

# Cobble Hill Association

## State of the Organization 2022

This document is intended to summarize the activities and advocacy of the Cobble Hill Association during the calendar year of 2021-2022.

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# Administrative Updates

## Board

In November of 2021, membership approved by-law amendments that expanded the Board from 7 to 11 members, staggered board member terms, and dispensed with any board member having specific responsibility for membership or communications. In May of 2022, membership elected the first new board under this scheme.

President: Amanda Sue Nichols

Vice President: Daniel Carr

Treasurer: Jonathan Minkoff

Secretary: Bennette Kramer

Toby Cecchini: Director, two-year term

Joseph Finnerty: Director, two-year term

Allie Peterson: Director, two-year term

Jillian Schiavi: Director, two-year term

Ezana Bocresion: Director, one-year term

Rebecca Johson: Director, one-year term

Josh Vogel: Director, one-year term

Not long after the election, Jillian Schiavi moved away, and as pursuant to the by-laws, the Board filled the vacant two-year director position with Brook Gesser. In October of 2022, long-time board member Josh Vogel was required by the City to resign from the Board because of a conflict with his new role as Department of City Planning Liaison to the City's BQE Task Force. The Board has not yet filled his slot.

## Administration

The CHA's physical systems for managing membership and sharing information are outdated. Since being elected in May of 2022, the CHA Board has been auditing these systems and working on ways to improve them. In calendar year 2023, the CHA hopes to roll out:

- A new, easier to use website that optimizes integration with our social media, as well as our membership, email, and financial programs.
- A new program for maintaining an up-to-date membership database and simplifying the process for renewal.
- Improvements to the membership program including new benefits.
- A new commercial membership program to strengthen ties between the community and local businesses.

## Financial

The Cobble Hill Association is made up of two organizations

- **Cobble Hill Association (CHA)**, is a 501(c)(4) used to collect membership fees with a focus on running the organization's administration, performing studies, advocating for the community, and supporting neighborhood causes.
- **Cobble Hill Community Fund (CHCF)**, a 501(c)(3) was formed by the CHA expressly for the purpose of collecting donations to benefit the Cobble Hill community. Donations are often targeted towards specific initiatives. Historically, the largest donations go towards supporting Cobble Hill Park.

**CHA** generates income through membership dues. Through the period of **6/1/22 to 12/31/22** CHA has received **\$4,942.76** in membership dues, net of processing fees. **CHA** contributes to many efforts. Through the period of 6/1/22 to 12/31/22 CHA has made various contributions totaling **\$9,854.45**. **CHA** began the term with a balance of **\$69,788.27** and ended the year with a balance of **\$64,861.23**. Below is a more detailed breakdown.

<b>Total Membership Dues</b>	<b>4,927.41</b>
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<b>Expenses</b>	
Cobble Hill Park Concerts	1,500.00
Court Street Trash Cans	5,293.50
Halloween Parade	1,500.00
Post Office Box	216.00
Processing Fees - NY Charities	50.00
Processing Fees - Square	7.55
Quickbooks Online	27.22
Window Painting	1,170.24
Zoom	89.94
<b>Total Expenses</b>	<b>9,854.45</b>

<b>Total Gain or Loss</b>	<b>(4,927.04)</b>
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**CHCF** generates income through charitable donations. Through the period of **6/1/22 to 12/31/22** **CHCF** has received **\$33,450.00** in donations. **CHCF** contributes to many efforts. Through the

period of **6/1/22 to 12/31/22** CHCF has made various contributions totaling **\$10,600.17**. CHCF began the term with a balance of **\$76,949.13** and ended the year with a balance of **\$99,888.96**. Below is a more detailed breakdown.

<b>Total Donations</b>	<b>33,540.00</b>
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<b>Expenses</b>	
Park Maintenance	7,423.52
Dog Park Maintenance	2,218.41
Atlantic Antic	260.00
Filing Fees	150.00
Processing Fees	308.72
Software	239.52
<b>Total Expenses</b>	<b>10,600.17</b>

<b>Total Gain or Loss</b>	<b>22,939.83</b>
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# Community Life

One of the primary roles of the CHA is assisting community members with quality-of-life issues and organizing activities to serve the community. Below is a summary of our efforts in 2022:

## Community Service

- Community members frequently email the CHA with questions or concerns about quality-of-life issues in the neighborhood. If possible, the CHA works with City agencies and elected officials to help address any problems. Below are a few examples of things the CHA accomplished for community members:
  - Coordinated with the NYPD to address the problem of cars not moving for street cleaning on alternate side parking days
  - Worked with NYU and Madison Realty Capital to help facilitate the removal of an abandoned trash bin that had become a rat breeding ground
  - Researched and responded to a question about the rules surrounding the City's placement of 5G towers on street lights
  - Helped an author obtain a photograph of the Second Unitarian Church that previously stood on the site of Cobble Hill Park
- September 22, 2022, the Cobble Hill Health Center presented the CHA with an "Advocacy Tribute" award in recognition of the organization's support of the CHHC residents and staff during the height of the Covid-19 Pandemic. This award reflected the work of many community members and past CHA boards members, who, among other things, helped source PPE, fundraised, organized meals for the staff, clapped and played music during every shift change, held a concert in front of the CHHC, and purchased a holiday gift of CHHC-branded hoodies for all 500 staff members.
- The CHA used its considerable reach to publicize other community service events and activities, including Stoop Sales for Ukraine, the PS29 Rummage Sale, and the Winter Social meet ups in Cobble Hill Park.

## Community Events

### The Cobble Hill Music in the Park Summer Concert Series

The Cobble Hill Music In the Park Concert Series took place on the first three Tuesdays in July in Cobble Hill Park. Each concert was attended by at least 75 people, if not more. Despite some questionable weather, all three concerts went off as planned. The lineup this year was:

- July 5 – Willie Martinez Quartet
- July 12 – Soapbox Sound

- July 19 – Papa Vega’s Dream Shadows

## Cobble Hill Halloween Window Painting

On October 29th, the CHA once again partnered with Mason Lane Art Advisory Services to host this wildly popular community event in which more than 75 local children (1st–8th grade) create their own Halloween-themed painting on the windows of participating Court Street businesses. Mason Lane recruits the businesses, preps the windows, handles registration, orders supplies, and arranges for the window cleaning. The CHA assisted with organizing, underwriting and advertising.

## Cobble Hill Halloween Parade

For over 20 years the Cobble Hill Association has organized the now iconic Cobble Hill Halloween Parade (the one exception being in 2020). In preparation for the big day, the CHA obtained all the necessary permits from Parks and the NYPD, arranged for evening street closures for trick-or-treating, and decorated Cobble Hill Park for all to enjoy. After a successful performance last year, the CHA decided to bring back the Brass Queens to lead the procession. This all-female brass band did not disappoint, coming in costume and taking the time to play in Cobble Hill Park before and after the parade. As for the parade itself, we didn’t take a count, but it was very well attended and continues to be THE Halloween event in Brooklyn.

# Information Distribution

The CHA interacts with the community through multiple means of communication. Through these platforms, the CHA shares information on, among other things, local construction, traffic, safety, upcoming events, and local elections (see below for more detail on our election-related content). We even did a public service announcement on Spotted Lantern Flies! Below is a summary of our reach and interactions in 2022:

## Outreach by the Numbers

<b>Means of Communication</b>	<b># Reached</b>	<b>Summary of Content</b>	<b># of Communications in 2022</b>
CHA General Newsletter	1,634 subscribers	Neighborhood updates and community event information	30
CHA Education Newsletter	117	Education news and resources for public schools in District 15	21
Facebook	1,735	Neighborhood updates, community event information, articles of interest	58
Twitter	1,402	Engaging with community members and other community organizations through tweets and re-tweets, posting neighborhood updates, community event information, and photos.	92

The Cobble Hill Park Committee and Cobble Hill Dog Park Committee send out specialized newsletters to their volunteers.

## Election Information

While the CHA is able to help the community directly in a myriad of ways, there are limits to what can be accomplished without the support of our elected officials. Thus, we view having an informed and engaged electorate crucial to our mission. During the last election cycle, the CHA used its reach to keep residents informed about the election, sending out 4 newsletters and 8 facebook posts with information on how, where, and when to vote. Additionally, the CHA created content to help voters understand who/what they were voting for. Specifically, the CHA:

- Created and posted a Q&A of Cobble Hill specific questions to the State Senate Candidates for District 26.
- Compiled information on the 15 candidates running for the U.S. House of Representatives in the newly-drawn District 15, including bios, their key issues, relevant articles on the race, and links to recorded debates.
- Summarized four proposals on the ballot November 6th.



# Committees

The CHA is still working on rebuilding the committee structure that existed prior to the pandemic. Much of the work previously done by committee is being handled by individual volunteers or Board members. For example, Margaret Kelley continues to provide the community with important education updates in her capacity as Education Committee Chair, and Jerry Armer continues to interface with the 76th Precinct as chair of the Safety & 76th Precinct Committee. The Cobble Hill Tree Fund, though not an official CHA committee, also remains active. During the past year, there were four active CHA committees: Nominating, Cobble Hill Park, Neighborhood Beautification, and Cobble Hill Dog Park.

## Cobble Hill Park Committee

The Cobble Hill Park Committee is a standing CHA committee, which is responsible for maintaining Cobble Hill Park. Liz Velikonja chairs the committee, along with a dedicated group of volunteers who perform weekly maintenance and organize volunteer spruce-up events. A summary of the volunteer maintenance work and other park maintenance work is below:

### Volunteer Events

- Regular weekly volunteer shifts: 251 hours
- Weekend “spruce up” events: April 9 & May 14 (19 volunteers, 39 hours); June 18<sup>th</sup> (10 volunteers, 31 hours)
- Mulchfest support: Mulchfest occurred over one weekend (1/8-1/9). On 1/8 Gale Synott of the Cobble Hill Tree Fund supervised mulching of over 770 trees. On 1/9 the Parks Department provided the chipper. The committee organized volunteers on both of these days to help bag the non-mulch-able donations (wreaths, garlands, etc) and move trees toward the chipper. A total of about 15 people were involved over the two Saturdays, with a total of about 25 volunteer hours.
- Two youth volunteers who worked independently on weekdays to complete their community service requirement for high school (2 volunteers, 15 hours)

### Other work in the Parks

- The willow fence on the perimeter of the granite planter was installed on 3/19.
- The annual sprinkler maintenance appointment took place on April 23<sup>rd</sup> with a follow-up appointment on May 16<sup>th</sup>. There were two breaks in underground sprinkler mains in the park which were difficult and costly to repair. Zone 3 of the Park was without water until May 16<sup>th</sup> because of this.

- The Park canopy was pruned by Alec Baxt during three visits (4/14, 5/25 and 6/8). On June 8<sup>th</sup> the dynamic cable in the giant elm tree (mid-park, south side) was replaced. The existing cable was estimated to be between 15 and 20 years old and in need of replacement. The new cable should help to stabilize this Park-defining tree.
- Volunteers installed a collection of sturdy cast iron plant supports in a variety of locations in the park—these are more durable and less unsightly than the current collection of tomato cages supporting plants. We hope to add more in a future year.

## Partnership with Parks

In addition to the maintenance of the Park, the CHA also works with the Parks Department to address other community issues that arise in the Park. This year the CHA:

- Worked with the Parks Department and local businesses to ensure that proprietors of children’s music classes were complying with Parks Department Regulations on sound amplification and permit requirements.
- Advocated for the Parks Department to make fixes to the slide so it could be reopened. Volunteers routinely applied tape to a broken stair and the slide to allow the slide to remain in use pending Parks repairs.
- Advocated for the Parks Department to repair the spider, where the eyes had rusted to such a dangerous degree that there were sharp holes. Volunteers routinely taped up the hole to allow the spider to remain in use pending Park repairs.
- Continued discussion with the Parks Department about rehabilitating the grass on the berm.
- Initiated discussions with the Parks Department about replacing the existing trash cans.

## Cobble Hill Dog Park (Upper Van Voorhees Park)

In February of 2022, when the dream of an official dog park at Upper Van Voorhees started to become a real possibility, the CHA created a special committee. Fashioned after the Cobble Hill Park Committee, the Cobble Hill Dog Park Committee maintains a separate email list of volunteers and a website, maintains the dog park, and organizes volunteer events. Linda Edwards chairs the committee. The CHA provides funding through the CHCF for maintenance, and continues to advocate with the City for an official designation and capital improvements. In 2022 over 200 people had signed up for the mailing list, and the committee held 3 maintenance events with between 10 and 20 volunteers. With respect to improvements, the CHA ordered range fencing for the perimeter of the park, which was necessary for the safety of dogs big and small. The Parks Department installed the fencing on November 11th.

## Neighborhood Beautification

In early Spring of 2022, the CHA launched an ad hoc committee dedicated to Neighborhood Beautification (affectionately referred to as “Team Trash”). The CHA purchased trash grabbers, which were handed out during two street cleaning events.

Over the summer of 2022, the CHA jointly applied with the Smith Street BID and the Brooklyn Chamber of Commerce for a grant to cover the purchase of new trash bins on Court Street. Despite our best efforts, we did not receive the grant. We pursued a number of additional avenues, but because we are not a BID (Business Improvement District), and had difficulty getting information on the discretionary funding process, we could not figure out a way to get these bins without purchasing them ourselves. Thus, in October of 2022, the CHA launched a fundraiser for our neighborhood beautification efforts, including the purchase of 4 new trash bins for Court Street. Our total goal was \$12,000, with \$6,000 coming from the community and a \$6,000 match from the Cobble Hill Community Fund. We are happy to say we hit our goal in less than two weeks! The CHA immediately submitted an application to DSNY to approve the locations for the new bins. DSNY granted this application on November 29th. The CHA has ordered the bins, which are set to arrive at the end of January 2023.

## Nominating Committee

Chaired by Susan Baxt, the Nominating Committee was tasked with interviewing and selecting a slate of candidates for the CHA Board to be elected at the May meeting. The committee, composed of 5 community members, met with individuals and conducted interviews. After selecting the slate, the Nominating Committee also took on the task of publicizing the May 2022 Annual meeting.

# Advocacy

The CHA advocates for the Community on city-wide and hyper local issues. Below are summaries on the following efforts over the past year: (1) Reduction of Traffic on Clinton Street, (2) Upper Van Voorhees Dog Park, (3) LICH Site Development, and (4) BQE.

## Traffic on Clinton Street

After extensive coordination with the Department of Transportation over several months, the CHA was able to improve traffic flow on Clinton Street – which had become a bottleneck for vehicles approaching Atlantic Ave - and improve pedestrian safety at intersections. This was achieved by modifying the signal timings at seven Clinton Street intersections to coordinate with the Atlantic Avenue signal. Pedestrian signal advances were also implemented to allow pedestrians to safely cross before lights turn green for vehicles.

## Upper Van Voorhees Dog Park

Following the closure of Long Island College Hospital in 2014, residents of Cobble Hill, Carroll Gardens, Brooklyn Heights, and Boerum Hill began using Upper Van Voorhees Park, located on Hicks Street between Amity and Pacific Streets, as an “unofficial” dog park. While the Parks Department has graciously allowed the community to continue this use for nearly a decade, beginning in December 2021, the CHA began the process to officially codify it, both to ensure it remains a dog run in the future and to obtain much needed improvements. Through cooperation with the Community Board 6 Parks Committee and the NYC Parks Department, the CHA was able to gain site approval, demonstrate community support, and demonstrate the existence of a community group willing and able to maintain the dog park (all three of which are required by the City). A more detailed description of our efforts are available upon request.

Although we have hit a bit of a hurdle on obtaining capital funding to improve the park, in 2023 we plan to continue our efforts to receive an official dog park designation and make non-capital improvements.

## LICH Site Development

The CHA represents the interests of the community on the LICH Construction Task Force. Led by Councilmember Shahana Hanif, the Task Force brings together relevant stakeholders, including agencies (Parks, DOT, DOB), developers, and state elected officials. In these meetings, we receive updates on the various projects and work together to solve issues that impact the community.

## NYU

The tower crane came down over the summer of 2022, and NYU is now mostly working on the interior of its building. The expected completion date is Spring 2023. Once the new building opens, the existing ER on Amity Street will shut down (after a required 30-day overlap period). The most significant inconvenience to the community arose from the traffic and constant sidewalk/lane closures from NYU's work on the underground connection of its stormwater systems and utility connections. The CHA successfully advocated for an option to which NYU agreed that the utility contractors perform the majority of the work at night to minimize interruptions to traffic. Work that would cause significant noise would be accomplished during the day. Unfortunately, DOT rejected all night work and provided a schedule for daytime work only on both weekends and weekdays. The CHA and NYU also worked together to secure a safe walkway for pedestrians on Hicks Street between Atlantic and Pacific Streets. Because the utility work would require NYU to close the sidewalk on the east side of Hicks Street, NYU had to convince DOT to require reopening of the sidewalk on the west side of the street. The CHA sent a memorandum in support of NYU's effort in November 2021. For reasons outside of their control, it took NYU far longer than the 12 weeks they anticipated to complete the utility work.

## 347 Henry Street (5 River Park)

As many may recall, Fortis stopped construction at 347 Henry Street in December of 2021. First there was a stop work order in place, and then Fortis ran into financial difficulties, which prevented them from restarting construction. During this time, the incomplete pool filled with standing water (creating a significant health hazard), the incomplete sidewalk in front of the Henry Street Sitting Park became a trash dump/rat palace and prevented the opening of the Park, and the whistling balconies continued to rage. Despite the lack of reliable communication from Fortis, the Cobble Hill Association, in partnership with our elected officials and the Parks Department, continued to push on all of the outstanding issues with the building. We also found

great partners in our newest neighbors, the residents of 347 Henry Street, who were just as affected by Fortis's delinquency, if not more.

Working together, we were able to get the pool regularly drained. When workers returned to the site over the summer, we were able to get them to prioritize finishing the sidewalk and opening the Sitting Park. While in 2022 there were significant questions as to who bore the ultimate responsibility for the Sitting Park and Henry Street Playgrounds, the residents of 347 Henry worked to maintain the landscaping, engage exterminators to deal with the rat problem, and open/close the park. The issues regarding the outstanding items relating to the Sitting Park and schedule will be addressed in the Parks/Playgrounds section below.

One area where the CHA has not been able to make progress is the whistling balconies. The remediation identified by Fortis in June of 2021 is glass panels that will be affixed to the balconies to prevent the wind from going through the banisters and making the screeching noise. Those glass panels have been physically on site for one year. Fortis continues to delay and provide inaccurate timelines on when the panels will be put up.

## 350 Hicks Street & 91 Pacific Street (River Park 1 and 2)

As noted above, Fortis ran into significant financial difficulties with this project. As a result, they were forced to sell the buildings located at 350 Hicks and 91 Pacific Street, both of which have been untouched empty pits for nearly two years. The purchaser was their lender, Madison Realty Capital, which is also a developer.

Madison Realty immediately reached out to the CHA and attended the November Task Force meeting. They are committed to being good community partners. However, even the best community partners cannot completely prevent the negative externalities of a large construction project. There will be noise. There will be street closures and potential playground closures. In 2023 the CHA will continue to advocate on behalf of the community to minimize these negative impacts.

The current plan is as follows:

350 Hicks Street: Start work Q2 2023, with construction anticipated to last 24 months. While Madison Realty said there will be no changes to the height, there will be changes to the exterior design.

91 Pacific Street: Start work Q3 2023, with construction anticipated to last 30 months. While there are no changes to the height, there will be changes to the exterior design.

## The H-Building (River Park 3 and 4)

This building remains in limbo. Pursuant to its agreement with the State, Fortis's obligation to close on the H-building will arise after NYU completes and opens its new facility. While it is our understanding that this was always the plan, given the recent turnover of 350 Hicks and 91 Pacific, the CHA is not sure whether Fortis still plans to complete the purchase of the H-building.

## Sitting Park and Henry Street Playgrounds

The Sitting Park, Henry Street Playgrounds, and Pacific Street Easement are what are known as "Publicly Owned Private Spaces" or POPS. They were created when the City gave LICH the space at 350 Hicks to build the parking garage on land that was part of a City Park. It fell on LICH to maintain and operate the spaces for the benefit of the public, an obligation which passed on to Fortis when they purchased the site, and is supposed to pass onto any successor.

The two playgrounds have fallen into disrepair - the worst being the Tot Playground. Rotting wood caused pieces of the bridge to fall off, so that the bridge has been boarded up since May. Rotting wood has caused other holes on equipment, including almost an entire side of one of the slides. A loose cord with a screw on the end came loose in May of 2021. The CHA applied a temporary fix after being told Fortis would make it a priority to fix the part. At the urging of the Parks Department and the CHA, in December of 2022, Madison Realty Capital began the work of fixing the park. They replaced the rotting wood on the sides and the cords that help children climb the ladders. They also installed some parts that Fortis had ordered but had not installed. Additional work on the remaining issues is expected to be performed in 2023.

While open, the Sitting Park is not complete. There are no trash cans, the water fountain doesn't work, it is missing removable furniture, and there is no sign indicating that the park is a PUBLIC park. Furthermore, the Sitting Park should be open from 6am to 1am, and yet often is locked or open only at random intervals. Although Fortis had said that it had ordered the furniture and it had been delivered, they had not done so. The CHA continues to advocate with Madison Realty Capital and the Parks Department to address these issues.

## BQE

Throughout most of 2022, the CHA continued to participate in The Coalition for the BQE Transformation (BQET), an organization we helped create, that brought together numerous stakeholders throughout the surrounding neighborhoods to collectively advocate for BQE repair and re-envisioning.

In September 2022, Eric Adams and NYC DOT announced a two-part initiative for a long-term fix of the City-owned section of the BQE: (1) “BQE Central” from Atlantic Avenue to Sands Street (including the triple-cantilever) and (2) “BQE North and South,” where the focus was on looking for strategies to reconnect other communities along the corridor. Simultaneously, the DOT launched a community engagement process “designed to invite a wide range of voices to work towards projects that improve communities while prioritizing technical and fiscal feasibility.” The CHA, independently and through its involvement as a founding member of the BQET, continued to advocate for Cobble Hill as part of this process.

In addition, the City selected the CHA to participate in its Community Visioning Council, which advises NYC DOT and its consultants on engagement content and strategies, and will meet on a regular basis throughout the visioning process to discuss emerging concerns, plan for future engagement, process information from previous engagement, and share feedback. Former CHA President Amy Breedlove is the CHA’s representative on the CVC.

The CHA’s long held position is that the BQE should be two-lanes, which, while it may cause short-term traffic increases, has been consistently shown to lead to a decrease in car use and traffic congestion. The CHA is also continuing to advocate for decking the trench, and is exploring potential opportunities for re-connecting Upper and Lower Van Voorhees parks, which would reunite Cobble Hill with the Columbia Street Waterfront, and allow for safer on and off ramps to the BQE.