK's *Homes & Gardens*, "Beyond Wild Expectations: The sky's the limit – how Upper West Side residents redefined urban gardening within their NYC rooftop oasis" (<https://www.homesandgardens.com/gardens/the-lotus-garden>). Again this year, the garden will be open to the public for Open House New York (on Sunday, October 18th).

The Lotus Garden is a 501(c)3 nonprofit, funded by keyholders beginning at \$10 (seniors). Membership renewal is annually. See <https://thelotusgarden.org/> for more information and to join/renew. Keyholders are welcome to enjoy the garden during daylight hours during the gardening season.

All are welcome every Sunday, April through November, from 1-4 pm. Gardeners are on duty during these hours to answer any questions.

Karen Gershenhorn is co-president of the Lotus Garden.



Why New York Needs an Urban Forest Plan

How a greener city helps everyone
By Sharon Waskow

Trees and green space are essential infrastructure that cool the city, improve quality of life, and reduce flooding. To further these goals, New York City debuted its first-ever Urban Forest Plan this past April. The plan outlines a unified vision for the urban forest and details strategies to expand the canopy citywide to at least 30% by 2040 (up from 23.4% as of 2021). Why are trees so important? According to the plan, trees play a critical role in reducing outdoor temperatures. Urban trees can cool city streets up to 2°F.

City trees purify the air we breathe, improve human health and well-being, beautify neighborhoods, and even help manage storm water. They can also keep us safer and more comfortable on hot days, shading and cooling us and providing protection from harmful ultra-violet sun rays. Trees in New York City provide \$260 million in benefits and services: including removing 1,100 tons of air pollution, providing energy savings equivalent to the annual use of 8,000 homes. The Urban Forest



Plan's release is a major milestone. Read more about the plan at www.urbanforestplan.nyc. However, ensuring the success of the plan requires deep public funding. Currently, there is no City funding allocated to implement the plan—and NYC Parks, the agency that manages more than half of the City's urban forest, is slated for budget cuts. The New York City Comptroller has released a report underscoring the importance of funding the urban forest. You can help support the Urban Forest Plan's implementation through advocating for its funding. Let local representatives know how important the Urban

Forest Plan is to the City's future. Sean Abreu represents our neighborhood on the City Council. Every little bit helps for a cooler, healthier New York City.

Sharon Waskow is the leader of It's Easy Being Green, a local environmental group.



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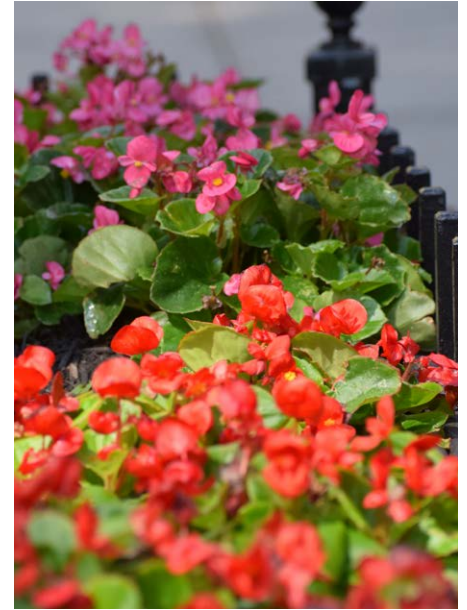
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Block Association Plants Summer Blooms

Begonias to add dash of color to tree gardens



With an assist from Block Association board members Mary Jo Gennaro and Larry Stern, on May 16 Cambridge Landscaping planted 425 individually potted 6" red and pink dragon wing begonia plants in the block's 20 tree gardens.

In the Swim Again

A miniature koi pond returns with some sizeable occupants

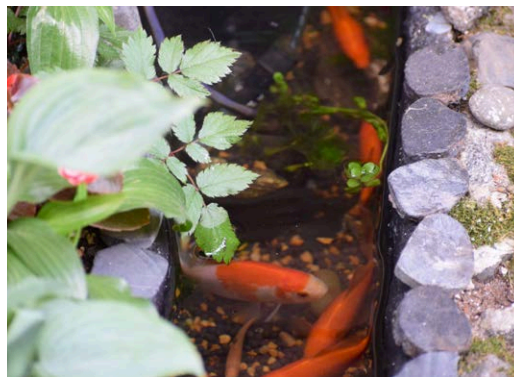
By Joyce Mann

Back by popular demand, George Flores' goldfish pond and plantings have returned for the season.

Last year George built a tiny oasis of flowers, waterfalls, serenity and goldfish in front of 304 West 104th Street, the brownstone where he lives. It instantly became a huge hit with the neighborhood, especially children. He brought the goldfish upstairs for the winter and every day enjoyed watching them grow. They now are quite robust. He says he will miss that part now that they're back outside.

Over the winter he decided to enlarge the pond but initially had a problem with a large leak. The super at 895 West End Avenue came to the rescue, recommending he use Flex Seal and follow the instructions to wait 72 hours. It worked!

George also was happy to see his perennials returning to the



surrounding garden space. Some of his plants and rocks came from behind 308 W. 104th where, thanks to the super there, the fish pond and garden have become a truly collaborative block effort.

There are 6 goldfish in the pond this year but when asked if he named them he said he didn't because he

wouldn't remember their names anyway!

He says the pond helped him meet a lot of really nice people both on the block and returning from Riverside Park, and he's looking forward to meeting even more this year.

He says he now goes by the name The Pond Guy by those who don't remember to call him George, but is enjoying the attention and the pleasure his work is bringing to all who pass by.

NEIGHBORHOOD SERVICES

BABYSITTING

Experienced and eager block resident looking to babysit days, nights, and weekends. I'm a lifelong Upper West Sider and rising University of Michigan Senior. Looking forward to connecting, and please reach me on my cell at 917-834-3603.

BLOOMINGDALE AGING IN PLACE

(BAiP) Bloominplace.org
BAiP is an intergenerational volunteer network of neighbors working to help older residents to continue living at home safely and comfortably. BAiP sponsors social and cultural activities, provides educational tools, and a helping hand for those in need through its Neighbor-to-Neighbor (N2N) program. The latter takes the form of providing help going places, running errands, light shopping, accompaniment at home or outdoors, and information. If you want to contact N2N for this kind of assistance, or to talk about volunteering, e-mail: N2N@bloominplace.org, or call: 212.842.8831 to leave a message with your contact information. Either way, a BAiP member will respond promptly.

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I am a BAiP member and licensed independent agent with the AARP/United Health Care Medicare plans. I am happy to help you understand Medicare and Medicare plan options (no cost). Please feel free to contact me at (cell) 914-419-5499 or (email) susanmschorphd@gmail.com.

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Suggestions for the block: _____

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Please deliver to our vice-president, Mary Jo Gennaro, 315 Riverside Dr., Apt. 7C, NY, NY 10025 or leave with Mary Koval: 895 West End Ave.