

CITY COUNCIL  
CITY OF NEW YORK

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TRANSCRIPT OF THE MINUTES

Of the

COMMITTEE ON PARKS AND RECREATION

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September 17, 2013

Start: 2:07 p.m.

Recess: 5:55 p.m.

HELD AT: 250 Broadway  
Committee Rm, 16th Fl.

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1 COMMITTEE ON PARKS AND RECREATION

2 CHAIRPERSON MARK-VIVERITO: ...maintaining  
3 the City's park system, and just to be clear to all  
4 of the colleagues and those participating here  
5 today, the scope is going to be limited to issues  
6 relating to the use of conservancies that will not  
7 focus on private events at parks. Issues relating  
8 to private events in parks will be discussed at an  
9 upcoming hearing in early October. So I want to  
10 make sure that everyone please stays on topic.

11 As a brief history, the use of private  
12 nonprofit organizations to run parks started in the  
13 late seventies and early eighties when the city was  
14 going through a fiscal crisis and its parks were in  
15 a serious state of disrepair. As a result, the  
16 Parks Department started to enter into agreements  
17 with nonprofits to contribute and take on the  
18 responsibilities of maintaining certain parks. The  
19 Central Park Conservancy was one of the first of  
20 these major public-private partnerships and served  
21 as a model for the conservancy structure going  
22 forward. The conservancy has an agreement with  
23 DPR, Department of Parks, and has various  
24 responsibilities including landscape maintenance,  
25 replacement of dead trees and plants, reseeding,

resodding, graffiti removal, cleaning of playgrounds and facilities, maintaining and repairing structures and monuments, hosting events, etc.

As the success of CPC became apparent, the conservancy model spread to other large parks including Prospect Park, Bronx River Park, Battery, Randall's Island, and more recently the High Line to name a few. The conservancies that run these parks have agreements with DPR to run certain day-to-day operations, though DPR is ultimately responsible and can terminate these agreements at any time for any purpose.

According to DPR, there are currently about twenty conservancy alliances that have agreements with the department to assume some responsibility for maintaining or operating certain aspects of various parks. In addition to conservancies that run and maintain parks, there are also nonprofits that may also be termed conservancy, alliance or friends of groups. These groups are more involved with conducting programming such as volunteer events, community building, cultural, sports, and educational



programming. They usually don't have agreements with DPR to operate parks.

Though the park system has improved a great deal since the fiscal crises of decades past, there have been many concerns raised regarding the apparent rising trend of conservancy-run parks.

One of the major concerns is whether this practice results in a disparity between parks in affluent areas and parks in more middle or lower income areas. Conservancies are privately-funded, and in the case of the large destination parks have greater access to wealthy donors while parks without conservancies struggle to attract private money and have to rely solely on public funds.

The question is whether the increased use of conservancies will result in more privatization and less public investment. While some have argued that increasing the number of public-private partnerships has been one way to augment DPR's diminished budget, questions remain as to whether this has resulted in replacing rather than augmenting public funds over the long term.

So at this hearing, we will examine other issues that have been raised regarding

conservancies including the structure and apparent lack of uniformity among conservancy agreements, the allocation of revenues from concessions of various conservancy-run parks, and whether any new conservancies are currently being planned.

So I look forward to examining this issue in greater depth today. Hope this hearing will result in creating a clear account of how conservancies operate through our park system and also to see if there's any recommendations on changes that can be made moving forward. So I'd like to welcome the administration, the advocates that have come to testify today. I see our commissioner is here and her staff, so I welcome them. And we'll jump right into allowing for the testimony of our Commissioner Veronica White, and maybe you want to introduce who else is here.

COMMISSIONER WHITE: Thank you, Chair Mark-Viverito. I'm Veronica White, Commissioner of the New York City Department of Parks and Recreation. I'm joined here today by a number of our senior staff. With me on this panel, First Deputy Commissioner Liam Kavanaugh, Deputy Commissioner for Community Outreach Larry Scott

Blackmon, and our Director of Government Relations Karen Becker. Additionally, we have Assistant Commissioner for Marketing and Revenue Betsy Smith and several of our park administrators who you will be hearing from later this afternoon.

Thank you for allowing me to speak for you today about conservancies as well as similar entities and the important role public-private partnerships play in parks across New York City. Thanks to your advocacy and hard work, the Parks Department has the highest adopted operating budget in its history, and let me repeat that. Thanks to you, the Chair and to the Mayor and to the Budget Director and to my boss Patty Harris, the Parks Department has the highest adopted operating budget in its history, and for that I'm extraordinarily thankful.

With more than 29,000 acres, equivalent to 14 percent of the land in New York City, the Parks Department works with civic-minded partners to augment services in parks across the five boroughs. These partners act as cheerleaders and benefactors of particular parks, and they play an important role in the success of the city's parks

through their collaboration with the Parks Department.

The largest role our partners play is in cultivating and engaging volunteers who give their time, energy and enthusiasm to care for parks throughout the city. In calendar year 2012, volunteers dedicated 1.5 million hours to parks across the five boroughs facilitated by a diverse group of partners such as the Bronx River Alliance and the Friends of Kaiser Park in Coney Island.

These partners include conservancies, alliances, funds, trusts, foundations, friends of groups and other entities that are found in all five boroughs. The names they choose do not indicate a particular legal status, mission or funding source. What is most important to all these groups, whether it is the Astoria Park Alliance, the Greenbelt Conservancy in Staten Island, the Fort Tryon Park Trust or the City Parks Foundation is that they all share the same goals, to assist the Parks Department in making New York City parks the best they can be and to encourage others to become involved with this effort.

Our not-for-profit partners serve to augment the work of the men and women of the Parks Department and do not replace city services or authority. It is the Parks Department that sets all the policies for all New York City parks regardless of any public-private partnership that might support a park. It is the Parks Department that approves every capital project, determines and approves every concession on park land, and issues every permit affecting park land. These facts often are misunderstood and is important to recognize that while the Parks Department coordinates closely with its partners and gratefully accepts all assistance, it does not cede its authority to determine policy or activity on city property.

Some parks require specialized focus due to their size, particular needs and other challenges and opportunities. Under Mayor Koch, Parks Commissioner Gordon Davis, recognizing that certain large parks needed comprehensive coordination by Parks Department staff, created the position of Park Administrator. Currently, there are 23 park administrators reporting directly to

their respective borough commissioner. Park administrators focus on daily maintenance and operations, develop park programming, cultivate relationships with local businesses, community groups and government entities, and work with our Capital Project Division on projects in the parks they oversee.

In many cases, park administrators work closely with public and private partners to accomplish these tasks and goals. Where there is a nonprofit affiliated with the park, they work to raise funds and develop programs in consultation with the organization and the borough commissioner.

Public-private partnerships are not new to New York City. In 1945, a public-private partnership was formed to host a Christmas tree lighting ceremony to honor soldiers lost in World War II. This became the genesis for what is now known as the fund for Park Avenue which to this day holds their annual holiday lighting and provides temporary public art installations from 54th to 86th Streets. Their workers replicated and served as a model for other groups such as the Broadway Mall Association which formed in 1980 to help care

for the malls along Broadway in the Upper West Side through Harlem to Washington Heights. The founding of the Central Park Conservancy in 1980 and the Prospect Park Alliance in 1987 set the stage for the revitalization of parks across the city. This revival of New York City parks was made possible by an increase in the involvement of citizens, volunteers and advocates.

Our partners have assisted us by planting trees during our Million Trees Biannual Planting Day events, by providing volunteers for activities during the partnership for parks' It's My Park Day, and I've left cards for all of you hoping you'll come on October 19th for two big days for Partnership for Parks and for Million Trees, and they continue to play an important role in our recovery from Hurricane Sandy. The Parks Department is proud of the work of our partners including many of you who have participated in and sponsored service and recreational events in New York City parks throughout the year.

A contractual relationship is not required for the Parks Department to collaborate with a nonprofit organization. However, some of

our partners do have a contract with the city. We have active agreements with partners large and small from little leagues that care for and maintain the ball fields they play on to larger nonprofit organizations that assist with horticultural maintenance to business improvement districts and cultural organizations such as botanical gardens and zoos. These partners have agreed to maintain some aspect of city land, and in these cases we feel it is prudent for the city to have a contractual arrangement to clarify the respective roles and responsibilities.

Our most comprehensive contractual relationship is with the Central Park Conservancy. With over 40 million visitors a year, there is no other park that attracts the same volume of users as Central Park. The Parks Department has a procurement contract with the Central Park Conservancy where the Conservancy has agreed to perform routine maintenance and repairs in Central Park, raise funds for the preservation of Central Park and program events in Central Park. The Central Park Conservancy also agreed to perform routine maintenance and repairs of the fountains at



Bowling Green, City Hall Park, Mannahatta Park, the fountains and landscaping at Frederick Douglas Circle and Columbus Circle, landscaping at Duke Ellington Circle, the Broadway Mall's Green Street from West 57th to West 59th, Morningside Park, St. Nicholas Park, Jackie Robinson Park, and Marcus Garvey Park.

All Central Park Conservancy activities are subject to the Parks Department's approval and the Parks Commissioner sits on the board of the Conservancy. In turn, as part of the city's obligation to the park, the city has committed to contributing specific funds to further support the conservancy's maintenance efforts in the park and through a separate agreement to provide capital funding to assist the conservancy in providing needed capital enhancements in the park.

Central Park serves as a model for urban parks worldwide. The conservancy provides technical, management and fund raising advice to park systems around the country and the world.

With eight to ten million visitors each year, Prospect Park is another example of a landmark city park in which a nonprofit

organization supplements the work of the Parks Department subject to our approval and oversight. The Parks Department has a maintenance and operation agreement with the Prospect Park Alliance where the alliance has agreed to perform routine maintenance and repairs in Prospect Park, raise funds for the preservation of Prospect Park, and program events and services in the park. The Parks Commissioner is a member of the alliance's board, and all Prospect Park Alliance activities in the park are subject to Parks approval regardless of whether there is a contract. In all cases, it has been civic-minded individuals within the public, private and nonprofit sectors that have taken the initiative to step forward and engage with local parks improving the quality of life throughout New York City. Most notable are Betsy Barlow Rogers and Tupper Thomas, city employees and the first administrators of Central Park and Prospect Park respectively who founded the Central Park Conservancy and the Prospect Park Alliance.

New partnerships have their roots in the needs of the agency and the interest of specialized or focused groups. Each one has unique

aspects reflecting the character and goals of the properties they are founded to support. For example, the Natural Areas Conservancy was formed in 2012 to expand the Parks Department's restoration and conservation work in the city's natural areas. A little known fact is that 10,000 or roughly one-third of our parkland are natural areas. These areas, and it's not meant to be a pun, have no natural local constituency so the Natural Areas Conservancy sponsors programs that enhance the capacity of the Parks Department to study and manage the natural areas to provide the greatest value for all New Yorkers.

Another example of an emerging partner is the Flushing Meadows Corona Park Alliance which was recently conceived. Spearheaded by Council Member Julissa Ferreras and the surrounding community to bring additional resources, volunteers and attention to this jewel of the Queens Park System. Conservancies have been at the forefront of innovative management and emerging trends and urban park development for over 30 years. The Central Park Conservancy is, of course, the best known of our partners, but many other groups make

important contributions to parks throughout the city. The Bryant Park Corporation uses extensive research into the social dynamics of public spaces to develop programs, events and attractions that have been emulated by parks all over the world. The Prospect Park Alliance Pioneer and Urban Ecosystem Preservation with the award winning Ravine Project that saved Brooklyn's last forest. The Greenbelt Conservancy helped preserve thousands of acres of public and private open space on Staten Island and kept our Native Plants Center alive at a time when we were unable to sustain it in the late 1990s.

Socrates Sculpture Park and Madison Square Park both bring public art into the daily life of New Yorkers in very different yet equally compelling settings. In Queens, the Forest Park Trust expanded its scope to neighboring Highland Park bringing events, programs and activities to the East New York and Cypress Hills communities while also reviving the Historic Children's Garden. The Open Space Alliance takes a different approach, providing an umbrella organization for all parks in

the North Brooklyn communities of Greenpoint and Williamsburg.

In addition to saving dozens of community gardens, the New York Restoration Project took an undeveloped site along the Harlem River Drive and turned it into a vibrant destination for the youth of Washington Heights and Inwood.

The Lower East Side Ecology Center, long a leader in sustainable practices, offers composting, environmental education, and stewardship in East River Park. Building on a model that the City Council established with the passage of Local Law 55, which created the Adopt-A-Park program in 2003, the Parks Department plans to launch a citywide campaign so that anyone can contribute to the care and vitality of NYC parks. Local Law 55 was created to establish a source of funding through community involvement and direct financial giving. The council's Adopt-A-Park model allows anyone to give to parks on a broad level, and beginning this fall we'll be launching a citywide fundraising campaign in partnership with the City Parks Foundation to continue to expand upon these goals.

The City Parks Foundation is a public-private partnership that provides free and accessible arts, sports, education and community building programs within New York City parks. Currently CPF raises money to support programs in parks across the city and in some cases acts as a conduit for funding and fundraising for a number of our partner organizations, and we're excited to partner with them on this new campaign. The Parks Department supports CPF by providing in kind support in the form of contributed personnel, office space, and computer telecommunication equipment and services. In FY14, the Council contributed over \$155,000 dollars which when combined with private fundraising efforts, special events and corporate sponsorships, enabled CPF to teach 12,000 children how to play tennis and golf, participate in track and field, and provide education programs to over 6,000 students and professional development teachers. CPF also entertained over 110,000 New Yorkers of all ages with free cultural programs and worked with thousands of individuals to create vibrant, clean and active parks in underserved communities.

While we welcome citywide fundraising efforts, financial contributions cannot replace the priceless dedication of our volunteers. Because we appreciate all forms of support for our parks, we encourage all New Yorkers to join us by becoming active and becoming involved in their local parks. They can join an existing group or start a new one by working with our Partnerships for Parks which is a public-private initiative between New York City parks and the City Parks Foundation. Through programs like People Make Parks which is facilitated by Partnership for Parks, community groups are provided with tools and resources to effectively contribute to their local park. No group is too large or too small to make an impact.

Seeing is really believing in all of our parks and we invite you all to come and see the amazing work we have done with our partners. You may have seen our ad campaign on busses and subways encouraging all New Yorkers to Go Park. Go Park is an awareness campaign that highlights the diversity of New York City Parks resources, encourages exploration and builds pride for New York City parks. The goal is to encourage New Yorkers to

use, care for, and support their parks. The specific campaign themes promote park resources, highlight unique park features and reinforce agency priorities. This campaign highlights another example of one of our many public-private partnerships and we thank NYC and Company, Infinia and Met Life for their *pro bono* work and support, and it's missing an I in Infinia and since they gave me so much free help, I'm gonna put it in. I hope everyone else will too. Infinia and Met Life for their *pro bono* work and support. I'd like to take a moment to share a few slides with you from our social media campaign.

Before the weather gets cold, come take a canoe trip along the Bronx River with Park Administrator Linda Cox to see the revitalized river. I know several Council Members joined us for a tour Freshkills Park with Park Administrator Eloise Hirsh, but come and join us for the biannual Freshkills Sneak Peek on September 29th. Go explore.

And this fall we'll be cutting a ribbon on the Lakeside Center, a true public-private partnership which is a \$74 million reconstruction



of the area around Wollman Rink and Prospect Park that, when opened, will include two new ice skating rinks and one roller skating rink, a promenade along the lakeshore, expanded picnic areas, walkways and open lawns with five new acres of green space and 26 acres of renovated parkland. This vision of creating a year-round destination and revitalized historical landscaping was conceived by the Prospect Park Alliance and we welcome you to tour the restored area with Park Administrator and Alliance president Emily Lloyd.

These are but a few examples of all the great things that are happening in our parks with the assistance of our many partners. Conservancies of all types have helped develop brand new parks in Staten Island, restored natural areas around the Bronx River, and reconstructed stark and established portions of parks in Brooklyn.

I thank you for the opportunity to come before you this afternoon, and I'd be happy to answer any questions you might have.

CHAIRPERSON MARK-VIVERITO: Thank you, Commissioner. I just want to recognized the colleagues that have joined us, Council Member Gale

Brewer, Jimmy Vacca, Liz Crowley, Vinnie Gentile, Danny Dromm, and Brad Lander from all parts of the city, so it's great to have you all here. And, you know, your testimony is very thorough and I think it really highlights obviously, you know, the beauty of our park system. It's vast, it's broad, it's wide, and obviously the need to develop the partnerships in order to successfully be able to cover all that land and provide this service to the community, and I think we are just looking to really talk specifically about the conservancy model in particular and maybe some concerns that have, you know, kept cropping up I guess in conversations and when reports are written, articles written in ways that we can figure out if there's improvements that can be made. I just have a couple of quick questions and then I know some colleagues have questions so definitely will pass it on. We have a lot of panels today, a lot of people that want to speak, so we, you know, are going to be here a little bit so I appreciate everybody's time.

So, in talking about, you know, the different structures and our briefing paper kind of

1 talks about it too that we have all these different  
2 models, the friends of the conservancies, the  
3 alliances, you know, there's all these different  
4 structures but taking that into account, uhm, with  
5 regards to the private organizations, whether  
6 they're called conservancies, alliances, how many  
7 in total have some sort of a formal agreement with  
8 the parks department, uhm, you know, if you could  
9 categorize that or at least let us know? If  
10 there's a way of also doing it by categories,  
11 that'd be great. How many are formal agreements  
12 and friends of...

14 COMMISSIONER WHITE: There were twenty  
15 conservancies, alliance or similar entities that  
16 have contractual agreements to assume certain  
17 maintenance and operating responsibilities in  
18 particular parks, and that is quite a range though.  
19 So that could be something like the Bryant Park  
20 Corporation which I mentioned earlier to the  
21 Greater Jamaica Development Corporation to the  
22 Central Park Conservancy and the Prospect Park  
23 Alliance. But it includes the Lower East Side  
24 Ecology Center working with us or the Socrates  
25

Sculpture Park. So it's quite arranged but by no means do any two of these twenty look at the same.

CHAIRPERSON MARK-VIVERITO: No, and understood, and I think that's one of the interesting aspects of this too. But, okay, so you have 20 formal agreements and then how many informal agreements?

COMMISSIONER WHITE: I would say hundreds.

CHAIRPERSON MARK-VIVERITO: Hundreds?

COMMISSIONER WHITE: But Larry can correct me if he cares to.

DEPUTY COMMISSIONER BLACKMON: We have to get back to you on the specific number, but we do have informal relationships with hundreds of groups.

COMMISSIONER WHITE: When you think about for example Green Thumbs to all kinds of groups of all different sizes. There's so many friends of groups and so many different parks across the five boroughs.

CHAIRPERSON MARK-VIVERITO: So you would categorize, you know, one of the community gardens that is under Green Thumb, that one garden is an

informal relationship, you would consider that kind of. Because there are agreements that are not agreements but there's some sort of...

COMMISSIONER WHITE: There are only 20 that are for maintenance and operating and we can give you the entire list of those. We have those.

DEPUTY COMMISSIONER BLACKMON: Council Member, I can speak to the Green Thumb aspect. We have license agreements with...

CHAIRPERSON MARK-VIVERITO: Right.

DEPUTY COMMISSIONER BLACKMON: ...the individuals and organizations that work with Green Thumb at community garden sites.

CHAIRPERSON MARK-VIVERITO: Is that how some of these informal arrangements are structured in license agreements or is there some cases where they don't have any type of...

COMMISSIONER WHITE: Most situations there are no agreements, so for example the Shore Road Park Conservancy where I grew up in Brooklyn is not under any agreement. Somebody on my staff correct me again when I'm wrong if I am. There's no agreement with the Parks Department. They make an effort to host different activities. When it's

CHAIRPERSON MARK-VIVERITO: How do you determine any level of oversight, how do you... I mean, you know, it seems like incredibly administratively cumbersome to think of all of this. How do you keep track of it all, how do you ensure, especially if there is a group that is formed and working within some sort of a park and you don't have a formal agreement. You know, how do you maintain oversight over that, how do you...

COMMISSIONER WHITE: There are formal agreements. The Parks Commissioner sits on the board of the entities, you know, Central Park Conservancy on through. We have the written formal agreements when somebody decides that they want to help out their local park and three people get together and decide that what we're going to do is clean the playground every Saturday morning which is how a lot of these groups start. They get together and they start cleaning out the

playground, we say thank you. Where we can we help them out. And Liam, I think, could go into a little more detail, a little more history of it.

## FIRST DEPUTY COMMISSIONER KAVANAGH:

Part of the role of Partnerships of Parks is to organize all of these groups that support parks all over the city, and there are hundreds of them. I think the estimate is in excess of 600 or 700 groups that are friends groups, that have a working relationship with the Parks Department both on the local level, with the local park supervisors and managers, and through Partnerships of Parks which not only supports them in their volunteer efforts providing them tools and technical assistance, but Partnerships has a pretty well developed program for helping organizations develop at the level that they aspire to grow to. So not every group wants to become a 501(c)(3), have tax exempt status, but some of them do. They want to be able to accept, you know, donations, you know, on behalf of their organization and have a more formal structure, and Partnerships helps them develop the capacity to do that, helps them to understand how to advocate on behalf of their park or the parks that they're

interested in in a more broad based way, outreach to elected officials, to foundations and things like that, so there are a number of steps that organizations can take if they want to take on more responsibility, but if an organization wants to have a, you know, formal role in managing a park, you know, we do require a license or a contract to codify what the expectations are and what the organization might be responsible for.

CHAIRPERSON MARK-VIVERITO: So how do you keep track of all of this? The formal agreements understood, the more formal, you know, you have an agreement, but in this partnership and these kinds of more informal structures, how do you keep handling it all?

FIRST DEPUTY COMMISSIONER KAVANAGH: Well, the Partnerships of Parks maintains a database of all of the organizations that have signed up basically to support their local parks. It's a very active means of communication. Obviously, we keep in touch with them for events and activities. They offer workshops and programs throughout the entire year that are open to anybody who is enrolled in the Partnership's network and we



have outreach coordinators in each borough whose job is to maintain those relationships and contacts with the friends groups.

CHAIRPERSON MARK-VIVERITO: How many people are employed under the Partnership for Parks division?

FIRST DEPUTY COMMISSIONER KAVANAGH: There are roughly 35 individuals who are employed with Partnerships and we recently just brought on a number of new outreach coordinators to assist us in these outreach efforts.

CHAIRPERSON MARK-VIVERITO: And what's the budget?

FIRST DEPUTY COMMISSIONER KAVANAGH: It's roughly a \$4 million budget split 2 million by the city and 2 million by City Parks Foundation.

CHAIRPERSON MARK-VIVERITO: But two million of that goes to City Parks Foundation?

FIRST DEPUTY COMMISSIONER KAVANAGH: The City Parks Foundation contributes \$2 million...

CHAIRPERSON MARK-VIVERITO: Oh, contributes two million?

FIRST DEPUTY COMMISSIONER KAVANAGH: Yes.

CHAIRPERSON MARK-VIVERITO: Okay. So, you know, so talking about like the formal agreements and then I'll... Brad Lander has a question I know, but one of the criticisms that you hear a lot about entrance of these agreements is that there's like, you know, no really standard structure. They vary. They're very different each and they vary widely from each other, so is there any plans to maybe create a more standardized process or a more standardized template maybe for some of these agreements, understanding that there has to be real particular distinctions between parks because then these may be different, but is there anything to create more uniformity and transparency in that?

COMMISSIONER WHITE: So uniformity and transparency, two different questions that I had the same question when I started as Parks Commissioner last summer. I'm like every one of these animals is totally different, is there any way that we can make them look alike, and then people explain to me they do look like alike in that the very common features in all of the agreements it's that the Parks Department approves

every capital project, we determine and prove every concession on parkland. We make the rules. We issue every permit on parkland, so that's the common denominator for any agreement that we have. But then beyond that, the parks are very different and what the parks groups are doing are very different. And so each... each group looks very different and each contract looks very different. The basic is the same, that it's parkland and first and foremost and the Parks Department and the Parks Commissioner is in charge, but secondly aside from that, what exactly that group is contributing is another story, so each contract looks very different. So uniformity I don't see. Transparency, I think we can do much better at. So, for example, right now obviously everybody that we're on... we're on the board, I'm on the board. A borough commissioner represents me on the board of some 70 nonprofits that are affiliated with the Parks Department in one way or another. And that ranges from museums that are built on our parkland like the Museum of Natural History or the Metropolitan Museum, to any of these conservancies and trusts and alliances that we talk about. So

each one of those groups, we review everything about them. We go to the board meetings, we get their 990s, we're on top of them. There's someone in the Parks Department at a commissioner level who is on top of and knows exactly what's going on at that alliance trust, etc. So that's in terms of that. But in terms of it being easily accessible if people wanted to, say, you know, how could you find this? You'd have to go to each of the conservancies' different websites to find the answer. There's no uniform spot on the city parks' website where you can say, you know, you can get a list but beyond that. What we try to do is have lists of the 20 that we have groups, you know, arrangements with and we try to go into the website to put more detail but we don't have that yet. So I think in terms of uniformity the organizations will never look the same. For example, I would never expect any other conservancy to raise 85 percent of its operating budget but I will fully expect Central Park Conservancy to always raise 85 percent of its operating budget so we won't get to uniformity amongst the groups, but I think we could do better on transparency, you know, to make sure

CHAIRPERSON MARK-VIVERITO: And then I think... I mean one of the other things about the agreement is that some allow the conservancy to keep 100 percent of whatever revenue is generated from events in the park. Others it's a percentage. You know, that kind of... it varies in that respect too. Is that something that you've looked at in terms of the concessions and revenue generating and whether or not it goes into the general fund or is the agreements moving forward that every park is going to be able to keep within its own, you know,

for its own budget? That's something else that I know varies tremendously.

COMMISSIONER WHITE: It does vary tremendously but there's only certain parks where that actually brings in much money where there really is... really would be helpful to a park.

CHAIRPERSON MARK-VIVERITO: So out of the twenty agreements, how many would you say that concessions are, you know, a significant factor or at least...

COMMISSIONER WHITE: I don't think it's necessarily significant. I think there's only ten where they're allowed to keep some element of it, but it's not always significant. So, for example, you know, in the Staten Island Greenbelt I think there's a bookstore or concession, just some small something there. But, so, there's only ten that has any rights to keep any concession fees, but most of the ones where there's really something worth keeping so to speak is that in Manhattan where the parks are heavily, heavily frequented with many, many users. You would have to get really high user ship in order to really have a concession that brings money into the park.

CHAIRPERSON MARK-VIVERITO: And then again as I said, you know, the whole thing of events in parks will be a separate hearing, but just... 'cause I know the events themselves also generate revenue for these parks so that's another aspect of it. I'm going allow Brad Lander to ask his questions and then I'll come back.

COUNCIL MEMBER LANDER: Thank you, Madame Chair, for convening this very important and interesting hearing. Thank you, Commissioner, for being here, and I guess just a quick word before I start with some questions. You know, I love the parks and the best part of being the Council Member of the 39th District is representing Prospect Park and being an ex officio board member on the Prospect Park Alliance and having founding Director Tupper Thomas here and Emily Lloyd and Eric Landau. It's an honor. It's made me go around the city to as many of the other ones as I can have been, so I have been on the Bronx River, I've been in Freshkills, and I agree that the energy that it brings in, the resources, the dollars that it brings in, in all kinds of ways is something we want to do more to have happen.

With that said, I really... I mean and I appreciate you saying we could do better at transparency because I think the situation we're in poses as many risks as opportunities and that the right answer for the city is to get out in front and to really be much more thoughtful about how we share the information, how we set priorities, how we raise, spend, allocate, and transparently make resource decisions, and I can sense in the run up to this hearing that some people concerned by proposals that have been put on the table, like the impulses, let's... I'm not saying you have this impulse, that we shouldn't show more, we should kind of show less, and you said we want more transparency so I'll take that as a good opportunity, but I just think there really is risk because if people come to conclude in different parts of this city that the way things are hearing doesn't attend to transparency, doesn't attend to issues of equity, then there will be a reaction against the model that we're talking about here, but if we step up together, the Council, the Parks Department, the administration and find better ways to share information and reflective collective



1 decision making. I think it's a good opportunity.  
2 So I guess I want to start with a couple of sort of  
3 budget level questions because for me it starts as  
4 the... like we're the steward, we're supposed to help  
5 allocate the budget, but part of that is  
6 challenging because big amts of the budget for a  
7 couple of the parks don't come from money we  
8 allocate so decisions that are getting made, though  
9 I deeply trust the people that are making them  
10 aren't in quite the same space. So can you... do you  
11 know how much in aggregate the conservancies are  
12 bringing in and how that relates to the total  
13 budget of the Parks Department just at a big level  
14 for starters?

16 COMMISSIONER WHITE: So let's start  
17 'cause I know you missed the first few minutes so  
18 I'm glad that... you brought up the fact that lots of  
19 people misunderstand what conservancies are all  
20 about and how without them the Parks Department  
21 would not be in such a great situation despite the  
22 fact that we have and I'll repeat for the fourth  
23 time, the highest adopted operating budget the  
24 Parks Department ever has had, \$380 million, thank  
25 you very much to the Chair of this committee, thank

you, Mayor Bloomberg, thank you to our budge  
director, Mark Page, \$380 million dollars, twice  
what it was 12 years ago and I'm very proud of  
that. That's enabled me to hire over 500 people  
since I became Parks Commissioner and that's barely  
a year. So that is extraordinary, but by no means  
does that \$380 million dollars allow me to keep my  
parks as I would love to keep them, and I think  
everyone feels that way, and there's only a certain  
number of resources to go around in a city that has  
lots of lots of agencies with many, many needs. So  
I'm grateful for the fact that I was one of the few  
agencies that received additional resources, and  
I'm very, very grateful for the 500+ new employees  
that I have since starting as Commissioner. I need  
the conservancies to help me keep my parks the way  
they look, and also, I don't know how fast you  
skimmed, you probably skim as fast as I so you  
probably caught this, but the vast majority of what  
people do for us through the conservancies, trusts,  
alliances, etc., etc., is the volunteerism. First  
of all, they encourage people to pick up after  
themselves. Secondly, they bring other...  
[interject]

COUNCIL MEMBER LANDER: Commissioner, I really... no, you gave very good testimony and I listened to what I was here for and I read all of it, but I asked a simple question and I guess I would like to talk about the budget, so I know that we put in \$380 million dollars, how much money was raised and invested in the parks by the conservancies in the current fiscal year or however you keep the numbers or...

COMMISSIONER WHITE: Approximately... philanthropic contributions to New York City parks last year were approximately \$76 million.

COUNCIL MEMBER LANDER: Okay. So that's about 20 percent...

COMMISSIONER WHITE: But that's... that's nothing to do with the \$380 million. That's on top of the \$380 million. The \$380 million is taxpayer dollars.

COUNCIL MEMBER LANDER: I'm familiar with the \$380 million in taxpayer dollars, but I think what you're saying is that 20 percent of the resources that go to maintaining what you called your parks, it comes from philanthropic dollars, is that all raised through the conservancies, can you

break down, you know, well I guess the first question is there any place that I could get this information...

COMMISSIONER WHITE: Absolutely.

COUNCIL MEMBER LANDER: ...either as a member of the City Council or a member of the public so that as we're making shared decisions about the allocation of resources, we would be able to assess where we're spending this and where we're raising it.

COMMISSIONER WHITE: Yeah, we can provide you a list of each of the conservancies and how much money each alliance, trust or conservancy raises.

COUNCIL MEMBER LANDER: Do you have there, can you give me a rough sense of...

COMMISSIONER WHITE: Of how the \$76 million breaks down?

COUNCIL MEMBER LANDER: Yeah.

COMMISSIONER WHITE: Yeah, I would say \$31 million is for the Central Park Conservancy, about \$8 million is raised by the City Parks Foundation, and about this... the range... I would say

the lowest one on the list here of the ones is the Fort Tryon Park Trust, about \$200,000.

COUNCIL MEMBER LANDER: Okay.

COMMISSIONER WHITE: So that's a range.

COUNCIL MEMBER LANDER: It would be great if you could follow up and provide us with that information.

COMMISSIONER WHITE: Sure.

COUNCIL MEMBER LANDER: And then I guess the question is where and how do you guys look at that money alongside the budgeted money that the council and the administration work together to provide as you're thinking about the allocation of city resources and making decisions about because that's not what our budget process does, but I assume you're doing it, so...

COMMISSIONER WHITE: Right, so for example, take Central Park because it's like the elephant in the room, I guess, for everybody. We expect the Central Park Conservancy to raise, and they do, the vast majority of the operating funds for that park so that we, as taxpayers, allocate far less. I do think, however, that it's very important that as a public-private partnership that

the city of New York continue to put taxpayer dollars into Central Park so that it is always a public-private partnership and it is not completely funded by a private entity.

COUNCIL MEMBER LANDER: And I think broadly... I mean I guess I don't want to... to me, I think it's great that we're raising additional money on top of what we're able to allocate, and I appreciate that people wouldn't give it if they didn't have some ability to see it get spent. Uh, some people are willing to give to the system as a whole, some people are recruited to give to Central Park or Prospect Park. I helped tried to recruit some of them to give to Prospect Park and I feel very positive about it, so... but I... well, I guess let me ask the equity question and how you think about it. Obviously, the... you know, part of a challenge here is that this raises questions of equity. Some parks can raise a lot of money and I hear that to some extent what that lets us do is spend less taxpayer dollars on those parks and we wind up with more in other parts of the system, so... so that's good, but how do you think about the

equity questions that are raised here as you allocate the resources that you have?

COMMISSIONER WHITE: So the additional money that's raised by any of the conservancies allows us just to make... to bring more resources into the park as we've said already. So in terms of how each of the park and what they need to raise dollars for, I think also... I think we should step back a second. Not all of that money is necessarily maintenance and operating money so it's more convoluted than what I'm saying, right, so I'm talking about my \$380 million taxpayer-funded operating budget. Separately, I have a \$5 billion that the Parks Department spent over the 12 years in capital money. So some of that money raised by most any random group that I've mentioned here could be for capital dollars or it could be for operating dollars. So, for example, someone could contribute a million and a half dollars and say fix this playground. It could go towards specific capital goals or operating goals, so all of that money does not go towards operating. Does that make sense?

COUNCIL MEMBER LANDER: Absolutely. I mean we're looking at a picture of Lakeside. I know a lot of money has been raised privately as well as publicly for Lakeside, so... I mean so I guess that's another thing that will be great to get the information on is of the \$76 million, and some of it's that I assume is the money to pay the salaries of the people that are doing the fundraising too so that doesn't automatically go into Parks operating and maintenance. But if you could give us some breakdown of what's capital and of...

CHAIRPERSON MARK-VIVERITO: Council Member, can I ask for clarity on something? Because you're saying that in the case of Central Park Conservancy, Parks has the expectation that it's going to raise 85 percent of its operating so how do you make the determination of the percentage and is that 85 percent the same for all the other formal agreements you have or how do you determine the percentage?

COMMISSIONER WHITE: It's different in each one so it's 75 to 85 depending on the...



CHAIRPERSON MARK-VIVERITO: But that's the range...

COMMISSIONER WHITE: For Central Park, no, for Central Park. I would never expect, you know, the Bronx River Alliance can't raise their operating budget. I mean that's not an expectation we put on... the Forest Park Trust raises dollars but, you know, they raise dollars for specific things and it may be for activities in the park, but I would never say oh you should raise a certain percentage of your operating budget. I just don't... I don't think it works in most parks because most of these alliances, trusts or whatever don't have that kind of fundraising capacity that would enable them to basically finance the vast majority of their operating budget, and we would have no expectation that they should.

Most of the groups, it's an evolution. I mean the Central Park Conservancy didn't have an agreement with the Parks Department for its first 17 years, so it evolves. It's like I went to the park and I pick up after my kids and then I say to Larry why aren't you picking up after your dogs, and then Liam says I don't have any time but I'll

1 give you some money for some tulips. This is  
2 literally how it starts, and then we in the Parks  
3 Department have a much more systemized approach now  
4 so Larry runs the Partnership of Parks and together  
5 with Alison Tachi [phonetic] their teams go out and  
6 they cultivate that, and they're like, wow, there's  
7 three people that are interested in making this  
8 park better, can we help out? And then we outreach  
9 to them, but it doesn't usually start with the  
10 Parks Department employees so much as it's a  
11 combination. It's people in the community paying  
12 attention and saying how can we make things better.  
13 It's people in the Parks Department through our  
14 Partnership for Parks, the City Parks Foundation  
15 and New York City Parks employees, working together  
16 to enable people to get started. And then what  
17 happens after people start volunteering, there's  
18 people that say well I'd like to give some money,  
19 and then each group has to decide, do you want to  
20 become a 501(c)(3), so it's an evolution. And even  
21 with Central Park Conservancy or Prospect Park  
22 Alliance, each one of these groups has evolved  
23 through the years.

Sometimes a group does not want to evolve into being a 501(c)(3). They want to stay a volunteer group. They don't want to collect money, they don't want to get involved in it, they want to make their park attractive, but they want to do it with their labor. They don't want to get involved in money. So there is a whole range of these different organizations as to how they're set up.

COUNCIL MEMBER LANDER: So do you think it would be... I mean one thing that seems like to me like it might be appropriate would be as part of the budget process that we have here to be able to get and use the information. I mean I appreciate that you'll provide a sum as a followup to the hearing, and this goes back to... 'cause, look, I've been thinking through the equity question since reading some of the proposals. To me, our job is to try to make sure we're equitably allocating the resources that are available to be responsible public stewards and the question of sort of what the balances and where we need those resources, that's where it should be when we should do the budget. We should be working together and we should be making sure that every park in the city,

1 we are responsibly allocating the resources that  
2 are needed. That's difficult to do in 20 percent  
3 of the resources for the system. I get that may  
4 not be perfectly accurate because some of that's  
5 capital and sort of off the table and it may be  
6 that those, in fact, are... you could make a case to  
7 be there because those private resources are all  
8 going into, you know, go in a substantial way into  
9 Central Park that frees up tax dollars we don't  
10 have to spend in Central Park and that's good for  
11 parks in other parts of the city. Obviously, you  
12 could also make a case that since we don't see it,  
13 that money's going into Central Park in a  
14 disproportionate way, and I guess to me one great  
15 way of helping us make those decisions together in  
16 ways that were both more transparent and helped us  
17 make comprehensive and equitable decisions be if  
18 they were part of the city's budget process and  
19 we'd be able to work together to understand where  
20 the resources are going.

22 COMMISSIONER WHITE: I don't know how  
23 that could be. In other words, you can decide,  
24 people raise money every year and so someone has a  
25 benefit, this year they raise X amount, next year

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public information about how they do raise, plan to raise and spend their money, as part of our budget process, would enable us to be much more successful in doing the whole thing in a way that people had confidence, was transparent and was allocating the resources fairly.

COMMISSIONER WHITE: I disagree. I don't see how in terms of... I mean I think that transparency's one thing in explaining how much money we think a certain group earned this year versus last year and under new leadership perhaps they're bringing in certain revenues or less revenues or more revenues. I think that's all on their 990s. We're happy to discuss it. I'm sure the executive directors of most of the organization would be delighted to discuss it with you, but in terms of factoring into the budget process...

COUNCIL MEMBER LANDER: Well, I guess I'm not... we're obviously not going to get to decide how much it is or how it gets spent. It belongs to 501(c)(3)'s, but their 501(c)(3)'s in partnership with the city so there's something in between reviewing their 990s on their annual 990 schedules which are usually backward-looking and not forward-

1 looking and off our budget timetable and us getting  
2 to decide what their budgets are and aren't which  
3 would be a meaningful way of understanding and  
4 thinking about what the conservancies are doing in  
5 our budget. I know we'll have to give more thought  
6 to it but I don't see why we couldn't... it wouldn't  
7 helpfully inform budgeting for the Parks Department  
8 to have a little better understanding of how 20  
9 percent of those resources are being raised and  
10 spent.  
11

12 COMMISSIONER WHITE: It's not  
13 predictable. In other words, at the same time that  
14 the city has a fiscal budget crisis, unfortunately  
15 that's also the same time that lots of people don't  
16 step up to the plate philanthropically as they  
17 might have in previous times, so it's hard when  
18 you're doing the full... [interject]

19 COUNCIL MEMBER LANDER: All the more  
20 important to have projections.

21 COMMISSIONER WHITE: But you can't... you  
22 don't have a projection because this year somebody  
23 gave X amount of dollars to the Shore Road  
24 Conservancy and next year they don't have X and  
25 they're not giving the money. It's very hard to...

you can't judge an advance. You can sit with Mark Page [phonetic] and... [interject]

COUNCIL MEMBER LANDER: They make budgets, they make projections just like we do.

COMMISSIONER WHITE: No, you cannot do that.

CHAIRPERSON MARK-VIVERITO: Council Member, I'm going to move on to the... if we can come back... [interject]

DEPUTY COMMISSIONER BLACKMON: Council Member, I think it would just be helpful if we have further conversations to help the Council sort of understand that piece. We encourage philanthropic support. We look forward to it, but there's no way that you could effectively project that in all of these cases.

COUNCIL MEMBER LANDER: With all due respect, I apologize, but I've run a nonprofit for a lot of years. I know how you think about raising and spending money. There are plenty of ways that those organizations think and plan and project, just like the city thinks and plans and projects, and if we're going to make good shared decisions together with them and allocate resources, some of



these projects are many years long. The idea that we have to essentially hide the information until it's too late to inform our decision making which is what you're saying if you're saying wait for the 990s to come out...

COMMISSIONER WHITE: There's no information being hidden and I really, really take exception to that.

CHAIRPERSON MARK-VIVERITO: Alright.

COMMISSIONER WHITE: I really take exception to that and I think that's wrong, inaccurate, and not a correct thing to say in a public hearing or privately.

CHAIRPERSON MARK-VIVERITO: Council Member, I'm going to... [interject]

COUNCIL MEMBER LANDER: I appreciate the spirit of openness in collaboration.

COMMISSIONER WHITE: Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON MARK-VIVERITO: Alright. Council Member Gale Brewer.

COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Thank you. My question is coming up in the future, do you have any conservancies planned. I must admit, I make a distinction between the Lower East Side ecology

versus, you know, Prospect Park or Central Park.  
So I'm talking not about the Friends of but the  
conservancies per se.

COMMISSIONER WHITE: Thank you. When I  
started in the Parks Department last summer, there  
were three different conservancies that are in I  
could call nascent stages. Two are mentioned in my  
testimony, one I did not... the two mentioned in the  
testimony is something called the Natural Areas  
Conservancy.

COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Right.

COMMISSIONER WHITE: The idea of that is  
to try to bring more private resources to our  
natural areas which don't have, as we said, a  
natural constituency.

COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Yeah.

COMMISSIONER WHITE: The second is  
something that's been evolving through the year  
with tremendous help from the council which is the  
Alliance for the Flushing Meadows Corona Park,  
Council Member Ferreras.

COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Right.

COMMISSIONER WHITE: The third that I  
did not mention is the Jamaica Bay Rockaway Parks

1 Conservancy, and this is evolved out of an  
2 agreement as a concept that the National Park  
3 Service, the Secretary of Interior, Secretary  
4 Salazar, fought signs and agreement a year ago  
5 together with Mayor Bloomberg that we would co-  
6 manage the approximately 10,000 acres in the  
7 Jamaica Bay Rockaway Parks area. 7,000 of those  
8 acres belong to the Federal Government. So in this  
9 decision to co-manage, we thought that it might be  
10 a good opportunity to set up a new conservancy  
11 there respecting the various communities all around  
12 the Jamaica Bay Rockaway Parks area and enable us  
13 to bring in some additional resources into that  
14 areas.  
15

16 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Okay. And so it  
17 would be similar to Hudson River Park where there's  
18 a state and city, this would be federal and city?  
19 I don't think you want to be like them.

20 COMMISSIONER WHITE: No, we don't.  
21 Thank you. For lots of reasons (inaudible)..  
22 [interject]

23 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: I know. That's  
24 what I'm saying, so I'm wondering how it's going to  
25 be... [interject]

COMMISSIONER WHITE: Let me say that again because I said it wrong.

COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: I said it right. I don't want to be like them.

COMMISSIONER WHITE: You said it right, but I didn't. It's a completely private group...

COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Okay.

COMMISSIONER WHITE: ...that's being set up but it's being set up to acknowledge the fact that the federal government and the city government are going to co-manage this area together and it's an effort by us to help bring in new resources there. I'm sorry, and there was... [interject]

COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: No, no, go ahead. I want to hear more about that because I guess the issue then would be who would be on the boards and so on, right? The board issue?

COMMISSIONER WHITE: Yes, yep. So there will be... it's, you know, it's being set up right now but there will be folks from the public sector, the private sector and representatives from the federal government as well as the city government.

COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Okay. I mean I guess there would be more discussion on that.

COMMISSIONER WHITE: More discussion on that and a fourth that I haven't mentioned that's been in the evolution stages for years but I think it's finally taking off is the Washington Square.

COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: That's a little weird for me. I'm just going to say because then we're all worried that NYU is going to take over. I'm just saying. When you say Washington Square, it does have a feeling that NYU might end up being in charge of the park.

FIRST DEPUTY COMMISSIONER KAVANAGH: I don't think there's any danger of anybody being in charge of Washington Square Park other than the people who use it every day. But, you know, there have been support groups of Washington Square Park very active for many years. They've contributed to performances, to events, activities, the Christmas tree lighting, and what's different now is that we have an administrator there dedicated to the park who can help bring all of those support groups together in one place. And, yes, we do expect NYU to contribute to the park because their students use it very heavily. But I think, you know, it is important to note that Commission Board 2 supported

the formation of a conservancy for Washington Square Park when it was brought to the Board for a vote, so you know the support for the park is definitely more widespread than just NYU, and we certainly want to include, you know, the community at large in developing this conservancy.

COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Okay. Leave Riverside Park alone, they're doing just fine actually.

My next question is what about the issue of... I know you talked a little bit about transparency with these different conservancies, but can you be more specific as to how you think you could make them more transparent? I am a big supporter of Doug Blonsky. I think he does a fabulous job, so... and obviously Prospect Park seems the same but how would you even... with Jamaica Bay starting off, how do you think about the real way that transparency can be done?

COMMISSIONER WHITE: I think that should be on our website. You should be able to see, and some of these questions you've asked today, which conservancies have an agreement or are responsible for maintaining a portion of a park or an entire

1 park, have all 20 of them there. And then click  
2 through on that and be able to see... I know some  
3 people don't like the 990s, maybe not the 990s or  
4 maybe the 990s, but also perhaps in a more easy-to-  
5 read fashion how much and what, you know, how many  
6 employees they have, how many employees they have  
7 that are privately-funded, how many employees that  
8 are city-funded, just some basic questions and  
9 answers that people might like to have about it so  
10 that... and I think there's probably a dozen that,  
11 you know, questions that people would like to know,  
12 how much money people raised, how can I get  
13 involved, if you live in the neighborhood, how can  
14 I get involved in that park?

16 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: The other issue  
17 just for the public is the street light is out, do  
18 I call Doug or do I call Veronica, who do I call?  
19 So... or do I call Bill? In other words, when  
20 somebody's wrong in the park, whom do I call and  
21 that's not clear. What I do is I just send a  
22 letter to everybody as everybody knows, but I don't  
23 think for the public... that's exactly what I do,  
24 Karen. But the question is for the public it's not  
25 clear, and I think that's something else that

people want to have a complete understanding of Washington Square Park, who am I going to call when, you know, there's something wrong with the arch or whatever, and that is not clear from anybody's perspective. Okay, alright, thank you, Madame Chair.

COMMISSIONER WHITE: I'm going to answer that because I think that's an excellent question.

COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Are you going to answer that?

COMMISSIONER WHITE: Yes.

COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: How are you going to answer that, Liam?

FIRST DEPUTY COMMISSIONER KAVANAGH: Well, in the case of Washington Square Park you call the park administrator, Sarah Neilson, who is here today.

COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: But does she work for Parks or does she work for the...

FIRST DEPUTY COMMISSIONER KAVANAGH: She's an employee of the Parks Department.

COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Okay. But she's going to be hanging out in the Parks Department office or in a Washington Square Alliance?



FIRST DEPUTY COMMISSIONER KAVANAGH: In a newly renovated Parks Department office in Washington Square Park that will be open shortly... opening shortly.

COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Okay.

FIRST DEPUTY COMMISSIONER KAVANAGH: And I would say that in any instance, you know, if there's any doubt about who to call, call the Parks Department employee that you're most familiar with.

COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: But I'm saying that the public, that's what I'm talking about transparency, they don't know, and I think you have to make that clearer.

FIRST DEPUTY COMMISSIONER KAVANAGH: Yes.

COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: They said they don't know. Alright, thank you.

CHAIRPERSON MARK-VIVERITO: I know Council Member Gentile has a question, but I just wanted to follow up on something that I think Council Member Brad Lander, if I'm understanding his line of questioning correctly. So if you're saying that 85 percent of the operating budget of

Central Park has to be raised by Central Park and then... [interject]

COMMISSIONER WHITE: I'm sorry, it's 75 percent of the operating budget, yeah.

CHAIRPERSON MARK-VIVERITO: Okay, well let's just say 75 percent of the operating budget has to be raised by Central Park and then we put in the remaining 25 percent, what is... would you be able to share with us what has been the growth in the Central Park Conservancy's operating budget year-to-year because I think it gets to what he's asking, right, that if it continues to grow and then we keep our percentage the same, in essence, we're contributing more as a city to that park while others may be suffering or not getting as much of a city contribution, if I think I'm getting it correct, you know, so it would be interesting to see during the past five, four years if the operating budget of Central Park Conservancy has actually grown which would then mean that the contribution from the city is also growing for that particular park whereas we may be disinvesting in other parks that could use additional assistance. I think that's the line of questioning if I'm not...

1 if I'm getting it right, that that may be asked  
2 here, and as a nonprofit, yes, nonprofits do have  
3 goals every year about what money they're going to  
4 raise and what their fundraising goals are, so  
5 that's something that I think is helpful in  
6 informing us not only with their agreement. I mean  
7 obviously it seems other agreements may be somewhat  
8 similarly structured so I think it is a relevant  
9 question to ask that. So it'd be kind of a good  
10 analysis to make...

12 COMMISSIONER WHITE: So we'll get the  
13 operating and the capital dollars for you, both.

14 CHAIRPERSON MARK-VIVERITO: Alright, so  
15 then I'll allow Council Member Gentile to...

16 COUNCIL MEMBER GENTILE: Thank you,  
17 Madame Chair. Commissioner, first of all let me  
18 thank you for your continued cheerleading for Shore  
19 Road Parks. That's always a good thing to hear and  
20 let me publicly thank you also for your efforts and  
21 intervention in getting the new Bay Ridge Eco Dock  
22 in place and ready to open in about two weeks, the  
23 first recreational Eco Dock in the City of New York  
24 in Bay Ridge, Brooklyn so thank you for your  
25 advocacy on that.

I just had a question though about... I'm still trying to differentiate between those groups that have formal agreements with the parks and those that don't, whether they be alliances or conservancies or foundations, whatever. Do you require more of those groups that have the formal agreements with Parks than you do of those who have just informal relationships?

COMMISSIONER WHITE: Yes, those with informal relationships, we don't require anything of them, so if the Shore Road Conservancy comes and plants tulip bulbs or takes down weeds or helps us pick up litter every Saturday, they do that and there is no agreement between the Parks Department and them. We encourage them, we help them, we provide resources through Partnership for Parks in other ways that's very different from the Central Park Conservancy or the Prospect Park Alliance where there's a contract that specifically states what they need to do.

COUNCIL MEMBER GENTILE: So however for those groups like those in my neighborhood that do not have official relationships with parks, it seems that in recent past you now have begun to put

more and more and more and more requirements on these groups in order to operate within the park system. So much so that many of these volunteers are beginning to feel very much put upon by some of the park requirements that they have to adhere to.

FIRST DEPUTY COMMISSIONER KAVANAGH:

Council Member, I'm not sure if I'm familiar with the requirements you're referring to. I know that there is an organization in Bay Ridge, the Narrows Botanical Garden, which has done a great job in beautifying a section of Shore Road Park. We don't have a formal agreement with them however, and in some instances, you know, we thought that they had, you know, some of their actions were not, I guess, as open and as open to the community as we wanted them to be, and I know there have been some instances where we've had disagreements and we've worked them out, and they continue to operate and offer a great service.

There are some cases where, you know, we have because of the size and the nature of the organization, even if they don't have a formal agreement, you know, we have to ask them to have insurance, you know, in the event of any accident

that occurs while they're operating in the park.

But I don't know of any effort on our part to put hurdles in the way of people who want to help, you know, take care of their local park.

COUNCIL MEMBER GENTILE: Well, just for example, that same group had to cancel most of its summer outdoor movies in the park because the Parks Department, for the first time in the number of years they've been doing this, had required them now to get a Food Handler's license because they serve popcorn at the movie. And as a result, a lot of those movies were canceled because they didn't have that... [interject]

COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: I would've just done it anyway.

FIRST DEPUTY COMMISSIONER KAVANAGH: You know, we do work very close with the Health Department for any food that's served in parks, and we do have an obligation to ensure that the people who are handling it are properly licensed and trained. I do agree that a popcorn machine is something that we may have taken another look at and we will for next season.

COUNCIL MEMBER GENTILE: I would hope so. We salvaged the last two movies but the first three were canceled. So, and that's what I just advocate and advise to be sensitive about, the fact that we... there are volunteers here that spend countless hours to transform portions of parks from just shrubs and debris into beautiful areas that all New Yorkers can enjoy, and I just ask that you be sensitive to the fact that the hours that they are giving over to the city of New York to make these parks beautiful, and on the flipside have to all of sudden get into this legal maze of having X amount of insurance or permits when they've been operating, many of these groups, particularly those in my neighborhood, have been operating for years with no concerns, no problems, but it seems that all of a sudden this legal framework has descended upon a lot of these volunteer groups.

DEPUTY COMMISSIONER BLACKMON: Yes, Council Member, we work closely with our volunteer groups. We know who many of them are. Our park administrators are here. They can tell you how closely they work with some of the organizations on many of their events. Many of these events are

1 annual events that have occurred for many years and  
2 we try to work closely with them, even with  
3 Partnerships for Park staff to avoid many of those  
4 pitfalls or many of the traps that may cause an  
5 event to be canceled. But there are specific  
6 issues, and aside this from, be happy to work with  
7 you and any other group to make sure that we try to  
8 rectify them going forward.

10 COUNCIL MEMBER GENTILE: We've been able  
11 to keep everybody in line, but sometimes it does  
12 feel on the part of the volunteer that Parks is  
13 more of an adversary than a partner, and I don't  
14 want that feeling to persist.

15 FIRST DEPUTY COMMISSIONER KAVANAGH: We  
16 don't want it to persist either, and I would say  
17 that, you know, we do have outreach coordinators  
18 who work with most of the organizations that  
19 support parks, and if any issues like that come up  
20 definitely bring them to the outreach coordinator  
21 or directly to the borough commissioner. The  
22 borough commissioners wholeheartedly support our  
23 partner organizations, and sometimes they can make  
24 decisions that, you know, that cut through red tape  
25 or that, you know, that weigh on the side of common



sense than rather whatever a regulation might require.

COUNCIL MEMBER GENTILE: I'm going to say Commissioner Jefferies in Brooklyn has been receptive. He's listened but it's been a struggle. This year it's been a struggle with some of the volunteer groups who felt as if they had been put upon after they put in all this time and have created such beautiful space.

FIRST DEPUTY COMMISSIONER KAVANAGH: Council Member, I'd be happy to talk to you afterwards about the specifics. We want all the groups in Bay Ridge and every other community to feel welcome and part of the Parks family.

COUNCIL MEMBER GENTILE: Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON MARK-VIVERITO: Thank you, Council Member. I forgot to recognize, we were joined earlier by Council Member Jimmy Van Bramer, and he has questions.

COUNCIL MEMBER VAN BRAMER: Thank you very much, Madame Chair. And, Commissioner, I just want to start off, if it hasn't been done already, to say that our Queens Commissioner Dottie Lewandowski is amazing, amazing, amazing, we love

her, as with her Chief of Staff Joanne Amagrande who are both stellar and people who I love working with. I was thrilled to hear you talk about Jamaica Bay as some folks in the audience know, including former Commissioner Benepe who is in the back there. My husband is literally making the movie about Jamaica Bay and wrote the book on Jamaica Bay, and it's exciting to see so much attention and hopefully resources follow that attention to Jamaica Bay and also obviously the amazing work our colleague Julissa Ferreras has done with Flushing Meadows Corona Park. But talking about those two brand new entities made me think about how you and how the department will make sure that they're successful because when you are creating these entities, and as you know there have been some efforts, particularly in Flushing Meadows, grass roots efforts to support the park financially. That's difficult for some of the communities around the park. So how are we going to make sure that Jamaica Bay and Flushing Meadows and maybe Hunters Point South where we just opened a brand new beautiful park and already there's some talk about a conservancy or some kind of

organization like that, how are we going to make sure that they're successful and what's your role in making that so?

COMMISSIONER WHITE: First of all, the Parks Commissioner would serve on every one of these boards as we do on the others so that we make sure that we're at the table at all times in terms of the budget and in terms of everything else. But also in support and be on the Parks Department is the private side. We need to engage people on some of the boards that can bring some private dollars to the table, and whether that be corporations or people representing corporations or individuals from the community or from other communities or perhaps who grew up in certain communities that might come back and help us out. So it's a question of bringing other resources into each of these parks or these conservancies that are maybe not necessarily right in that neighborhood, so it means working with the people in the community to set up a board, the people are happy with the board, but that the board represents different folks around the city, different financial means, so that each one of the boards can actually help

bring in more dollars to that conservancy or alliance or trust or whatever it is that we call it.

COUNCIL MEMBER VAN BRAMER: Sure. I mean obviously there are folks who care about these places, right, and Tom Secunda comes to mind immediately with Jamaica Bay and folks like that, but the equity question is a very real question that Council Member Lander and the Chair raised, and so while the establishment of these trusts, conservancies, is extensively helpful in reducing the inequities, if they're not successful, they could actually perpetuate it, and I just think it's really important that they be successful obviously, and I know that we all want that clearly, and I'm just thinking about your role in directing those resources and ensuring that they're successful, and I was thinking about Queensbridge Park which as you know I've allocated over six million dollars into because I love it so much and just believe in that park so much. But it does not have a conservancy or an alliance. It has a wonderful friends group that Ms. McQueen, who is a legend in the Parks movement in Queens and in our city, has lovingly

COMMISSIONER WHITE: I think all parks need to have equitable resources. I think if one park has ten visitors a year and another park has 10 million visitors a year, I think that there's different ways of looking at it. So lots of times when we create the conservancies too, the four that we just mentioned, are very unusual. One, the natural areas is to try to bring new private dollars to areas that nobody thinks about, the forests, the marshes, the wetlands, that we have in Parks Department. A very unsung part of the department in our Natural Resources Group which does tremendous work in restoring natural areas but could certainly use more private assistance, because obviously when you're allocating the budget you're really interested in making sure that the playgrounds and the fields and the parks that are frequented most often by the most people are kept

up, so sometimes our forests and marshes suffer so that's why we set up that group.

The Jamaica Bay Rockaway Park is an interesting conundrum also because 7,000 of the 10,000 acres belong to the federal government, so we're trying to bring additional resources in but it's not resources that are going necessarily to city land, but since 7,000 of the 10,000 belong to the federal government, it's trying to create a new pot of resources for this combined parkland as well so each one is very different because there's no city resources going into those 7,000 acres of public park which is controlled by the National Park Service, but now with our agreement we're going to be jointly operating.

COUNCIL MEMBER VAN BRAMER: Yes, I probably know more about Jamaica Bay than most Council Members. Whether I want to or not, it's what we talk about just about every single night. So it's a pleasure. There will a boat cruise by the way on September 29th as a fundraiser for some of the organizations supporting Jamaica Bay. But, yes, the documentary film will be previewed at, this is a plug shamelessly for my husband's film,

but so I thank you, I thank our former Commissioner in the back there as well for the work we did on Hunters Point South and Queensbridge Park in particular and look forward to further discussions and some more answers along the line of what Council Member Lander was talking about in terms of making sure that there is equity, and we all love Central Park and it is an amazing jewel of our city and certainly does bring people to New York which is incredibly, incredibly important for our city's economy, but Queensbridge Park and all of the parks are just important to me and to my constituents as Central Park. So, with that I return it back to the Chair.

CHAIRPERSON MARK-VIVERITO: Thank you, Council Member. And, again, I thank everyone for their patience. We're going to ask just a couple more questions on my end and then I know Council Member Lander has a couple more, but we do want to go to the panel. Just quickly, and these don't have to be... I just want to understand in the case of these new groups that form and I know that in reworking the Central Park Conservancy contract, there has been language added about some additional

responsibilities of providing technical assistance and support to additional groups. Now, is that for groups that want to become conservancies, is it friends of groups, because I guess the question is, you know, with like Flushing Meadows Park Conservancy that's being set up, what's the level of, you know, what's the process to set it up, like who's doing that, is it the Partnership of Parks, is it the Parks Department, I mean, you know, just those quick questions.

DEPUTY COMMISSIONER BLACKMON: So, Council Member, to address the question related to the Central Park Conservancy, the groups that the conservancy are helping in the language that's spelled out, these were groups parks have already established prior to that. So, Friends of Morningside Park, Mount Morris Park Community Improvement Association, we're starting to see some activity around Friends of St. Nicolas Park. These were groups that were already established.

And if I could just jump back to Council Member Van Bramer's comment, it was really the work of the partner organizations, the Friends of Queensbridge Park, ERTA, many of the community



groups that push the Parks Department to work with Council Member Van Bramer and the Council on the funding for the Queensbridge Sea Wall which is something that while they're not technically a conservancy, they were the driving force behind all of that. If it really wasn't for the community and the Council Member we wouldn't have been able to do that. But to come back now to the original question...

COUNCIL MEMBER VAN BRAMER: Well, and I wouldn't have provided the funding.

DEPUTY COMMISSIONER BLACKMON: And that's accurate. So thank you. But, so yes, many of those groups were previously established.

CHAIRPERSON MARK-VIVERITO: Right, so then basically so are they going to be lending any additional training and support?

COMMISSIONER WHITE: So, in terms of training and support for others, the Central Park Conservancy is willing and able and ready and has provided lots of, I would call it ad hoc informal support, so they were probably, I would say, and Holly Light would answer this as well, between and among the various folks in the Parks Department,

community members out in the Flushing Meadows area, as well as folks at New York Parks and other groups. There were dozens and dozens of meetings that the folks at the Central Park Conservancy tried to help and assist and advise. So part of they are thinking about trying to give advice around the city is to say people come in from countries, cities, and from all across the five boroughs for assistance and help, so they want to be able to do it in a more coherent fashion, so maybe there could be a class on boards or fundraising or operating or getting the Parks Department to do what you want it to do or whatever it is that the class they might want to host and so they're right now soliciting different ideas from folks that are actually administrators or heads of alliances or trusts to think it through and to think what would be something that they could rather than having all these one off relationships which is what they have now which is people coming in and saying how do I do this and how do I do that, how about getting ten folks in the room at the same time and having a class on how to do

whatever it is, and they're doing research around that now with different of the Parks groups.

CHAIRPERSON MARK-VIVERITO: And it has to be recognized. I mean they've really gone way beyond, you know, being helpful to surrounding parks. You know, East Harlem, Harlem, so it's been... and they are willing to kind of (inaudible) expertise... [interject]

COMMISSIONER WHITE: Absolutely, yes, yes.

CHAIRPERSON MARK-VIVERITO: ...so it definitely, you know, it goes recognized so I appreciate that clarification. So... but then... so then right now when a group wants to form into a conservancy then who is lending that support along the way to get them there?

COMMISSIONER WHITE: It really starts with us, with the Parks Department as a starting point, so it's with the Parks Department, with our Partnership for Parks group and trying to figure out what it is and how the group is going to get started. After that, you know, other such as the Central Park Conservancy can help, but the initial formation stage it really helps to start with the

Parks Department and with the people in the borough that know this as well as our Partnership for Parks which is jointly operated with our City Parks Foundation.

CHAIRPERSON MARK-VIVERITO: Alright, so, yes, go ahead.

DEPUTY COMMISSIONER BLACKMON: We have a program called People Make Parks which is a visioning program at where partnerships guides the community around formation of a stewardship group, and we'd like to invite the Council actually in November. Partnerships is leading our annual conference at NYU Law where we'll bring in smaller groups to learn from larger groups, share best practices on how to grow and how to increase engagement in their local neighborhood.

CHAIRPERSON MARK-VIVERITO: Alright, I'll allow Council Member Brad Lander just ask the last questions and then we're going to turn over to the panels, but thank you for all your testimony today.

COUNCIL MEMBER LANDER: So this is just a question for clarity because I think one thing that I know in my neck of the woods people think of

1 when we talk about conservancies are things which  
2 aren't really New York City parks, and I think one  
3 thing that has contributed to the confusion here is  
4 the Brooklyn Bridge Park which, you know, is in  
5 some ways a New York City entity, has its own  
6 complex structure and then it's got a conservancy  
7 on top of its own complex structure, but as a  
8 result which isn't exactly governed by any New York  
9 City Parks Department rules, but similarly the  
10 Battery Park City created by its own complicated  
11 structure is well known for, you know, having a lot  
12 more dollars per acre than the rest of our parks  
13 and a battle has to be fought with them regularly  
14 to make sure that they're not keeping money and  
15 spending, you know, gilding their wonderful,  
16 wonderful parks, and so I just... I mean are there...  
17 do you have any relationships, does the Parks  
18 Department wind up in relationship to these either...  
19 I mean some of them are state and federal parks and  
20 some of them are park like entities, I guess  
21 Brooklyn Bridge Park being the best example of  
22 this.

24 COMMISSIONER WHITE: So, in general, in  
25 the Parks Department, the administrators of the

1 parks, as designed by Gordon Davis during Mayor  
2 Koch's term and, you know, start with Betsy Barlow  
3 Rogers and Tupper Thomas, the administrator then  
4 founded the conservancy, and the administrator is a  
5 city employee. People who are administrators, who  
6 are city employees, and run a conservancy trust,  
7 parks, whatever raise your hands high, high,  
8 higher. Okay, city employees were running trust  
9 conservancies, whatever, so generally they're  
10 coterminous in the same way that it was at the  
11 start of the conservancy in Central Park and the  
12 alliance in Prospect Park. However, the three you  
13 just mentioned are totally different animals. So  
14 to start with Battery Park City Authority, as far  
15 as I know I have nothing to do with it other than  
16 they occasionally use their own money to hire PEP  
17 [phonetic] officers. So that's fair, okay, I'm not  
18 on their board. Distinguished from the other shoe  
19 entities which have come up earlier, one is the  
20 Hudson River Park Trust and the other is the  
21 Brooklyn Bridge Park. The Parks Commissioner  
22 servers ex officio on those two boards. With  
23 respect to Brooklyn Bridge Park, there was lots and  
24 lots of interface between the staff there, the head

Regina, and the Parks Department. Some of the land is owned by the city and some by the state as you know. Very convoluted. The Hudson River Park, most of the land is owned by the state, and again the Parks Commissioner serves ex officio on that board, but there is... it's not... it's a different relationship. Again, they hire PEP officers with their money that we train for them, that they pay for, but it is not the same. In other words, earlier I said we make the decisions about permits, etc., etc., we do not make those decisions for Hudson River Park.

COUNCIL MEMBER LANDER: And I'll just flag that as one more thing, but in this case I really about the Parks Department conservancy model and have some concerns about in some of the other models. You know, Brooklyn Bridge Park is magnificent. I love being out there. I was out on Pier 5, my son's flag football league. It's probably the nicest place I've ever seen sports played in the planet, but we don't have, you know, I think the coterminous model and the clarity with which city employees set and make decisions and city rules govern is one very valuable bright line

about the conservancy model that I feel very positive about. It makes me feel better about the ways in which there's some amount of kind of private role in the public-private partnership because the decisions about what to do with our public parkland are being made publicly in a partnership between the administration and the council and, you know, I've said this before. It's a concern of mine about Brooklyn Bridge Park but that's not true. It's got some history. It wasn't done just for the purpose of cutting out the New York City Council to be sure. It was done through history, but the result is it's not New York City Parks Department policy which governs and we have less ability to have clear and transparent oversight and decision making there. That doesn't take anything away from it as a magnificent park, but when we talk about what we're trying to do and make sure is it in place as we move forward with conservancy policy, the model that was established by Gordon Davis sounds to me like the one that we want to maintain.

COMMISSIONER WHITE: So like all Parks Commissioners I have a very big head so, going all



1 the way back to Robert Moses, so while I would like  
2 to control it and be in charge of everything, the  
3 reality is they're a very transparent organization  
4 so the Brooklyn Bridge Park, I'm one of the voting  
5 members of the board and the same with Hudson River  
6 Park, but they're public board meetings and the  
7 public shows up and so it was all very, very public  
8 and very, very transparent. So I just want to say  
9 that, while the Parks Department itself is not the  
10 sole decision maker or the key decision maker  
11 because there's so many other involved parties,  
12 there are public board meetings and, you know,  
13 everything's online and they televise them  
14 sometimes at some of them so I just want...  
15 [interject]

17 COUNCIL MEMBER LANDER: It's true but  
18 there's a fundament difference in terms of policy  
19 being said by the people of the city of New York  
20 through their elected representatives and that is  
21 not the case at Brooklyn Bridge Park. Parks  
22 Department policy for the rest of the parks is said  
23 in a way where the mayor who's elected and the  
24 council who are elected make a set of sometimes  
25 their laws, sometimes their rules, sometimes their

1 policies, and that's just not the case of Brooklyn  
2 Bridge Park. That doesn't mean they're not doing a  
3 good job with the trust that they've been given and  
4 that they don't handle it in a public and  
5 transparent way, but to me for our publicly owned  
6 and controlled land, I want to keep us on this side  
7 of the line, you know, and going forward, you know,  
8 I hope as we're doing... we can do new things as  
9 Freshkills shows and as other new park development  
10 examples show with the model that we have and not  
11 with a model which continues to push the envelope  
12 towards something, you know, less of the city and a  
13 little more private.

14  
15 COMMISSIONER WHITE: Freshkills is an  
16 excellent example. Thank you very much. Yes.

17 COUNCIL MEMBER LANDER: Thank you.  
18 Thanks, Madame Chair.

19 CHAIRPERSON MARK-VIVERITO: You're  
20 welcome. Commissioner, you indicated about the...  
21 you talked about the Adopt-A-Park program and in  
22 our briefing we talk about it as well with regards  
23 to money being raised for, you know, playgrounds  
24 and open spaces and city parks. Can donors specify  
25 where they want that money allocated or is it a

general fund that then the Parks Department designates where it's going to be invested?

COMMISSIONER WHITE: For Adopt-A-Park, it's generally... it's specific to that park.

CHAIRPERSON MARK-VIVERITO: To the park.

COMMISSIONER WHITE: But what I'm creating now and I actually had hoped to do a year ago but Sandy got in the way, is I want to have a general conservancy that people can contribute to. You actually can do it now; we just haven't launched it. So if you go to the Parks Department website you can click where it says Donate Here sending my hundred dollars to a general parks conservancy money. That money is going through the City Parks Foundation. We haven't launched it so it's just a couple of thousand dollars at this point in time while we were trying to figure out exactly how to launch it with an event to make sure that it'd be something citywide. It would be dollars that then the Parks Department would be able to send towards parks that aren't able to raise the kinds of funds that we're talking about, the larger conservancies. So that's what I was referring to in my testimony. It's actually been

active online for several months but we would like to launch it with an event that would make people... part of it is the starting of the Go Park. It's the 29,000 acres. We're big. Yes, we have the biggest budget ever. Yes, we've invested 5 billion but for the dozens of years before that there was barely a billion and a half dollars invested. So while we're making tremendous investments and we have a great operating budget, we need a lot more resources, and we think that a lot of people will come to the table and help us out and give more generically to the Parks system and that's what we're creating. It doesn't have a name as such and we haven't launched it, but that's what I was referring to in the testimony and we're hoping that people will go online and give. We're, you know, sort of in a soft launch of making sure that actually works which it does and that our plan is to be able to utilize that funding to help out the parks that don't have the other resources, private resources.

CHAIRPERSON MARK-VIVERITO: I want to thank you for your testimony. Every time we have these hearings we have a lot more questions that we

could ask, but I do respect everyone's time. What we are going to do is we will be following up with a letter with some questions that we were not able to get to that we would like some information on and answers to so we will make sure that that happens, and again I thank you for the testimony and I thank you for being here today.

COMMISSIONER WHITE: Thank you for having us here. This is a lot of confusion and I think this helped at least somewhat and we'll continue because...

CHAIRPERSON MARK-VIVERITO: And raising a lot more questions too.

COMMISSIONER WHITE: ...the conservancies are really, really helpful to us and we're so grateful for all the support, both volunteerism as well as the dollars that people contribute, so we're very, very grateful of that, and we're veyr glad to be here today. Thank you very much.

CHAIRPERSON MARK-VIVERITO: Well, thank you. And we have quite a few panels. We're doing each panel about four people. I know that the Parks Department did ask a lot of the administrators and representatives of different

groups to be here. If there's any way of working collaboratively and people want to collapse, you know, you can feel free to do that. If not, we have the panels here and we'll sit through the testimony. I'm going to call the first panel, Janice Melnick, we have Emily Lloyd, Portia Dyrenforth, and Peter Harnik.

Sorry, we had a little confusion right now. So Peter Harnik is here, right? Peter, Janice and Emily. And, you, John Herold, can also come up a minute? Is John Herrold here? That's you, okay. So feel free, either one of you can start, and Mr. Herrold, if you can... once he gets here, he could sit at the table as well.

JANICE MELNICK: Good afternoon, Chair Mark-Viverito and members of the City Council Parks Committee. I'm Janice Melnick, the Flushing Meadows-Corona Park Administrator for the New York City Parks Department.

Thank you for allowing me to come before you to talk about our park. Flushing Meadow-Corona Park is an 897-acre flagship park in Queens that attracts over 7 million visitors each year. It is home to several cultural institutions,

athletic stadiums, and a myriad of amenities that attracts thousands of visitors each week.

I'd like to think of FMCP as a utilitarian park. Where there's a patch of grass, someone is using it, whether you play soccer or volleyball or have a picnic. This extensive use takes its toll. The Parks Department is tasked with keeping the park safe and clean for all to enjoy, but this is not always easy. While we do have fulltime staff to cut the grass, pick up the garbage and clean the bathrooms, there's a lot more we would like to do.

A conservancy or alliance can raise funds to help. As most of you know there's been a lot of discussion about establishing an alliance in Flushing Meadow-Corona Park as a result of the USTA and Willets Point expansions. We attended meetings with the six community boards that surround the park. They along with many interested park patrons and Council Member Julissa Ferreras all strongly supported the idea of establishing a new alliance for the park.

In fact, five of those community boards and Council Member Ferreras listed it as a

requirement for their support of any expansion. We believe the community gave us a mandate to create an alliance and we're currently in the process of doing just that.

The mission of the FMCP alliance would be to support and augment parks operations and plans for Flushing Meadow-Corona Park in partnership with the city of New York through advocacy, fundraising and programming. It would be the principle catalyst for the park's enhancement and the coven of supporters and volunteers. While we have a commitment from the USTA for annual funding, our goal would be to raise at least a third of our total budget from sources other than our principle funders. With raised funds, we would like to hire year-round PEP officers as well as seasonal maintenance and recreation staff and to add more free programming for the public.

An alliance will help us to raise funds but more importantly will serve to advocate for the park and assist the public in becoming stewards of this great park. As we approach the 75th and 50th anniversaries of the two World Fairs that were held in FMCP, I believe this is the perfect time to



establish the alliance. I fully support the work of the many public-private partnerships that help us care for our 29,000 acres of parkland throughout the city.

EMILY LLOYD: Good afternoon, Council Member Mark-Viverito and Council Member Lander. My name is Emily Lloyd and I serve as both as the Administrator of Prospect Park and President of the Prospect Park Alliance, and it's my pleasure to be here today.

Covering 585 acres, we have competing acreage here, 585 acres in the heart of Brooklyn, Prospect Park is more than just a neighborhood park. It's a borough wide facility. With its great subway service and wide array of activities, Prospect Park is a magnet for all of Brooklyn's diverse and ever-changing population, and I will skip some sections of my testimony to be a little faster.

But I do want to say Frederick Law Olmstead and Calvert Vaux designed the park to be a place of respite and relaxation as well as a place for people to come together to participate in various types of activities. They envisioned

Prospect Park as a place where people would come to be renewed in the 90-acre long meadow, 250 acres of woodlands or 60-acre lake. Today, Prospect Park has over 10 million visits each year. Olmstead and Vaux envisioned families from every neighborhood in Brooklyn coming to Prospect Park and come they did from the day it opened as they do today to picnic, barbecue, fish, participate in our public education programs, to play on the hundreds of athletic teams at the playgrounds and the ball fields, to volunteer to help keep the park clean or to attend one of our regular events like our annual Halloween Haunted Walk and Carnival or the monthly food truck rally.

As you may know, Prospect Park Alliance is a not-for-profit that partners with the Parks Department and the community to foster stewardship of Prospect Park. Established in 1987, the alliance helps to care for the natural environment, to preserve the park's historic design, provide facilities, oversee more than 25,000 permitted events, mostly birthday parties and picnics and host programs and activities throughout the year.

Over the past 26 years, we've played a vital role in restoring the park to its original beauty. During this time, we worked very closely with local elected officials, the Parks Department and surrounding communities to identify, prioritize, design, and complete approximately 50 restoration and renovation projects over close 120 acres of the park and 5,100 linear feet of our watercourse. And of course I won't list them all, but at the heart of all this work, for the past the 26 years, has been the restoration of 250 acres of woodlands reversing decades of soil erosion and compaction. The alliance has replaced over 10,000 over story and under story trees, and the results are substantial, and Prospect Park's woodlands once again offer visitors a place to connect with a natural environment, and Prospect Park is now again a major anchor for the northeast bird migration.

In December, we will complete Lakeside which is two skating rinks in the winter, roller skating and water play in the summer, open to the public all around, and restores the original Olmstead and Vaux design to the shorefront, and we hope will be goldly [phonetic] certified so we're

really very excited about that and very appreciative of the support we've had from the City Council, the Brooklyn delegation on that.

In addition to our restoration though and just as importantly, the alliance actively engages the community to become stewards and advocates of the park through our volunteer program and our education and youth programs, our community committee and through membership. The alliance supports and maintains a very active volunteer program. Like many not-for-profits, volunteers play a huge role. At Prospect Park, they assist with a variety of landscaping and maintenance projects including raking, gardening, woodland restoration, sweeping, painting and litter removal. This past year approximately 4,000 volunteers gave over 27,000 hours in the park working primarily with our landscape management and maintenance and operation departments. Their work contributed the equivalent of approximately 15 full time staff members. Our volunteers are always important and they became truly critical as part of our team when we had to deal with a natural disaster such as Hurricane Sandy.

As you know, Sandy caused major damage throughout Prospect Park. Hundreds of trees down, countless branches hanging, pedestrian pathways obstructed, and the park had to be closed to the public. With our staff and our robust volunteer program, we were able to manage 500 volunteers from the community to help clean, and we were able to open the park just five days after the storm, much sooner than we had originally anticipated.

We serve directly over 70,000 people a year through our environmental education programs with active learning adventures that teach children about the natural world, helping to support our mission to encourage appreciation and stewardship of the park, not just today but into the future. Using the park itself as an outdoor class room for hands on learning, we have created a unique opportunity for children to learn about the value of our parks and become the next generation of park stewards.

Our free public programs include Prospect Park's Audubon Program. This year we introduced Popup Audubon, an interactive program for children directly engaging with nature through

1 outdoor learning adventures. Using our greatest  
2 resource, the park, Popup Audubon is located at a  
3 different site around the park each month featuring  
4 an educational program about a different park  
5 ecosystem. And Lefferts Historic House, part of  
6 the Historic House Trust, Lefferts interprets the  
7 history of Brooklyn's environment from pre-Colonial  
8 times until the present using its working garden  
9 and historic artifacts and documents as well as  
10 period rooms and exhibits.

12 In addition, for more than 10 years,  
13 the alliance has developed successful youth program  
14 focused on park stewardship. Made up of  
15 approximately 15 high school students, our  
16 Woodlands Youth Crew is a hands-on environmental  
17 restoration crew that works closely with the park's  
18 Natural Resources Crew to actively participate in  
19 our woodlands restoration. Working fulltime  
20 through the summer and on weekends during the  
21 school year, Youth Crew members specifically work  
22 to give new life to some of the park's most damaged  
23 areas by countering erosion, removing invasive  
24 vegetation and planting native plants.

In addition, we have a team of six park youth representatives leading programs and tours for visitors and summer camp groups, working primarily with the Audubon Programming and at Lefferts Historic Center. Park Youth Reps receive valuable leadership development and a keen understanding of the value of public park in an urban environment. They work fulltime in the summer and on weekends during the winter.

I'd also like to say a word about our community committee. The alliance would not have been able to accomplish everything it has done without the support of the surrounding community. Over the past 20 years, we've built interest, involvement, communication and collaboration to the Prospect Park Community Committee which we call the Com-Com. The Com-Com was specifically created to provide an ongoing dialogue with the community around problems, management initiatives and capital plans. The Com-Com takes an active advisory and advocacy roll representing the interests of park users and the community while making recommendations for the function and future of Prospect Park. Representatives of more than 30

1 local organizations as well as all of the elected  
2 officials, city, state and federal, and community  
3 boards surrounding the park are invited to monthly  
4 meetings to discuss relevant issues of Prospect  
5 Park management such as dog rules, garbage,  
6 recycling policies, park drive hours, and how to  
7 make the park more accessible to seniors, to review  
8 capital plans and programs and have regular  
9 discussions with other city agencies such as the  
10 Department of Transportation that manages the park  
11 drive.  
12

13 We also serve as a constant source of  
14 public information with close to 12,000 recipients  
15 of our monthly electronic newsletter, 35,000 fans  
16 on Facebook and 14,000 followers on Twitter. I'm  
17 now speaking in tons. I have no idea how you do  
18 any of that. We regularly communicate events,  
19 programs and important advisories to the  
20 surrounding communities. In addition, the alliance  
21 has close to 5,000 members from neighborhoods in  
22 Brooklyn as well as other boroughs and outside the  
23 city. Unlike cultural institutions around the city  
24 that can offer free admission as an inducement to  
25 its members, the alliance attracts members



1 primarily by offering them an opportunity to play a  
2 vital role in the park's well being. Their support  
3 allows the alliance to help maintain ball fields  
4 and playgrounds, restore historic structures and  
5 landscapes, protect wildlife habitats and provide  
6 targeted summer cleanups and our enormously popular  
7 picnic and barbecue areas.  
8

9 I believe the conservancies play a  
10 critical role in focusing the oversight, advocacy,  
11 and care of park users in practical and effective  
12 ways. I think the Prospect Park Alliance has been  
13 successful in doing that for the communities around  
14 the park and for all the residents of Brooklyn. I  
15 think it has been successful because it's been  
16 shaped by the people who use the park, evolving  
17 over the years and allowing them to create and  
18 contribute to the stewardship of their shared space  
19 in a wide variety of ways. Having said that, I  
20 think that there is probably no singular formula  
21 that will work for all parks, and I hope that this  
22 committee will appreciate the value of the varied  
23 forms conservancies take. Thank you for the  
24 opportunity to testify.  
25

PETER HARNIK: Thank you, Madame Chair.

I'm Peter Harnik. I'm director of the Center for City Park Excellence. We're located in Washington, D.C. We're a Department of the Trust for Public Land. I'm pleased to be here today. I gave you written testimony but I'll summarize it.

This has been a very fascinating conversation. New York City has always been at the forefront of all the new ideas in parks from Frederick Law Olmstead all the way on, and park conservancies, as you know, grew out of the challenges that came to New York City ahead of other cities. We collect the data from cities, all the large cities in the country, and the ideas that were created here in New York back in 1980 have spread around the country, and there's now, according to our database, 56 major conservancies around the country in places like Atlanta and Houston and Denver and Chicago, places that never conceived of anything like this back in 1980 but saw the tremendous success of what you've heard about today and also faced some of the challenges that New York may be faced earlier than some of these other cities.

We're big fans of conservancies and we're also big fans of cities stepping up to the plate and doing their own share of paying for parks. We, like Councilman Lander, we don't support turning over parks to the private sector. We want the public sector to do its role and accept the support that these private entities bring. The somewhat unfortunate realities in some cases are Americans are increasingly tax-averse. Parks, as they age, become more expensive to repair, and many great old cities with great old park systems have fewer resources, and there are many, many people that want to step up to the plate and help their parks, love their parks and help their parks, and we think the conservancies have shown themselves to be a very effective way of merging this public-private partnership together.

So, like I said, you know, in Buffalo, there's the Olmstead Park Conservancy. It's now managing about two-thirds of the whole park system of Buffalo. Buffalo's kind of a hurting city, and they're doing more than half of the parks there. In Atlanta, the Piedmont Park Conservancy has turned Piedmont Park around just the way Central

1 Park Conservancy has done it here. In  
2 Philadelphia, the Fairmount Park Conservancy works  
3 not only to beautify the heavily used public parks  
4 of East and West Park, but they've also led a  
5 remarkable transformation of something called  
6 Hunting Park in a very gritty part of the city, and  
7 in San Diego, where Balboa Park has almost played  
8 second fiddle to the 26 museums that are located in  
9 their park, is now coming up with a conservancy  
10 saying this is not just a location for 26 museums,  
11 we have to have a conservancy just for this park  
12 too. So what's being done here is spreading around  
13 the country and the kind of debate and discussion  
14 that you're having here today, very fascinating  
15 conversation will be playing itself out I think in  
16 other cities. So to quickly compress our findings,  
17 we believe that conservancies raise the tide for  
18 everybody in the city since they allow heavily  
19 visited destination parks to burst with beauty and  
20 horticultural health and great programming. They  
21 provide a mechanism whereby infrastructure repairs  
22 can sometimes be made on a quicker and less  
23 bureaucratic turn around basis. They enable city  
24 parks departments to reprogram staffing and  
25

1 expenditures from the focal destination parks  
2 towards parks that otherwise would receive less  
3 attention and they raise the psychological bar. I  
4 think this is the most important. They raise the  
5 psychological bar so that all city residents can  
6 see and expect and call for the kind of park  
7 excellence that they see in conservancy parks in  
8 their parks around the city, and they bring in not  
9 only money but the involvement of citizen, and this  
10 is something that my center works on day and night  
11 to get more people involved. I'm sorry that  
12 Councilman Van Bramer just left because as you may  
13 know that my organization here in town is working  
14 with the Friends of the Queensway to create the new  
15 Queensway Park which may be New York's next great  
16 park, and if and when that succeeds, I fully expect  
17 that we'll be supported by a Queensway conservancy.  
18 Thank you.

19  
20 I just want to say we're at your beckon  
21 call. We produce a lot of information. Anything  
22 we can do to help you with the information you need  
23 we'll do from Washington. Thank you.

24 CHAIRPERSON MARK-VIVERITO: Thank you.  
25 Mr. Herrold.

JOHN HERROLD: Thank you. Good afternoon, Chair Mark-Viverito and members of the City Council Parks Committee. I am John Herrold, and I am the Parks Department's administrator for Riverside Park in Manhattan. I also serve as the president of the Riverside Park Conservancy, and I thank you for the opportunity to come before you this afternoon to talk about the role the conservancy plays in the care of Riverside Park and beyond.

As the Riverside Park administrator, I also oversee West Harlem Pier's Park, Riverside Park South, and the southern half of Fort Washington Park; in all, some 400 acres running along the Hudson River for six miles from 59th Street to 181st Street. It is a regional park whose waterfront greenway, historic monuments, playgrounds, playing fields, and programs draw people from around the city and across the region, and for people living on the western side of Manhattan from the edge of Chelsea to the Upper West Side to Harlem to Hamilton Heights and Washington Heights, it is their much loved backyard.

As the administrator, I can assure you that these parks would not serve the millions of New Yorkers as they do today without the tremendous support of the Riverside Park Conservancy. In the wake of New York City's financial struggle during the 1970s, Riverside Park was neglected and had deteriorated badly. Because of the park's condition, it was little used by the community and misuse proliferated. In 1986, a group of concerned neighbors formed Riverside Park Fund, now known as Riverside Park Conservancy to bring the community back into the park, raise awareness of the park's lost grandeur and advocate for greater public resources to restore and maintain the park. One way they did this was by establishing what I believe is today the largest volunteer program in any city park. Each year, the Riverside Park Conservancy marshals more than 40,000 hours of volunteer effort in projects of all sorts to restore and maintain the park's landscapes, playgrounds, ball fields, tennis courts, and dog runs just to name a few. More than half of this effort comes from community members who use the park every day and who have committed themselves to

1                   caring for a specific park location. They garden,  
2                   prep baseball fields, clean and monitor dog runs,  
3                   brings children's programs to playgrounds, maintain  
4                   tennis courts and so much more. These regulars are  
5                   the lifeblood that gives Riverside Park a palpable  
6                   sense of community. Some of them even come out to  
7                   shovel snow from the park's dozens of staircases.

8                   The remaining volunteer effort comes  
9                   from school groups, churches, synagogues, and  
10                  corporate teams who come in large numbers to tackle  
11                  large projects such as cleaning and replanting a  
12                  hillside or to clean up after a hurricane. All  
13                  that community involvement sustained now for 30  
14                  years has made immeasurable improvements to  
15                  Riverside Park and have helped make it and continue  
16                  to make it the jewel that today serves so many. If  
17                  you remember the bad old days, you know the  
18                  turnaround is priceless.

19                 The conservancy's financial support is  
20                 invaluable to our efforts to restore and maintain  
21                 the park. The conservancy pays for contractors to  
22                 plant, prune and inoculate trees. It hires  
23                 plumbers and electricians to keep fountains  
24                 workings. It buys vehicles and other equipment  
25



that it donates to the city for use in the care of the park. This support assists our hardworking city-funded staff to maintain and improve the park.

The conservancy employs a team of full time gardeners assigned to specific zones within the park from 153rd Street to 72nd Street who can provide their landscapes with consistent focused horticultural care that the park's one city funded gardener could never provide. These zone gardeners also support the park's volunteers, providing tools, materials, and guidance to make sure the community members who come out to help can make an even greater impact. Other full time Riverside Park Conservancy staff make sure the park's ball fields are groomed, cleaned and maintained so that the children and adults who come from all across the city have safe inviting facilities to play on.

These key services provided by the Riverside Park Conservancy make all the difference in what we on the city side are able to do through this partnership. Funding for this work comes from all across the communities served by the park from its users. Roughly 20 percent of the conservancy's income last year came in donations Of \$100 or less

from more than 3,500 people which is more than half our donor base, reflecting the breadth and depth of Riverside Park Conservancy's grassroots support.

Lastly, the Riverside Park Conservancy sponsors dozens of free music, art, and recreational programs throughout the year from one end of the park to the other serving children, teens, young adults, older adults and families. These programs benefit thousands of people from across the city and provide yet more ways to enjoy our parks and the great outdoors.

I thank you for allowing me the opportunity to testify before this committee.

CHAIRPERSON MARK-VIVERITO: And I want to thank the members of the panel for presentation. I allowed some leniency for this panel, but considering how many other panels we have I would really ask that people maintain their testimony to no more than three minutes and I'll ask that from this point forward. So thank you very much for your presentations and for that today. And I'll call on the second panel, but thank you.

I have Harbachan Singh, Deborah Marton, Tupper Thomas, and Holly Light.

COUNCIL MEMBER LANDER: And, Madame Chair, while the second panel's coming up I would be remiss if I didn't call out my wonderful Prospect Park leader for her outstanding work, so thank you, Emily, and now Tupper's coming as well.

CHAIRPERSON MARK-VIVERITO: Anybody can go ahead and start.

HARBACHAN SINGH: My name is Harbachan Singh. I am on the board of directors of the Flushing Meadow-Corona Park Conservancy, and I am here to testify on behalf of the president of the conservancy regarding this topic.

Conservancies, also known as land trusts, are community-based nonprofit organizations dedicated to the permanent protection and stewardship of natural and working lands for the public good. Conservancies are positioned to act swiftly and professionally to help landowners and communities protect the places important to us all. Open spaces that define our sense of place connect us to the natural world and provide real services such as water quality protection, wildlife habitat, outdoor recreation, and sources of food and timber.

## The Flushing Meadow-Corona Park

Conservancy believes that a successful conservancy is made up of community leader groups such as civic groups, community boards, the culturalists in the park, elected officials, as well as appointed members. All these groups have a vested interest in the park, and the conservancy's success with these very vested interest groups, we can better establish funding sources. Also, these groups provide an important communication vehicle to get the word out to their respective communities about fundraising, park events, volunteerism, and business opportunities. While achieving this vision for the conservancy may be difficult, we know that by working and respecting each other's ideas, we can accomplish a great deal. The Flushing Meadow-Corona Park Conservancy looks forward to working with you. Thank you.

DEBORAH MARTON: Thank you. Chair Mark-Viverito and Council Member Lander, hello, thank you for holding this hearing, and also I just want to thank my colleagues for coming to hear this hearing. I'm Deborah Marton. I'm Senior Vice President of Programs at New York Restoration

Project, and I'm very honored to be here today to testify on the success of public-private partnerships and our work in New York City.

The New York Restoration Project was founded 18 years ago by Bette Midler who was inspired by the radical improvements to Central Park that were thanks to Central Park Conservancy, and NYRP is also a conservancy but we're unique. We're not attached to a particular site. Rather, we're driven by our strong commitment to the idea that every New Yorker deserves to enjoy the same levels of safety, cleanliness and beauty in our parks and public open spaces, and we put our money where our mouth is.

Since our founding in 1995, we've invested over \$100 million in our city's highest need communities and only in our city's highest need communities. We focused first on the under resource parks in northern Manhattan. I don't need to remind the Chairwoman and others here that Fort Washington, Fort Tryon and Highbridge Parks were dumping grounds in the mid-nineties. In close collaboration with the Parks Department, our organization moved tons of garbage from these parks

turning them into safe, clean and respectful places for local citizens to recreate, exercise and escape the hardscape city.

I distributed earlier images of what became Sherman Creek Park. That's our crowning achievement and the largest private investment to date. I want to just emphasize that. The largest private investment to date to build a park in a high need neighborhood. The images show the area before renovation and then after our \$15 million investment created a premiere waterfront park on the Harlem River reconnecting the communities of Inwood and Washington Heights to their waterfront. We also maintain the park today with the help of community stewards, and it's every bit as immaculately maintained as Central Park, and I know that the Chair has been there and we'd love to show it to you if you haven't.

After renovating Fort Tryon Park, we opened the New Leaf Restaurant to encourage round-the-clock activity within the park. Similarly, in 2004 at Sherman Creek, we built the Harlem River's only community rowing boat house on a historic site that once supported a very vibrant boating

community similar to what we find today on Schuylkill or the Charles in Boston. Without the Peter J. Sharp Boathouse, our partner there, Row New York, would not have been able to train 140 local school kids this fall alone in competitive rowing with the goal of helping those kids secure a full scholarship to premiere colleges through rowing.

And we're not done yet at Sherman Creek. Over the next two years to celebrate our 20th anniversary, we'll invest another \$5 million in improvements at Sherman Creek. We're now completing renovation of the last site within the park that's not yet publicly accessible. It will support a state-of-the-art storm resilient outdoor classroom and community boat storage facility, making it one of the city's premiere sites for environmental education, water access and recreation. So that's a demonstration of the public-private partnerships.

NYRP is a conservancy that only serves high need communities through our park renovations, community gardens and partnership with the city to plant one million trees by 2015, two years ahead of

schedule, I add. Wherein an example of how private investment can significantly improve our city's physical and social resilience.

And our collaboration isn't limited to our work with Parks. We work across all jurisdictions with NYCHA, City and State DOT, HPD, and DP just to name a few, and of course on our own 52 community gardens which are located in the city's highest need communities. We're a proud member of a thriving community of nonprofits that care deeply about New York City's public realm. Each of us plays an important part in making this a more livable and sustainable city, so I conclude by just thanking you for support. I know this committee has done a great deal for cities and every sort of community, for parks in every sort of community in this city and we're very grateful for your work. Thank you.

TUPPER THOMAS: Hi. I'm Tupper Thomas. I was the former president of the Prospect Park Alliance and the first administrator of the park, but I also over time have been very active in helping to form an organization called the City Parks Alliance, which is a national organization



1 that really focuses totally on parks in cities,  
2 whether they are city, state or federally funded.  
3 And, in fact, Brad Lander, one of my most favorite  
4 Council Members, but now I don't live in this  
5 district, spoke at that conference on just this  
6 topic, on transparency and public-private  
7 partnerships. Our organization is very interested  
8 and is actually formed by many groups that Central  
9 Park and Prospect Park and others like us saw as  
10 this useful thing to be doing, so the ones that  
11 Peter Harnik recommended, Peter and I served on the  
12 board together, and we have really branched out  
13 across the country to help cities really rethink  
14 how to fund their parks and how to make their  
15 budgets work so that the parks that are so  
16 necessary for people's quality of life to come  
17 back.

19 So, the thing I'd like to say about  
20 this whole issue of whether a board should be  
21 making decisions on public land, and the answer's  
22 absolutely no, they don't make decisions on public  
23 land. I don't ever remember a board meeting in the  
24 Prospect Park Alliance where the board members  
25 talked about whether dogs should be off-leash,

picnicking should happen, barbecuing should happen, roads should be closed. It doesn't happen. And maybe that's something that should be made more clear is that these people who give so much of their time and energy who are such great leaders to really all of us and in many ways in the civic lives of the city of New York, these guys, they don't sit down and make decisions that are city decisions that should be made only by the public policy people. They make decisions about how the organization is going to operate, how can we raise the money that we need to raise, and I think there has to be, Brad, a way that that complete openness of our boards. I don't think if you asked any of us that we would say that our boards are actually involved in saying, oh no, we aren't going to go with that city policy or whatever. The city still makes the decisions in city parks. The state still makes the decisions in the state parks that have to do with the public. It is really these Friends groups, conservancies, alliances, really are involved in helping all of us to provide these wonderful spaces which also are not going to wealthy people. These spaces really provide a

fabulous alternative for people who don't go to their summer homes and have a great place.

So, I don't think that the conservancies are putting their heads in the ground and saying, oh my god, don't attack us, because I'm sure none of you would attack us because we are doing great things for people, but the thing that I think has to be more transparent is how do we do them, and I think those are really important things for us to all work on together to make sure that the people feel comfortable giving us money because they will only feel comfortable if they know that the city is equally committed to doing this.

That's what the public-private partnership is, so I'm hopeful that we will have ways that we can all talk about how to make this effort that all of us have put into this more transparent.

CHAIRPERSON MARK-VIVERITO: Thank you.

I think we're going to have bring up another, for the future panels, another chair because we can fit four chairs up there, but thank you. Yes.

HOLLY LIGHT: Hi, I'm Holly Light, Executive Director of New Yorkers for Parks. I'll try to make this as brief as possible.

Thank you for hosting this today to discuss the much debated topic of conservancies. Despite their significant role in some of the city's most utilized parks, conservancies have only been around since the mid-eighties. Most began as grassroots efforts aimed at improving abysmal conditions in parks resulting from the fiscal crisis of the seventies. Today, there are hundreds, if not thousands, of volunteer groups dedicated to New York's parks but fewer than 30 have formed legal agreements with the city, and I'm going to focus on those 30 really in my remarks.

Even those organizations with legal agreements have differing roles, and what I want to talk about mostly, we believe in New Yorkers for Parks that they do, as we said earlier, rise the tide for all parks in the system, but I want to address a few of the criticisms about them.

Some critics argue the conservancies remove control of parks from the Parks Department encouraging privatization of these public assets and breeding inequity among parks. Let me address these in turn.

Conservancies have a dual reporting structure for maximum oversight. In almost every case, as has been said, the head of the conservancy is also the park administrator, meaning he or she reports jointly to a nonprofit board of directors that bears fiscal responsibility for its activities and to the borough commissioner of the Parks Department. As nonprofit 501(c)(3) organizations, conservancies have to account to the IRS for every dollar they bring in and spend, and this financial information is publicly available. In addition, the Parks Department has ultimate approval over all decisions and activities of conservancies, so really far from ceding control, this belt and suspenders approach means there are more checks and balances for these parks than for the rest of the city's parks.

As for an equity, while there's no doubt conditions vary from park to park across the five boroughs, our research on public-private partnerships and park maintenance makes clear that singling out conservancies as the source of the problem misses the mark. Parks with conservancies are not uniformly better maintained than those

without, and that's in part because the majority have modest revenues and struggle to keep their parks at a standard of care that New Yorkers rightly expect. To truly address inequitable park conditions, the Parks Department needs more fulltime maintenance and enforcement staff and it needs greater control of its capital budget so it can target funds more effectively, prioritizing those parks with the greatest need. It is by bolstering and redistributing the public budget for parks, not reallocating relatively small amounts of private fun that we will equalize the standard of care across all 1,700 parks.

All this is not to say the conservancy is perfect. Last year we analyzed 26 legal agreements between conservancies in the Parks Department and developed the following recommendations to encourage greater consistency, transparency and accountability while still allowing for flexibility and recognition of the diversity among these organizations.

First, there are now enough conservancies in existence to identify what works and what doesn't. A standard license agreement

should be developed incorporating best practices from existing agreements. This new template should be used for organizations seeking to enter into their first license agreement with DPR as well as for organizations whose agreements are being renegotiated at the end of their terms. Second, all agreements should require that the DPR Commissioner and relevant Borough Commissioner are ex officio members of the organization's board, they actually don't all require that right now, to ensure DPR involvement in decision making.

In addition, community committee such as that for Prospect Park should be required to ensure public input. Third, all organizations 990 tax filing should be available in one place on the DPR website. I was glad to hear the Commissioners think about doing that. Ideally, DPR would also require organizations to report their financial information annually in a more simplified consistent form that would be posted on its website.

And finally, parks maintained by private organizations should be held to the same maintenance standards as other city parks. License

agreements should explicitly mandate that all parks be inspected through PIP, the Department's Parks Inspection Program.

Public-private partnerships for parks are still relatively new, but we now have enough experience with them in New York to tweak the model and encourage best practices as we move forward. New Yorkers for Parks firmly believes the conservancies play a critical role in helping to manage our city's parks, and with increased consistency and transparency, they will be even more effective in assisting the Parks Department so that precious public resources can be weighted toward those parks most in need.

CHAIRPERSON MARK-VIVERITO: Thank you for the testimony. I think, Council Member Lander, you have a couple of questions?

COUNCIL MEMBER LANDER: So thanks to all of you for testifying. It's especially great to see Tupper.

So, Holly, are those new recommendations or is that a report that you guys had released previously and we can...



HOLLY LIGHT: We did not release this as an official report. We sat with the Parks Department and talked them through these recommendations probably about six months ago and have had ongoing conversations about those.

COUNCIL MEMBER LANDER: I mean did you do analysis... I mean we got your testimony obviously. I don't know if there was something more that you can share... [interject]

HOLLY LIGHT: We'd be happy to provide more information. What we had started with is we did a matrix of all of the agreements which ended up filling my entire office, sort of a roll because there isn't a lot of consistency, and as has been said there's reason for having these tailored to specific parks but there also are some things we think should be consistent, and so we have this sort of matrix and some ideas of what terms we think should be consistent. We didn't want to be too prescriptive because we think the Parks Department knows these best as do the conservancies, but we can definitely share more details of our analysis with you.

COUNCIL MEMBER LANDER: That would be great, and I think that's one thing that we need to think a little and the level of what ought to be required by law so should there be something which puts into law if there's going to be an agreement. You know, that should have even less, right? There's sort of, you know, leaving flexibility for the conservancies and there's leaving some flexibility for the Parks Department, its relationship to conservancies, and hopefully the Parks Department will sort of move in that direction but we'll have to think about whether we think it's appropriate for there to be some amount of clarity provided by law about what should be... at least that there should be an agreement, that it ought to be, you know, made public in some of the way, so it would be great...

HOLLY LIGHT: My understanding in having worked extensively on the Flushing Meadows idea is that they are now starting this creation of a template based on best practices, and so I think that may be the first one where they pull the things that have worked best and tried to make a template, and I think, you know, I would look to

1                   them to do that since they have the most experience  
2                   with it but certainly think that input and sharing  
3                   of that is worthwhile.

4                   CHAIRPERSON MARK-VIVERITO: And there  
5                   was legislation. We're trying to actually amend it  
6                   to clarify but there has been some legislation that  
7                   we have passed regarding reporting of additional  
8                   resources that come to conservancies and trying to  
9                   get more detail about that but, yeah, I think  
10                  there's more work that can be done but thank you  
11                  for that recommendations, and for NYRP I really  
12                  appreciate the relationship that we've established.  
13                  I know that you manage a lot of and own a lot of  
14                  community gardens in my district and the  
15                  relationship has been a very positive and  
16                  productive one and Sherman Creek is beautiful.  
17                  It's being done there so thank you for the efforts  
18                  that you've engaged in and working with the Heidi  
19                  [phonetic] communities always a value, especially  
20                  for me [interject]...

21                  HOLLY LIGHT: Thank you.

22                  CHAIRPERSON MARK-VIVERITO: But thank  
23                  you. Thank you all for testifying and we'll call  
24                  the next panel. Add another chair from one of  
25

these maybe up there. I don't know if it... is it easy to get over there, Brad, or not? Thank you. Joe Puleo, Jack Lynn, Marlana Giga, and Geoff Croft. And I see Commissioner Benepe's still here, I didn't... I didn't... I'm sorry. I didn't recognize you earlier, Commissioner. Thank you for sticking around and being here. Thank you.

And people can... you decide how you want  
to start and feel free to begin.

JOE PULEO: Okay. I'll start off. I'll be brief. My name is Joe Puleo. I'm President of Local 983. I have with me Marlana Giga. I'd just like to begin by saying if I was ever confused about conservancies I am now. The biggest problem I have with conservancies from a union perspective is a lot of them hire employees that are nonunion, so it seems to be a way for them to circumvent hiring nonunion, non-civil service people. A good example of that is Central Park Conservancy. I think we lost something like 250 people that are now conservancy workers that are nonunion, and these workers are exploited because they could be fired at any whim, you know, anytime they feel like

saying you don't have to come in, that's it. They have no benefits like our employees have.

The other problem I have, it's like a tale of two parks. Again, if you have the money and you can start these great programs, you can do a lot for these parks but what about everybody else? I mean I think there's a tendency of forgetting who these parks really belong to. These parks belong to the people, you know? And as elected officials, you're in charge, you know, of administering who, you know, gets to steward these parks. You know, and for the longest time it's been the Parks Department. I know like during the late seventies, early eighties, these parks were in bad shape, and it worked great maybe for parks like Central Park, you know, where there's a lot of wealthy people, but what about everybody else, and I think that's what the real concern is. What about everybody else, what about tax levy dollars that was mentioned earlier? You know, when these matching funds come, just because the park generates more money the city has to give them more money as well? So these are serious concerns.

Okay, I'm now going to have Giga.

Giga? Giga has been an enforcement officer for the last 14 years, and it's more fresh on her mind, things that she's observed during her tenure, and she's going to mention some of those.

MARLENA GIGA: Hi, my name is Marlena Giga, and I'm a Sergeant with the Park Enforcement Division. During my 14 years, I've worked in all five boroughs and I've had the opportunity to see firsthand what various conservancies and park partnerships groups have done. In the worst case scenarios, they divide the parks into a state of being able to pick what laws are enforced, what types of concerts are heard, what types of sports are played, the designs of the park recreation centers and prohibiting the public access and how the money will be spent in that particular park. Often, the administrators for these types of partnerships do not care what the needs for the community are, what sports the local children play. These partnerships are money driven which means if you are wealthy enough you or your child can play on a field for a fee. The priority is raising

money for the conservancy in any way, and often the community suffers.

I have witnessed in Heckshire Playground in Central Park, the playground being closed to the public during primetime play for children due to a conservancy event that was serving alcoholic beverages in the playground where obviously by law that is prohibited. I have witnessed in Van Cortlandt Park in the Bronx only accommodating Riverdale schools and schools that are able to pay for permits that take up the entire playground or running track, making it nearly impossible for neighborhood children to use.

I have also witnessed the diversity of the concerts of the past in many parks diminish to non-minority entertainment, making the park not friendly to the locals. This is happening in many parks. The conservancies are also able to make up their own signs which are different from the park rules and regulations and the laws of New York City.

I have witnessed illegal arrests by my coworkers of artists that were set up at High Line Park. I have seen the mistreatment of First

Amendment artists at Brooklyn Bridge Park as well.

I have witnessed the conservancy staff abuse their power numerous times. The conservancies do not want homeless individuals in their parks, telling them to leave if they do not look desirable, in which I would remind the conservancy staff that is not illegal to be homeless in a park.

Conservancies, in my opinion, are all too often dictatorships that work against the communities they are in. A park should be for all New Yorkers to enjoy, not just the ones that can afford to influence the conservancy.

Obviously, the money raised and spent in certain parks has created huge disparities between the haves and the have-nots. The solution is to fund parks from public dollars and ensure that the money is distributed evenly based on the need and not political influence. It is the government's job to properly fund its parks and not pass the responsibility along to others. We also need more funding for the park enforcement officers. Thank you.

GEOFFREY CROFT: Good afternoon. My name is Geoffrey Croft. I'm President of New York



1 City Park Advocates. Experience with public-  
2 private partnerships over the last thirty years has  
3 proven that the private subsidization of individual  
4 parks, however well-intentioned, has created an  
5 enormous gap between the haves and the have-nots  
6 while ignoring the real problem that our parks are  
7 not funded as an essential government service. It  
8 helps to ensure different or no parks for different  
9 people, discourages the government from maintaining  
10 the parks, and substitutes private decisions on the  
11 funding and the upkeep for accountable, transparent  
12 decisions regarding these precious public lands  
13 that can be changed by the public itself.

14  
15 As most people are acutely aware, this  
16 "system" of allowing public parks in wealthy areas  
17 to be paid for by private donations while most  
18 languish due to lack of private funds has created a  
19 widely disparate, separate, and decidedly unequal  
20 park system.

21 What this means in practical terms is  
22 that those parks, the chosen few, have dedicated  
23 staff, specific employees assigned to individual  
24 parks while the vast majority of the rest have to  
25

make do with the hodgepodge of roving cleaning crews, if at all.

For decades, the public has been told the expense funding needed to hire the skilled laborers, gardeners, climbers, and pruners, foresters, park enforcement, qualified managers among other positions that are so desperately needed are not available for our public parks. New York City's parks system needs roughly between \$20 and \$30 billion in capital funds to recover from more than forty years of fiscal neglect. Add at least another \$700 million needed annually for basic maintenance and operation for park upkeep. This does not include the federal and state park systems which are a whole other underfunding balls of wax, and we certainly disagree with the current Parks Commissioner saying "we have a great operation budget." That is ridiculous.

And although these are citywide problems that affect virtually every segment of the population, it is no secret that a disproportionate amount of the most severe issues exist in poor neighborhoods among the city's underserved communities, namely the working class, the point of

1 impact, the disenfranchised and in areas populated  
2 by people predominately of color. This is, of  
3 course, the great irony considering these are the  
4 communities that rely on these public services the  
5 most. Generally, they cannot fly to getaways for  
6 their respite the park so critically can provide.

7  
8 This increasing reliance on public-  
9 private partnerships has resulted in a vastly  
10 inequitable distribution of services. It has  
11 become a tale of two cities. Cause and effect, the  
12 budgets of a handful of publicly owned spaces,  
13 Central Park, Bryant Park, Madison Square, the High  
14 Line, Brooklyn Bridge and a few others are  
15 breathtakingly larger than the average municipally  
16 maintained park, and not surprisingly these spaces  
17 are well maintained.

18 As the first person in the city's  
19 history to have inspected every single city, state,  
20 and federal park in the five boroughs over many  
21 years, I'm intimately aware of the problems facing  
22 our park system as well as the impacts these  
23 conservancies and so-called public-private  
24 partnerships have created. I can assure you that  
25 relying on these groups to solve our issues instead

of holding the elected officials accountable to adequately fund parks is certainly not the solution.

Why are we in this predicament? That is simple. Each year our elected officials allocate a fraction of the funds desperately needed to properly maintain, operate, secure and program our 29,000 acres of public parks. This year is no different. The \$70.1 billion budget recently passed by this administration and the City Council allocates again 0.4 in tax levy funds to maintain our parks. The city continues to try and advocate its responsibility by entering into these public-private agreements that officials are not only allowing but actively encouraging. They are increasingly resorting to these pay-to-play funding schemes. This welfare mentality has to stop.

To be sure, a few parks have "come back" after many decades of municipal neglect due to the work of conservancies which they deserve credit for but at what cost to the public? The enormous disparity created by some of these arrangements aren't the only negative impacts. Often, these deals also hand over enormous power

and decision making authority to these groups with little transparency and accountability on what is supposed to be public land. This is a huge issue. This administration is also increasingly allowing private businesses to turn public parks into cash cows while privatizing the parks. The desperate measures groups are now employing in order to raise funds is also a great concern.

The two recent deaths in addition to the 19 people treated for illegal drug-related issues and 34 arrests relating to the Electric Zoo concert on Randall's Island was a completely avoidable incident on public parkland. Was it worth the reported \$600,000 that that conservancy received?

The total destruction of Randall's Island largest open space caused by the Governor's Ball Music Fest Festival which was held in the torrential rain and attended by 120,000 people is another example. The Randall's Island Sports Foundation, now named the Randall's Island Park Alliance, manages the park under an agreement with the city and is being allowed by our elected officials to divert concession revenue from the

city's general fund which is in violation of the city charter. RIPA relies on these fees generated from these events including Bloomberg LP's extravagant \$9 million annual private summer party as a major part of its annual revenue. For up to five months a year, up to dozens of acres of public parkland are being used for revenue producing events that prohibit the nonpaying public from accessing this crucial public parkland located between East Harlem and the South Bronx. I know that the issue of conservancies and the fees are coming up at another hearing.

The Union Square partnership bids eight-plus-year battle to seize desperately needed place base in Union Square Park at the expense of children and the greater community is another of the countless examples. The bid which pays for dedicated park services while most go without is attempting to install a high-end restaurant in an area with the highest concentration of eating establishments and the least amount of playground space in the entire city. The administration is allowing the bid to dictate policy on what is supposed to be public land, and it should be noted

that this is another irresponsible project supported by New Yorkers for Parks.

For up to ten months of the year, the Bloomberg administration is allowing Damrosch Park to be illegally seized by Lincoln Center, and the park is being rented out for private events while also allowing the concession revenue to be diverted. Examples also include preventing the general public from accessing for weeks up to dozens of acres in Prospect Park while damaging parkland in order to accommodate GoogaMooga for a paltry \$75,000. Another is the closing of the park's beloved Audubon Nature Center at the Boathouse on weekends in order for the Prospect Park Alliance to rent it out to private events. This is disgraceful. Emily Lloyd testified of the popup events there, but she failed to mention this important part.

The commercialization of Bryant Park has long been a concern. One Bryant Park [interject]...

CHAIRPERSON MARK-VIVERITO: Geoff, I think we mentioned that we wanted the events is

going to be a separate hearing, so if you just want to summarize some of those issues?

GEOFFREY CROFT: Yeah, I'm not dealing with the events.

CHAIRPERSON MARK-VIVERITO: Thank you.

GEOFFREY CROFT: I'm just saying, you know, the... you know, Bryant Park has been a huge issue. The changing mission of the Friends of Hudson River Park from advocacy and protector of the park to fundraising and government partner has also had significant impacts. I think it's safe to say the recent reworking of the law that now allows helicopters to remain in the park after that group fought so hard to keep them out would not have been allowed to happen previously. Again, the Neighborhood Improvement District tax being proposed for Hudson River Park and supported by them is another harebrained scheme meant to divert responsibility to properly fund the park.

The Flushing Meadow Park Alliance is another irresponsible scheme that is now in the works. Depending on businesses that are exploiting the park to fund these parks is certainly not the answer.



The enormous compensation being received to run these so-called private groups has also raised great concern as has the dual role of park administrators. City workers being paid at the same time by private groups. This is bad government plain and simple. Unfortunately, I can go on and on.

To make matters worse, for years Bloomberg administration officials including Parks Commissioner Adrian Benepe have absurdly pretended this disparity simply does not exist. Mr. Benepe called the disparity "a phony premise" in one of the many embarrassing moments caught recently in a TV interview. "I think they are nothing but positive" he said of public-private partnerships. Another completely unsubstantiated claim which was also made here today is that private funds allow the city to take public dollars and "allocate them to the vast majority of parks that don't get any private support" as former Commissioner Benepe recently said. This claim is clearly not supported by the Park's continued lack of underfunding and the resulting deplorable conditions found in many parks.

One thing that was mentioned a couple times today, the city, including Mr. Benepe, have also claimed that \$165 million is now being brought in annually from private funds to parks. However, less than that amount is accounted for in the reporting mechanism created to monitor such funds which is that 2008 law. We only heard today a \$76 million. That is obviously a huge discrepancy.

All New Yorkers deserve well maintained parks, not just those who can afford to pay extra. This is a basic quality of life.

In closing, how can we level the playing field and help ensure that every neighborhood gets the park funding they so desperately need? It is the government's legal responsibility to properly fund our public parks, not private citizens or businesses. We need our elected officials instead to take back our parks and allocate proper resources and ensure these funds are fairly distributed based on need and not on politics. The public also has to do its part. They have to demand accountability. And until communities begin to stand up and demand accountability from officials and so-called park

advocacy groups, the public can expect more of the same. One thing is certain, if people spent a third of their time and money on holding the people responsible and accountable for allocating proper funding for our park system, the city would be in a much different place. Thank you.

JACK LINN: I will be quite brief. I'm going to begin [applause]...

CHAIRPERSON MARK-VIVERITO: Really, let's be fair. Most of the majority of the testimony here has been favorable. I think that allowing a little bit more time to someone that may have a different point of view I think is also necessary, so please refrain from any expressions. Thank you.

JACK LINN: I'm Jack Linn and I used to work for the Parks Department. Number one, conservancies are Plan B. That's my echo. Public funding is Plan A. Conservancies exist because of 150 years of failure to provide sufficient public funding for our public park system. We have to start the conversation there. Now how in the world do we get sufficient public funding? Well, maybe we don't. Politically, it is difficult. You guys

1 make these decisions every year. However, if you  
2 want one argument that can support providing that  
3 money it is this. The public park system of New  
4 York City is a profit center for the city. It  
5 generates more money than it consumes. It does  
6 that in the form of property taxes, increased value  
7 to a land near our parks, taxed at higher rates  
8 that goes into the city coffers. The Parks  
9 Department doesn't get that money back; it gets a  
10 fraction of it. Other money goes to other city  
11 services. There's a huge amount of research on  
12 this point, not just our park system but  
13 nationwide, but it goes back like this insufficient  
14 funding 150 years to Olmstead. He made this point  
15 and documented it, and in documenting the  
16 difference between the property values around the  
17 Central Park site when he started building and when  
18 he finished, a period of 15 years, a nine-fold  
19 increase in property values around what is today  
20 Central Park. It's enormous. But much more  
21 recently, Professor Vickie Bean of NYU did a study  
22 on the city's community gardens and showed a 10  
23 percent bump to adjacent property values  
24 attributable to our community gardens.  
25

The Central Park Conservancy in 2007 did a study, which I played a very small role in vetting, that showed that Central Park alone, Central Park alone, is responsible for over \$600 million of annual revenue to this city. Why is that number significant?

It is significant because that represents the fully loaded operating budget of the park system. It's not the \$300 some odd million that has been kicked around here. That's not the correct figure. It's over \$600 million. And you don't count in their study, the Central Park study, what Prospect Park contributes, what the High Line contributes, what Bryant Park contributes, only Central Park. That by itself supports our park system so give more of it back. Please, you and your fellow decision makers on this.

The place where now I'm going to diverge from what some others here have said. The equity issue. I don't think it holds water, the argument, and here's why. Overwhelmingly, the private money that flows into our park system, whether it is conservancy money, event money or concession monies, is flowing into about 18 parks.

1 We have 5,000 properties. Eighteen parks get  
2 almost all of the money. What do they have in  
3 common, those parks? All of them are at least  
4 regional if not citywide parks. They serve a broad  
5 diverse constituency of New Yorkers. Bryant Park,  
6 who do you think you're going to find in Bryant  
7 Park at lunch hour? You're going to see the CEO of  
8 Bank of America, Merrill Lynch, whose headquarters  
9 is across the street or are you much more likely to  
10 see some guy who lives in the South Bronx and works  
11 in the mailroom of Bank of America? Well, it's the  
12 latter, of course. So our parks that are getting  
13 these conservancy monies that get special events  
14 fees, that get a lot of concession money, some of  
15 which stays in the park, and remember there is an  
16 impact on things like special events, and you've  
17 got to somehow take care of that with some extra  
18 money. These places, Central Park, 40 million  
19 visits a year. It takes a lot of money to clean up  
20 after 40 million people.

22 So the equity argument as long as the  
23 money is flowing to this handful of parks which are  
24 these citywide parks just makes no sense. You must  
25 do apples to apples, oranges to oranges. If you

were talking about a neighborhood park on the Upper East Side being better resourced than a neighborhood park in the South Bronx, then you've got an equity issue to look at, not because of what the conservancies are doing.

Final thing, there's been a lot of talk about transparency and I think it can be enormously helpful in getting rid of some of the... it's almost paranoia now about, you know, what is going on with the park system. The transparency cannot only apply although it certainly should to the conservancy organizations which should post, frankly, much more information than anyone is suggesting they're going to. Make it all available. Sunshine is indeed the best disinfectant, but the fact of the matter is that the city itself, and believe me, I'm not singling out the Parks Department at all in this, the city itself, all of it, has enormous transparency problems. The city can ask the conservancies to do a better job of being transparent and maybe because they're smaller organizations they can do it more quickly, but the city has an obligation to be transparent in how it spends all of its money, how

1 much money does the Parks Department spend on grass  
2 seed each year? Do you have a clue? No. The fact  
3 is that no member of this panel, I suspect, could  
4 have told you how much money it costs to operate  
5 the park system each year, that \$600 million figure  
6 is not the figure they're familiar with. Why?  
7 Because our budget doesn't readily show things like  
8 the debt service, judgments and claims, pensions  
9 and fringe benefits. They're in another part of  
10 the budget, so if you want to know what does it  
11 cost to run the Parks Department you have to have  
12 those kinds of things. Any business would but in  
13 city government, in New York City government, not  
14 all city government, we don't do it that way. So  
15 you end up with these odd conversations. You've  
16 all had, every member of the Council, angry  
17 conversations with Parks Department people about  
18 what a capital project is going to cost. Oh, I  
19 gave you a million dollars, how come I'm only  
20 getting a \$700,000 product, and then they explain  
21 to you they have. Oh, that 700 is... that's hard  
22 dollars. That's brick and mortar. That's  
23 construction cost, but try to build a house without  
24 soft costs, without paying the lawyers, without  
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Committee. I'm Steven Cain, Park Administrator for the Greenbelt as well as Executive Director for the Greenbelt Conservancy. Thank you for allowing me to come before you to talk about our organization and the role we play in the Greenbelt on Staten Island.

The Greenbelt is a city park comprised of nearly 3,000 acres of pristine forests and traditional parks. The Greenbelt is home to the Carousel for All Children in Willowbrook Park, the state-of-the-art Greenbelt Nature Center, 35 miles of hiking trails, and a very active and child-centered environmental education center in High Rock Park.

Greenbelt programs and facilities attract over 500,000 visitors annually from Staten Island and across the five boroughs. In contemplating the value and efficacy of the Greenbelt Conservancy it is important to revisit our beginnings. Today's Greenbelt is a public resource that in the 1960s was rescued from development by a small but dedicated group of conservation-minded individuals. They were men and women who were not threatened by voids on a map or

unpaved paths or blissful silence, but rather who appreciated the value of untrammelled open space as a legacy for future generations.

These individuals were motivated not by money or acclaim but only by standing for the good and the right. They are the forerunners of the Greenbelt Conservancy. Our current board members share their deep appreciation for and commitment to open space, environmental education, and preservation.

Today, the Greenbelt Conservancy works in partnership with NYC Parks to maintain, support and preserve the Greenbelt. Over the past two years, the conservancy has raised nearly \$215,000 from individuals and foundations to fund programming including environmental education classes for children and teacher training courses. Additionally, to purchase vehicles and equipment used by NYC Parks employees to maintain the Greenbelt, including two new pickup trucks. And also the conservancy conducts public outreach promoting the Greenbelt through a dedicated website and social media outlets as well as cultivating

awareness and support for the Greenbelt through public events and publications.

The Conservancy through its fundraising, outreach, maintenance and programming enhances the overall experience for visitors to the Greenbelt. Thank you for your time.

ROSEMARY ORDONEZ: Good afternoon, Chair Mark-Viverito and members of the City Council Parks Committee. My name is Rosemary Ordonez and I'm the Chairperson of the Friends of Crotona Park. Thank you for allowing me to come before you to talk about our organization and role we play in Crotona Park. The Friends of Crotona Park is a non-for-profit 501(c)(3) coalition of concerned residents, local organizations that work with the New York City Parks and Recreation toward preserving and improving Crotona Park. Formed in June 1996 by volunteers, we became a non-for-profit in 2002. The Friends of Crotona Park mission is to work towards the revitalization of Crotona Park through programming, events, capital improvements, horticultural activities, cleanups, fundraisers, crime prevention activities, and special projects with Parks and Recreation.

The Friends of Crotona and the Tools of War sponsors the summer hip-hop concert series cosponsored by Councilman Joel Rivera. The concert series is a four-day summer jam that brings deejays such as Biz Markie, Jazzy Jeff and DJ Cass [phonetic] to Crotona Park. Our other events include annual movies in the park, fall festivals, holiday lighting, and spring festivals.

The Friends of Crotona photographer is present at every event from Central American Parade to Old Timers Day to the Ghana Day Parade to the Summer Stage Kids Series. He manages and promotes the Friends of Crotona Park Facebook page and Twitter pages that have more than 1,200 followers.

Also in June, we hosted the Friends of Crotona Family Day. This year was the most successful with over 700 kids participating. There was face painting, caricature artists, dancing, spin art, clowns, free Icees, free popcorn and cotton candy, and free giveaways in addition to educational health and social service resource tables.

Each year, the Friends of Crotona Park participates in the It's My Park Day cleanup day. This year we held it at the Bathgate Playground adjacent to the pool. We had over 55 volunteers helping to clean, paint, weed, and mulch the park. Most of the volunteers were junior high and high school students.

Friends of Crotona writes grants for the park. This January 2013, Friends of Crotona was awarded a CPF grant to assist with capacity building for the park. With the funds we built a message board for Crotona Park and are modifying the existing map of the park creating postcards to promote the Friends of Crotona and purchasing banners promoting the Friends of Crotona. We plan to unveil the new message board at the Friends of Crotona Halloween event in October.

Nearly every year we assist the park maintenance and operation with maintenance equipment and tools. Over the years, we have helped purchase mowers, snow throwers, furniture, tools, rakes and nets. Over the years, Friends of Crotona has helped acquire over 60,000 towards maintenance of the park. Currently, the Friends

of Crotona is made up of 20 members with our capacity grant funds and with the prospect of developing a relationship with the New York Junior Tennis League who is building the Cary Leeds Center for Tennis and Learning in the park.

We expect to expand and grow our operation. It is our mission to keep fulfilling and building on the conceptual plan we built together in 2001. We work with the Crotona Park administrator who's here, Portia, every step of the way. The administrator assists in helping guide and advise us to make sure events are as successful as possible. Having an administrator at Crotona Park ensures that this exciting and beautiful park gets the attention and care it deserves. In the year we were missing an administrator, there was a gap in attention we received and the park received. In addition to working with the administrator, the Friends works with the 42nd Precinct Community Affairs officers and the Bronx Community Planning Board 3. The Friends of Crotona Park in collaboration with the administrator of the park play an instrumental role in the success of the park, and we look

forward to obtaining additional resources to support the nature center and to hire additional staff and to enhance the programming of the park. Thank you for allowing me the opportunity to testify this afternoon.

PORTIA DYRENFORTH: Good afternoon, Chair Mark-Viverito and members of the Parks and Recreation Committee. I am Portia Dyrenforth, the administrator for Crotona Park in the Bronx. I started as an administrator about one year ago and I have found the job very satisfying and challenging.

At 127 acres, Crotona Park is not the largest park in the Bronx but is arguably one of the most heavily used and certainly one of the most beautiful. Crotona Park is home to 20 tennis courts, eight playgrounds, five ball fields, a soccer field, and a half-dozen basketball and handball courts. Besides these more typical amenities, Crotona has a beautiful Robert Moses era Olympic pool and exquisite natural rock amphitheater. There is also a 3.5-acre lake that attracts blue herons, redwing



blackbirds, ducks and frogs, a myriad of wildlife all in the middle of the very urban South Bronx.

The Friends of Crotona was formed over a decade ago and are at the heart of Crotona Park. I have witnessed their hard work and dedication from day one. This year, with an allocation of approximately \$12,000 by Council Member Joel Rivera, the Friends of Crotona helped us purchase an arsenal of tools including mowers, rakes, extension pruners, shovels, nets. With these tools in hand, a mission of volunteerism has set forth in Crotona Park. Last fall, we had two committed schools volunteering each week. This fall we have four more local schools signed up to adopt the park for weekly and afterschool community service.

Crotona Park has become the go-to park for groups like New York Cares and Build On for service days since we can readily equip over 80 volunteers to help improve the park. Crotona Park has also become the fall home to NYPD Explorers. This will bring approximately 30 more kids twice a week helping us to beautify the lake

perimeter, assist with regular maintenance and provide a presence in the park.

Since I became the Crotona Park administrator, the Friends of Crotona and I have been an integral part of bringing in the helping hands of nearly 2,000 people, mostly children between the ages of 11 to 18 to the park regularly. Over the past ten years, Crotona has seen major capital improvements. The lake, three ball fields, tennis house have been reconstructed, and a new destination amphitheater built. Currently, Crotona has over 10 active capital projects totaling nearly 38 million. This includes a \$23 million Cary Leeds Center for Tennis and Learning that will be managed by the New York Junior Tennis League. The facility will be a new concession that will attract more visitors to the park as well as provide year-round free space for kids. This level of investment really demands a close level of oversight and communication with the community, elected officials, and park partners. Further, due to the supporters such as the New York Junior Tennis League, Billie Jean King has visited

Crotona twice this year along with Tommy Hilfiger and former New York City Mayor David Dinkins.

With a team of great staff, the lift from regular volunteers, and support from the Friends of Crotona and Partnerships for Parks, I have received many compliments on the state of Crotona since I arrived. Although we still have a way to go, I'm extremely honored to oversee and protect this exquisite and exciting park. Thank you for allowing me the opportunity to testify today.

MARIANNE ANDERSON: Good afternoon, Chair Mark-Viverito and City Council Parks Committee members. My name is Marianne Anderson, and I'm the administrator of Pelham Bay Park and Orchard Beach in the Bronx.

At 2,772 acres, Pelham Bay Park is the largest in the New York City, and Orchard Beach is the only public beach in the Bronx, and it serves over one million people each summer. I've worked for the Parks Department for 28 years, much of it spent working for the administrator of Van Cortlandt and Pelham Bay Parks. I've served at the Pelham Bay Park administrator since 2008.

Pelham Bay Park has a very active Friends of group that was established in 1992 when a group of local volunteers banded together to clean up after a damaging nor'easter. Over the course of the next two decades, the Pelham Bay Park administrator worked with the Friends group to help them become officially recognized. They established a steering committee and board which organizes outreach to the community, advocates for the needs of the park and fundraises to help achieve their goals. At the core, the Friends of Pelham Bay Park have never lost their hands-on can-do attitude for the park. They work in the park's woods, meadows and marshes at least ten times a year by planting, removing evasive vines, building bog bridges and cleaning the shoreline. The Friends of Pelham Bay Park support and cosponsor special events like our annual Earth Day event, the Bronx Native American Festival, and a Halloween event for local special needs children. They've hosted or contributed to volunteer trainings, nature workshops, lectures, exhibitions, and they

contribute to and maintain our Pelham Bay Park website.

The Friends help me as a park administrator bring more resources and more attention to Pelham Bay Park. We work together to promote the park, encourage positive use and stewardship and protect and preserve the park's natural areas. Together, we've accomplished many projects. We work with our local elected officials to advocate for capital funds for Pelham Bay. Over the years, this has enabled New York City Parks to restore the Bronx Victory Memorial Column and the American Boy Statue. We've worked together to see that portions of the park's greenway and Bridal Path were reconstructed. In partnership, we established the park's dog run, installed and provided children's programming for a sensory garden for special needs children and raised funds to purchase the city's first beach wheelchairs at Orchard Beach. Our current projects include establishing an accessible pond walk at the playground for all children and purchasing some outdoor fitness equipment.

At Pelham, we're fortunate to have many community recreation and environmental groups who actively participate in and support the park in numerous ways, but it is the Friends of Pelham Bay Park working in partnership with Parks which provides the focal point for all our efforts, allowing us to address needs and concerns with one voice. This fall I invite you to come up to Pelham Bay Park, plant a tree, meet the Friends, and see why we work so hard to make the city's largest green space the best that it can be.

Thank you for allowing me testify today.

CHAIRPERSON MARK-VIVERITO: And thank you all for your testimony. It's great to hear the amount of work that's going on throughout the city of New York so thank you all for taking the time to be here. Thank you.

With that, we have two more panels. The next panel is... actually three more panels, sorry. Christine Datz-Romero, Dena Libner, Syderia Chresfield, that's three, and I'll call another... Linda Cox, are you here? Yes. Oh,

because we don't have a form for you. Did you sign one of these? Don't worry, we'll take care of it, but if you want to, you know, just... because you were on the panel list that was given to us by Parks. So don't worry, you can sit there and we'll take care of it. Okay, so feel free to begin.

CHRISTINE DATZ-ROMERO: Yes. Thank you. Good afternoon, Chair Mark-Viverito and the other members of the City Council Parks Committee. My name is Christine Datz-Romero and I'm the cofounder and the executive director of the Lower East Side Ecology Center. I'm also a long time resident of the Lower East Side. I arrived there in 1980 and sort of grew up in the neighborhood if you may and discovered East River Park early on in my residence in the Lower East Side and have treasured it ever since.

The Lower East Side Ecology Center which actually was founded in 1987 is a community-based organization that provides community-based recycling, environmental education and stewardship programs in the Lower East Side. In 1997, the Ecology Center was able

1 to move its compost processing operation and  
2 administrative offices to East River Park through  
3 a license agreement with Parks which was created  
4 to mutually benefit both parties. The Ecology  
5 Center was able to continue and expand its  
6 program and East River Park gained a steward. In  
7 exchange for using space in the park, the Ecology  
8 Center started to recruit community residents to  
9 be stewards of the park, organize volunteer  
10 events and created environmental education  
11 programs tailored to its new home on the bank of  
12 the East River which is part of the New York  
13 Harbor Estuary.

14 Quite frankly, without that  
15 partnership, our organization would have never  
16 achieved what it has achieved in terms of being a  
17 leader in the compost movement here in New York  
18 City and also just helping us to, you know, in  
19 our capacity to grow as an organization.

20 In 2012, more than 2,400 youth and  
21 adults participated in 122 workshops that we  
22 offered in East River Park and the organized  
23 numerous volunteer events in the park where a  
24 total of 933 volunteers contributed over 3,270  
25



hours to the maintenance of the park. The relationship between the organizations such as the Ecology Center and Parks Department clearly benefits the community and makes for more vibrant parks. East River Park has undergone a major capital renovation project and that just makes everybody pitching in to help out even more important.

Partnership between parks and community organizations are probably as diverse as our city is. Some groups raise funding, others do advocacy for parks and open space. Others such as ours contribute educational programming and what I like to call sweat equity. In a sense of ownership in the community for the park but the local park where such partnership is happening is obvious, enriched and more vibrant, and we would like to stress the importance of such relationships to strengthen our public parks. Thank you.

SYDERIA CHRESFIELD: Good afternoon.

My name is Syderia Chresfield, and I'm the president of the Mount Morris Park Community Improvement Association.

We're a neighborhood organization in existence for over 30 years, and we're located in the Mount Morris Park Historic District, and our park is Marcus Garvey Park. We works with Parks personnel and others, and we meet on a monthly basis with Commissioner Castro, the police PEP officers, New York City Department of Police, and others to discuss and resolve issues. We formed a very strong partnership over the years, and our monthly meetings have become a way of life.

As an organization, we are the eyes and the ears of the community. We bring information to the Department of Parks that they may not have had prior knowledge of. Our most recent partnership with Parks is the restoration of the Fire Watchtower in Marcus Garvey Park. For years, the community talked about restoring the Fire Watchtower, but nothing was done. We met with Deputy Commissioner Blackmon and Manhattan Commissioner Castro to discuss the current state of the structure. For those of you that do not know, the Fire Watchtower is a 150-year-old cast iron structure that was used to alert the community when there was a fire in the

1 area. The bell was rung using Morse Code to make  
2 the announcement that there was a fire. Once  
3 this method of alerting the community was  
4 obsolete, the bell was rung at noon for the  
5 pleasure of the community. It's a New York City  
6 landmark and it is listed on the National  
7 Registry of Historic Places. The Fire Watchtower  
8 was in such a state of disrepair we thought it  
9 would fall down at any given moment, and through  
10 our partnership with the Department of Parks, we  
11 hashed together a plan to raise the \$4 million  
12 needed to restore the tower.  
13

14 The organization created awareness by  
15 having a fundraising event in September of last  
16 year. We used President Obama's grassroots  
17 efforts by asking for as little as a dollar. We  
18 wanted the community to be invested in our  
19 efforts. Later as an organization and  
20 individuals, we met with NBC, CBS, New York One,  
21 New York Times, Daily News and others, and  
22 especially our political leaders to ask for their  
23 financial support and to create awareness. We  
24 created a tag team with the Commissioners. We  
25

created awareness; they closed the deal resulting in \$4 million in eleven months.

Commissioner White, Deputy Commissioner Blackmon, and Commissioner Castro took us seriously and it made our goal and helped us to make our goal. We're celebrating this Saturday, September 21st from three to seven atop the Acropolis in Marcus Garvey Park, and everyone is invited to attend.

I also want to mention that I've managed a Green Thumb Garden for more than ten years, and I've created many friendships along the way, and I guess I'm somewhat of a parkie.

In the last five months, I've met with the Central Park Conservancy and New Yorkers for Parks to learn if our organization would actually like to branch out and create a conservancy for Harlem Parks. Both organizations suggested we start small and take baby steps, and I thanked them for their kind words of wisdom. We will take their advice and continue under the guidance of Deputy Commissioner Blackmon and Commissioner Castro and start with small projects until our feet are firmly established on park ground.

We've received outstanding support from the Department of Parks, the Central Park Conservancy and New Yorkers for Parks. We met with the Department of Parks personnel. We meet with the Department of Parks personnel and Commissioner Castro monthly. We've made tremendous progress in the park with neighborhood support. Our New York for Parks score went from a D to a B+ in a little over a year due to our community participation. We've been allowed to advocate for capital funds and get the support needed to be a place of destination, and we did this through our partnerships and we thank everyone that we've worked with.

DENA LIBNER: Good afternoon. I'm Dena Libner representing the Central Park Conservancy. Like all conservancies, we were founded by citizens who shared a vision of what their local park could and should be. Based on that vision, grassy lawns instead of dustbowls, ducks floating in ponds instead of trash, graffiti removed and benches repaired quickly, we introduced management strategies to make it a reality, and in time when it became clear that the

conservancy's management techniques worked, we started to attract donors who shared our vision and trusted our ability to fulfill it.

But a conservancy's ability to succeed is not defined by the amount of funding it receives. Funding is not a silver bullet when it comes to park maintenance challenges. Funding gives any charity flexibility and the ability to tackle increasingly complex problems, but it doesn't guarantee any of the necessary elements of a conservancy's success, a foundation in volunteerism, the commitment of the employees, the power of a shared vision and technical expertise.

The conservancy's original vision was of park restoration, maintenance and enhancement. Recently it's expanded to include working with other parks and Friends groups throughout the city and world to support the spirit of leadership and volunteerism. As a result, our impact extends well beyond Central Park's perimeter today.

We helped to restore and maintain more than a dozen parks in Manhattan including the

1 historic Harlem Parks. Earlier this year we  
2 established a training program for Parks  
3 Department employees. By 2014, the conservancy  
4 will have trained more than forty Parks  
5 Department employees and staff members from all  
6 five boroughs in turf care. Next year, we expect  
7 to dedicate more than 20,000 consultation and  
8 labor hours to local parks in each of the five  
9 boroughs.  
10

11 The Department of Parks and Recreation  
12 has made incredible strides in the quality and  
13 maintenance of New York City parks. This has  
14 been accomplished in part as a result of their  
15 willingness to leverage all the resources at  
16 their disposal, one of them being the  
17 institutional expertise of conservancies. We  
18 believe that the conservancy model can be a  
19 source of inspiration for every New Yorker who  
20 wants to be a part of making their local park  
21 better. We look forward to continuing working  
22 closely with the Parks Department to apply our  
23 model of volunteerism to all public parks as well  
24 as more than 100 local groups who have asked for  
25 our advice in taking a leadership role in the

future of their own neighborhood park. Thank you.

LINDA COX: Good afternoon. I'm Linda Cox. I'm the Bronx River administrator for the New York City Parks Department and also Executive Director of the Bronx River Alliance. Thank you for inviting me to speak.

The Bronx River Alliance was incorporated in 2001, and actually is a product of the catalyst efforts of Partnership for Parks and was founded really to serve as a coordinated voice for the river and to use the river corridor to protect, improve, and restore the river corridor and to have it serve as a resource for the communities along the river, a resource in every respect. The alliance works in very close partnership with the New York City Department of Parks and Recreation, but it also works in partnership with a hundred other local community-based organizations, regional nonprofits, and various levels of government to achieve these goals.

I see that you don't have my name there. Do you need something from it?



CHAIRPERSON MARK-VIVERITO: No, we're just...

LINDA COX: I failed to turn that in and I apologize. The alliance plays a pretty critical role in shepherding the resources for the reclamation of the river and also for the new development of parks along its banks so that we will eventually have a complete and continuous Bronx River greenway.

So today, the alliance has helped the Parks Department to open about 18 acres of new parkland and create four miles of newly connected parks that link those parks along... paths that link the parks along the river. The alliance's role really is to champion the community vision for the Bronx River and for the Bronx River greenway by engaging community folks in planting the greenway and in programming those new parks and trails. We also shepherd and raise critical capital funds for the development of the greenway. Over \$140 million has been committed or spent to date, and nearly all of that is public dollars. It's not private dollars that are really building that greenway, and those

dollars are coming from the federal, state, and city level.

Now, the alliance also engages hundreds of school children and educators each year in programs that use the river as an outdoor classroom, and it puts boots on the ground and in the river through the Bronx River conservation crew to clean and green the river and to do hands-on restoration as well as provide useful job training to hundreds of local residents and trainees, of course, across the course of a year.

Finally, the alliance very deliberately engages communities in every aspect of our work, whether that's to bring in volunteer groups on our various teams that advise on issues or through the development of friends groups that are tied to particular parks.

In a typical year, the alliance is able to raise about a million dollars towards this mission. That's only about 10 or 15 percent of that is from individual donations. This year we've worked especially hard on diversifying and adding to individual sources of funding and having reached \$56,000 by the half year we've

1 reached our best year yet in raising individual  
2 donations. Clearly, the large part of the  
3 dollars come instead from various stages of  
4 government, from corporations and from private  
5 foundations.  
6

7 Operating as we do in some of the most  
8 economically impoverished neighborhoods in the  
9 country, we recognize the individual donations  
10 represent only a small piece of the resources  
11 needed to carry out our mission, and they're  
12 certainly a drop in the bucket toward the cost of  
13 managing and maintaining the parks that are  
14 emerging along the Bronx River. So the continued  
15 commitment of public dollars is essential to the  
16 vitality, the cleanliness and the safety of these  
17 parks.

18 By far, the most critical role that  
19 the alliance plays is really in harnessing the  
20 vision and energy of community leaders and  
21 residents. In imagining a new future for the  
22 Bronx River and in engaging in concrete steps to  
23 make it happen, this is the real value of the  
24 alliance to the city and I think it's an  
25

irreplaceable function of the alliance. Thank you so much for allowing me to appear.

CHAIRPERSON MARK-VIVERITO: And thank you to all of you for your testimony. We're a little confused here because I guess I'm wondering if these people are here or whether you've signed in because we don't have the speaker forms for you. Katie Denny, Eloise Hirsh, Sarah Neilson and Brad Taylor. Could you please just sign in with the sergeant and I'll call the next panel. That means we're going to have three more panels. Joan Byron, Cathryn Swan, Maria Torres-Springer, Marilyn Purty. Thank you. We don't seem to have them. Okay, so feel free whoever wants to start.

CATHRYN SWAN: Hi. I'm Cathryn Swan. I write the Washington Square Park blog and I've also written a series for the Huffington Post on the privatization of public space, and I just want to say first of all I just found out about this at 11:30 this morning. I was on my way to Washington Square Park actually for an occupy Wall Street rally and I found out about this and decided to come here instead, but I have to say

1 obviously the Parks Department rallied all the  
2 conservancy and alliance people but I do not  
3 believe the general public was aware of this and  
4 there has to be a better mechanism to let people  
5 know. I mean I try to stay in tune to this kind  
6 of issue, and I just heard about it this morning.  
7 So I do believe that more people would be here  
8 with other viewpoints or at least more nuance  
9 viewpoints if the word had gotten out better so I  
10 find it a little frustrating honestly because I  
11 think it's a really important issue and I mean  
12 it's great to hear what people are doing but I do  
13 think there's a lot more that needs to be said  
14 and more of a discussion on it. I appreciate you  
15 having this conversation.

17 What I believe, it's not just about  
18 the inequities between parks in affluent areas  
19 and other areas. It's about what happens when  
20 these private entities get involved. It's not  
21 just about volunteers and raising funds. It's  
22 about the ways these private entities transform  
23 the very spaces they are charged with. Now,  
24 obviously not all of them. You know, it's just...  
25 but I do believe with any private entity there is

1  
2 some change that goes on and it really needs to  
3 be greatly looked at. There's a pattern that  
4 goes on, diminished transparency, increased  
5 privatization, increased commercialization, and  
6 diminished public access, almost always in some  
7 form goes on.

8 At Washington Square Park, as  
9 Commissioner White mentioned earlier, conservancy  
10 was formed behind closed doors with the Parks  
11 Department and the former Parks Commissioner, the  
12 community... it was purposely done behind closed  
13 doors because they knew the community had  
14 reservations about the model, and the conservancy  
15 now is saying that they're a conservancy but not  
16 really a conservancy while having the structure  
17 of every full on conservancy where the park  
18 administrator is also the executive director.  
19 Commissioner White said this was in evolution  
20 stage for years which is actually not true except  
21 the Parks Department kept trying this and the  
22 community kept pushing back. The community board  
23 did vote on it as someone stated, but that vote  
24 was very controversial and very contentious, and  
25 the Parks Department was pushing the issue behind

1 the scenes. It was pushed through, no bylaws or  
2 organizational documents of the conservancy were  
3 ever seen and people argued and argued to slow  
4 down the process, but clearly there were things  
5 going on behind the scenes. It was not open or  
6 transparent, and you have to wonder what the  
7 urgency was and why so many questions were left  
8 unanswered.  
9

10 These private entities, if it was just  
11 money is raised and volunteers are galvanized,  
12 that's one thing, but the issue ends up being  
13 control. In some cases, the spaces become overly  
14 programmed and overly sanitized among other  
15 things. It's true the city should adequately  
16 fund the parks, and the city should maintain and  
17 operate the parks. At Union Square Park, Madison  
18 Square Park, Bryant Park, for example, there are  
19 serious issues that the community and the  
20 community board battle. The over programming,  
21 the commercialization and the privatization. So  
22 the issue of conservancies needs to be seriously  
23 looked at and more in depth, and I do appreciate  
24 you having this hearing. Thank you.  
25

MARIA TORRES-SPRINGER: Good afternoon.

My name is Maria Torres-Springer, and I'm the Chief Operating Officer of Friends of the High Line. Thank you, Chair Mark-Viverito for the opportunity to speak today and to the entire City Council for over a decade's worth of support. The High Line would not exist today if not for the Council's partnership and collaboration.

Fourteen years ago, the High Line was under threat of demolition. Two community residents formed Friends of the High Line and worked together with neighbors, local businesses, community institutions and elected officials in support of the High Line's preservation and reuse as a public open space. Today, under a license agreement with the city of New York, Friends of the High Line is responsible for operating and maintaining the High Line and raising the philanthropic funding to support the park.

Custodians, gardeners, educators, mechanics, rangers, technicians, every person you see in a High Line uniform is an employee of Friends of the High Line. The city provides for security and utility services while the rest of the Park's



operation's budget is supported by donations, gifts, and grants secured by Friends of High Line.

Importantly, the philanthropic funding we raise enables us to keep the High Line thriving for the more than 4.4 million people who visit the elevated railway each year. It allows us to tend the landscape, keep the park clean and perform routine maintenance. It supports visitor services, seasonal art installations and the more than 450 free annual education volunteer programs. It allows us to support the robust set of programs we created to ensure that the High Line is a meaningful asset and a resource to the residents of the two neighborhood developments closest to the High Line.

We believe that when you create innovative ways to encourage philanthropic giving to fund public amenities whether it's parks, programs or services, you take the burden off of the taxpayer shoulders and everybody benefits. And that's why park conservancies like Friends of the High Line are so important.

Together with our city partners, Friends of the High Line has created a park that has resulted in about \$2 billion worth of private investment and over 12,000 jobs which in turn generates critical tax revenue for the city. We keep the park clean and beautiful for visitors whose spending positively impacts local businesses and the city as a whole. And while some may think that the park draws primarily tourists, visitation counts show that half of the park's 4.4 million visitors annually are New Yorkers.

With the public programs, education initiatives and volunteer opportunities reorganize and fund, we work hard to ensure that the High Line is a local amenity. As more construction [phonetic] on the park's third section, we need to finish the landscape design, immobilize construction teams for the second phase, we need to raise philanthropic funding to support the park's annual operations and grow community programming, and we need to keep building our endowment to stay in the park as an extraordinary public space for future generations

1 to enjoy. The City Council support has been so  
2 crucial to the High Line's success. We sincerely  
3 hope that the Council will continue to help  
4 friends of the High Line as well as other park  
5 conservancies as it considers creative ways to  
6 maintain public parks citywide. Thanks for the  
7 opportunity to testify today.

9 JOAN BYRON: Hi. I'm Joan Byron, and  
10 I'm speaking both as Policy Director at the Pratt  
11 Center for Community Development and also as a  
12 proud board member of the Bronx River Alliance.  
13 So, my job today is to bring the nuance because  
14 this is a hard problem.

15 The Bronx River Alliance, as Linda Cox  
16 testified, has been able to do some amazing  
17 things, not the least of which is changing the  
18 map of the South Bronx, putting parks where there  
19 were never parks before and where people  
20 desperately needed them. We're leading the  
21 ecological restoration of New York's only real  
22 river. As a nonprofit independent of government,  
23 we can keep the heat on the city, state, federal  
24 agencies, not only to fund the completion of the  
25 greenway but to overcome all the bureaucratic

obstacles that stand in its way. Similarly, we piled a green infrastructure approach as to managing storm water that DEP has subsequently mainstreamed citywide.

The conservation crew that Linda spoke of is made up of local residents who have been recruited, who have been trained, who are now highly skilled in ecological restoration and management and who I would add earn a living wage and full benefits and often graduate from us and go on to Union Park's positions. So we are not taking a low road approach to managing this resource.

Even modest conservancies can do things that government that maybe could not just because of our agility. What we can't do is fill the funding gap that's left by shrinking public support for parks, and as wonderful as it is that the council and the administration together agree to increase funding for parks maintenance this year that was an astonishing and commendable reversal of a long negative trend, and we want to see city government go the rest of the way.

The Bronx River Alliance, as Linda said, only a small fraction of our support comes from individual donors and we're in a high-need community. We're in a community where our community members, the people who form the alliance and still govern it, also need to raise money to support their own missions. I'm talking about groups like the Point, like Rocking the Boat, like Youth Ministries for Peace and Justice, so a community with a lot of needs and few resources. We can't fill that gap. We're here as others have said to catalyze and galvanize something that would never happen without the leadership of local and really highly committed individuals.

So, New York is the only global city, the only wealthy city that relies to the extent that we do on conservancies to fund our parks. I had the privilege of doing a short term travel research grant from the German Marshal Fund to see how London, Paris and Amsterdam, all cities with large and diverse populations, manage their public spaces. None of them have embraced the conservancy model and depend on it financially to

the extent that we do. So, the recommendations that we would make to help the neighborhoods that have been left behind catch up are built in part on the platform drafted by New Yorkers for Parks that many of us have signed onto when it's accounting for and making public the actual cost of maintaining and operating every park as a couple of folks have testified, we don't know those numbers. They're buried. You can't find the costs that are attributable to any given park, especially the smaller ones. Make all partnership agreements transparent. They may not need to be strictly standardized because every park conservancy brings something special. They need to be public, and in particular the provisions for matching private funding with public funding which now results in a regressive distribution of resources need to be reexamined.

Baseline maintenance and operating budgets for parks are probably at least 100 million short of what they need to be, even taking into account the contributions of all the conservancies that raise outside money. So that, the task of bringing those budgets up to the

level they need to be is in the hands of our political leadership. It's with the council, it's with the next administration. All of us who have done this work stand by to support the political leaders that will step forward and meet this challenge. Thanks, we look forward to working with you.

CAROLINE PURDY: Okay. Thank you first of all for inviting me to speak with you today. My name is Caroline Purdy and this is Josh Madell, and we are members of the Fort Greene Park Conservancy, and our plea is to present the conservancy's accomplishments and goals and service to the community.

Fort Greene Park is the historic recreational and cultural nexus of North Brooklyn. The oldest park in the borough, it serves not only the immediate community but institutions such as Brooklyn Hospital, Brooklyn Tech High School, Long Island University, as well as visitors to the Brooklyn Flea, and now increasingly several large high rise developments.

A fort during the American Revolutionary War, this historically significant Olmstead and Vaux park is home to the Prison Ship Martyrs' Monument, a Stanford White designed memorial on the National Register of Historic Places. Historian David McCullough, a two-time Pulitzer Prize winner and recipient of the Presidential Medal of Honor, has called Fort Greene Park with its monument and crypt one of the three most important sites relating to the founding of our country.

The conservancy was founded in 2001 when it was spun off from the Fort Greene Association Committee and received its nonprofit 501(c)(3) status in 2006. Our mission is to serve Fort Greene Park and our community through free programming, park plantings and maintenance materials, staff support, and a comprehensive advocacy effort. Currently, an all volunteer board and proactive members such as Josh and I work to achieve these goals. No other board members were able to make today's meeting because they all maintain fulltime jobs. This is an important point to stress because it shows that



all the efforts put forth in our organization are done so through the commitment and free time of those involved. We produce approximately two dozen free events annually serving over 10,000 citizens.

Over the past decade, the conservancy has been instrumental in raising over \$7.5 million for restoration and capital projects in the park by reaching out to City Council members, state senators and assemblymen and our borough president. In 2008, we received a \$350,000 New York State grant to help with the refurbishment of the Martyrs' Monument. We will add a \$300,000 federal grant award to the \$2.55 million allocated for the comprehensive redesign of the Willoughby Street entrance to the park.

Our most recent improvement occurred this spring when the six tennis courts which are used by park goers throughout the borough from Cobble Hill to Green Point were resurfaced with privately raised funds. The conservancy helped the fledgling group, the Fort Greene Tennis Association with this endeavor. A few of the courts had severe problems that conservancy

viewed as a public safety concern, so we helped the tennis association obtain a permit from parks and bring in an improved private contractor. Now our annual operating budget is only \$150,000, a paltry sum compared to other parks organizations. Because of this, we are currently seeking independent benefactors, local merchants, small businesses and corporate sponsorships for support in such matters as special events, maintaining the garden areas, supplementing park staff salaries and raising funds for large scale parks renovations. These renovations would include but are not limited to repairing the pathways, restoring lawns, replacing old benches with the original Vaux and Olmstead replicas, and creating a long term solution to the ongoing irrigation problems facing the park.

Making matters complicated these days is that since the beginning of the year, the park has been without a parks administrator or a dedicated parks employee whose job it is to manage the parks, jobs, program trainees, supervise lawn maintenance, litter and trash pickup. This absence has resulted in

miscommunication and an inability for the conservancy to provide services we've had in the past. We have also not been informed as to why the \$2.25 million that were advocated for the renovation of the Willoughby Street entrance has not yet been put to use. The renovation was last scheduled for the fall of 2012 but that date has since come and gone. If you have any questions or suggestions, specifically if you know any businesses interested in sponsorship for some of our programs and renovations please contact me by the phone or e-mail listed on the attached card, and thank you so much for your time.

CHAIRPERSON MARK-VIVERITO: Thank you for the panel, thank you for your time. Why does the Parks Department say you don't have a dedicated park director?

CAROLINE PURDY: Formally, we have not been contacted by the Parks Department. The Parks Department has not told us why we lost our park's administrator. Informally, we discovered that there is apparently either a single person lawsuit or a class action lawsuit that perhaps is preventing them from fulfilling that goal, but

1 regardless we have reached out to Marty Maher,  
2 the Commissioner for Brooklyn Parks. I used to  
3 work for Parks myself so I've reached out to my  
4 own contacts there to find out, and they have  
5 been silent on the subject. I can imagine... we're  
6 not interested in getting involved in any kind  
7 of, you know, we're not interested in getting  
8 involved in the situation, but what our issue is,  
9 is that because we have no one there to be in  
10 contact with to... for someone to receive the  
11 supplies that provide for them on, you know, on a  
12 consistent basis to tell them please don't mow  
13 lawn when the dogs are off-leash in the morning  
14 or when we have special events. We have no  
15 direct contact, and we've had a very difficult  
16 time trying to get any sort of line of  
17 communication with the Parks Department just to  
18 merely provide the services that we have had, you  
19 know, that we are able to provide them as well  
20 as, you know, I am a bit disappointed that  
21 Commissioner Tish James is not here because she  
22 was part of the project to bring in the money,  
23 again, the money, the \$2.55 million of renovation  
24 was allocated, it's there, and yet the actual  
25

renovation has not been... has been postponed many times, and the last time it was postponed we were told in 2010 that it was going to happen in the fall of 2012 and it has yet to.

CHAIRPERSON MARK-VIVERITO: So you're saying that... is Council Member James the one that is in this [interject]...

CAROLINE PURDY: Well, I mean she's been part of when there was a meeting with Marty Maher back in December 2010 where he was heralding, you know, one of the... they wanted to brainstorm part, you know, things to help the park and one of the, you know, one of his centerpieces was that they had raised all of this money and we actually have a poster of the plan of how they were going to do the renovation and that was two years ago, and since then no one has actually communicated to us what's going on with that money.

CHAIRPERSON MARK-VIVERITO: In whose Council District does this park fall in?

CAROLINE PURDY: This is Tish James.

CHAIRPERSON MARK-VIVERITO: Okay, and the allocation was made by Tish James?

CAROLINE PURDY: Yes.

CHAIRPERSON MARK-VIVERITO: Okay. So we, you know, in our letter to Parks asking for some additional followup on questions we weren't able to ask, we'll put an inquiry with regards to this, okay?

CAROLINE PURDY: We would be very grateful, thank you.

CHAIRPERSON MARK-VIVERITO: No, but I thank you for taking the time to be here. Thank you.

CAROLINE PURDY: Okay, thank you so much.

CHAIRPERSON MARK-VIVERITO: Alright, and I know everyone's time is precious. A lot of people have been waiting here. We've all been here together since 2 o'clock. I actually have to provide testimony at a hearing in my district. I have to leave here by six. It's 5:30 so hopefully these two panels, we can be out of here by six and everyone can, you know, we've had a productive day so I appreciate you being here.

So the next panel is Sarah Neilson, Eloise Hirsh, Brad Taylor, Katie Denny. Thank

you very much everybody for your patience.

Anyone can feel free to begin.

ELOISE HIRSH: I'm Eloise Hirsh.

Thanks, Chair Mark-Viverito. You're the sole

Council person who actually came on the tour.

CHAIRPERSON MARK-VIVERITO: Yes, yes,

thank you. It was great.

ELOISE HIRSH: She actually came in the

rain. It was a terrible day.

CHAIRPERSON MARK-VIVERITO: It was not

a nice day.

ELOISE HIRSH: You were great. So I'm

Eloise Hirsh. I'm the administrator of

Freshkills Park. As an administrator of one of

the city's flagship parks, albeit one that's just

coming into being, I'm glad to have the chance to

talk with you about who manages our big parks and

the role that private groups have in supporting

them, because it is the administrators who manage

the parks, and I'm going to just actually cut

through a lot of what I already was going to say,

but I do want to remind everybody that if you

think about what our large parks are, our

flagship parks, they are the parks where the

diversity of our city really gets experience. They're the parks where everyone comes. If you think about what the crowds look like in Flushing Meadows, in Van Cortlandt, in Central Park, in Prospect Park, and in my special open house one-day event in Freshkills Park you will see that it is the everybody that uses city parks.

Regional parks though belong to everyone and yet to no one in terms of advocacy and resource help. Administrators bring together and focus both Parks Department and external resources for the benefit of their parks. The administrator's job focuses accountability directly so that responsibility is placed not only for the level of maintenance and operations but also for making sure that the constituencies, the uses, the extraordinary aspects of these varied treasures around the city get the kind of advocacy that that particular park with its varied users needs.

And that's where the supporting organizations come in, the conservancies, the alliances. You all know the reality as well as we. There's not enough public funding to do



everything that our park should have, and what these parks should have varies all over the city.

So on behalf of Freshkills Park, for example, we have recently begun a not-for-profit organization, the Freshkills Park Alliance, that will help to fund the kinds of programming that will let people come and experience Freshkills Park, the site, before the park is fully built out. Our annual open house, I should have actually given the Sergeant of Arms these cards, our annual open house sneak peek at Freshkills Park which is Sunday, September 29th, where we open about 400 acres of the park for just one day. That open house is supported by private contributions that allow us to offer pony rides and climbing walls and free bikes to people to come and experience the future park today. We're anxious to be able to do more educational onsite experiences. We want to engage with research institutions around some of the scientific issues the site presents. I'd like a Jeep that isn't ten years old. The reality is that in these times public funds are just not enough to make our flagship parks be all that they can be, but a

dedicated focused administrator with support of private citizens dedicated to that particular site makes a difference.

Thank you for allowing me the opportunity to testify today.

BRAD TAYLOR: Good afternoon, Chair Viverito. I know it's been a long day. I'm Brad Taylor with the Friends of Morningside Park, and it's great to see you again. Always a pleasure.

We heard something about, you know, not getting enough nuance on this. I think frankly, especially that last panel, we've maybe gotten too much nuance because there are all these confusing terms when we talk about parks. We heard from a Friends group which is really a conservancy. We heard from a conservancy that basically sounds like an advocacy group. So I'm here representing the Friends of Morningside Park. We really are on the spectrum an advocacy group, and we've been doing this 1981 so we've been in the business as long as Central Park Conservancy and longer than some of these very large groups but we are all volunteers. And our park, Morningside, is one of the four historic

I also wanted to point out that we do get... our park gets help from the Central Park Conservancy. This has been pointed out by others. I just wanted to clarify that and to say that that money is not coming to us, our group.

Now that's not going to work everywhere and I understand that, and what I think really needs to be done is that we need to look at the public part of this equation and that

1 involves, you know, what are the real costs for  
2 maintaining parks and, you know, those can be  
3 pretty straightforward, but they also have to be  
4 based on needs and based on use, and a park like  
5 Morningside and you know well, Chairwoman, are  
6 East Harlem, Central Harlem, West Harlem Parks,  
7 get so heavily used and there needs to be some  
8 compensation in terms of the public allocation of  
9 dollars based on the use of those parks. And so  
10 I would really advocate that the council take a  
11 look at that, and then you know we've got to  
12 figure out how we're going to get to a good place  
13 using a model like ours or using some other model  
14 using public dollars, private dollars, whatever  
15 we can come up with, and so I think that's where  
16 we got to start. And then we have to concentrate  
17 on, you know, on the equitable allocation of the  
18 public dollars as I just said. We can't... also if  
19 there are private dollars coming in we should  
20 make sure that those private dollars are  
21 supplementing the public dollars and not  
22 supplanting them. In other words, we shouldn't  
23 be taking away public dollars just because there  
24 are private dollars coming in and, you know, we  
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as volunteers put in thousands of hours into this with no compensation so the last thing we want to see is all our efforts, you know, going and then somehow the public dollars being cut back because we've done such a good job, you know, for no pay.

Conversely though, I think, you know, we need to look at... we can't let the public funds chase the private funds, and I just want to bring up one example which has been bandied about a lot which is the PEP officers. You know, we're in a 30-acre park. We have one PEP officer and, you know, Parks has tried hard but often these PEP officers are allocated based on who can provide private funding for them. And it really becomes an inequitable situation.

I'm also on the Community Board in West Harlem, and we heard from John Herrold, the two-acre West Harlem Piers Park gets \$500,000 from Columbia. That funds four PEP officers. This is basically a two-acre park. Morningside has one PEP officer for 30 acres. I mean if they were an equitable system, Morningside would have 60 PEP officers. So we really need to make sure that, you know, these public resources and these

people are maybe paid by conservancies but they're, you know, they're trained on the public dollar. You know, their benefits are public. You know, they are allocated based on public need. So thank you very much.

KATIE DENNY: Good afternoon, Chair Mark-Viverito and members of the City Council Parks Committee. I'm Katie Denny, Director of Development and Communications at Socrates Sculpture Park. Not a Friends of, not an alliance, just a park, and thank you for allowing me to come before you today.

So Socrates Sculpture Park is a 4.5-acre waterfront park located in an industrial area of Long Island City, just in the border of Astoria. The park was actually an abandoned riverside landfill, an illegal dumpsite until 1986 when a coalition of artists and community members under the leadership of our founder Mark di Suvero transformed it into an open studio and exhibition space for artists and a neighborhood park for local residents.

Socrates became a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization in 1992, and in 1993 the parkland went

under the jurisdiction of the Parks Department, so we were actually created before the park. We currently have a licensing agreement with the agency.

As a nonprofit, Socrates has an annual operating budget of approximately one million which supports the maintenance, administration and programming of the park. Socrates has been recognized as an economic driver in the community since it was founded which includes three of the largest public housing projects in the U.S., Astoria, Queensbridge and Ravenswood houses, by creating a cultural hub supporting local businesses through our programming and providing jobs with our Community Works initiative which employs residents of Astoria houses as grounds crew and horticulturalists.

The park is open every day from 8:30 a.m. until dusk. Entrance to the park and all of our programs are free of charge. In its 27-year history, Socrates has hosted over 1,000 artists, presented more than 80 exhibitions and currently attracts approximately 90,000 visitors on an annual basis. While known internationally for its

renowned exhibitions and annual artist residency program, the park is perhaps better known in the Queens community as a vital New York City park offering a wide variety of free programs.

In fact, we fill over 200 days a year with free public programming. Our education program, for example, offers sculpture and art making workshops six days a week from May through August serving 8,000 local children during a single summer season. We also organize annual family friendly festivals and seasonal events averaging about 12,000 attendees each.

Our Healthy Living Program which was created to serve the local community with recreation and local produce has grown to include five months of a weekly green market, free yoga and tai chi classes every Saturday and Sunday and free kayaking and canoeing from the park's beach just north at Halletts Cove.

One of the park's most popular programs is our outdoor Cinema Festival which celebrated its 15th anniversary this year, and I would thank Council Member Jimmie Van Bramer for his support if he were here, and the festival celebrates the



cultural diversity of Queens through film, music, dance and food, and despite a rainy summer, this season more than 7,500 people attended this year's festival.

Socrates is committed philosophically and practically to reaching the broadest spectrum of the public possible by offering access and all programs free of charge. We continue to be committed to serving the cultural and educational needs of our Queens community, and for many the Sculpture Park provides a fundamental and primary art experience. And so I appreciate the opportunity to speak about the park in front of the committee today. Thank you.

SARAH NEILSON: Good afternoon, good evening, Chair Mark-Viverito and members of the City Council Parks Committee staff who are here. I'm Sarah Neilson, and I'm the Administrator for Washington Square Park. Thank you for allowing me to come before you to talk about my role as Park Administrator and the work of the Washington Square Park Conservancy.

I became the administrator of Washington Square Park about six months ago. I

came from the Park's Capital Division and a background in City Planning and Nonprofits. As the Park Administrator, I work closely with the park staff to keep the park operations moving smoothly, and I respond to community concerns as well as manage events and film shoots. My goal in the park is to provide a balance of the many different uses and constituents of the park while maintaining the essential character as a vibrant neighborhood gathering spot.

This is an especially exciting time to come to Washington Square. The long renovation process is almost complete. The park looks better than ever with expanded lawns and plantings, refurbished play areas and dog runs, and soon, very soon, we'll finally move into our new park house.

In addition to my role at the Park Administrator, I'm also the Executive Director of the newly formed Washington Square Park Conservancy. In this role, I work with the park neighbors who have come together to support the park by bringing volunteers to the park and uniting the very many constituents. The dual role ensures that the work of the conservancy group is closely

aligned with the actual needs of the park. The conservancy can bring together neighbors and develop a community of supporters for the park as volunteers, as eyes on the park and as advocates. The Parks Department will continue to manage the park and make all policy decisions related to the park.

Conservancy goals are in line with the Parks Department's to keep the park clean, safe and beautiful. The founders were motivated by the city's commitment to the renovations and want to create and support a community network that sustains the park. Thank you for allowing me to testify today.

CHAIRPERSON MARK-VIVERITO: The last three people that we have for this hearing, in this last panel, is Jennifer Hoppa. She left, okay. Veronica Bulgari, although we just heard from Washington Square Park Conservancy, so is that okay? Or do you want... if you want to testify, feel free. And Ed Janoff? Okay, so... might as well if you want to testify. This one left so we have two panelists. Okay, so feel free to begin.

ED JANOFF: Thanks. Good afternoon, Chair Viverito, and my name is Ed Janoff. I'm the North Brooklyn Administrator for the Department of Parks and Recreation and the Executive Director of Open Space Alliance for North Brooklyn.

I'm here today to talk about the importance of nonprofit partner organizations to the health and vitality of city parks. In my role, I'm responsible for oversight of the Parks Department Maintenance and Operations Resources for District 1 in Brooklyn which covers parks located in Green Point and Williamsburg. I'm also responsible for fundraising and project development for a nonprofit park stewardship organization, Open Space Alliance, in the neighborhood and for community coordination of all projects and activities in the district parks. I've also worked in related capacities for the Bryant Park Corporation and for the Department of Transportation Plaza Program.

There's three important points I wanted to stress today regarding why I think park conservancies play a critical role in making New York City parks the best they can be.

First, conservancies can augment the standard of care for parks. Leveraging volunteers and private resources, conservancies are able to contribute additional cleaning and maintenance services, this providing reinforcements for some of the heaviest used parks in the city where intense maintenance may be needed to keep up with the onslaughts of activity from morning hours to night. And because of the local management presence, dedicated staff and mission driven approach, many conservancies are able to provide additional landscape amenities such as movable tables and chairs, rotating seasonal flower displays, decorative lighting and gravel paving which beautify the public realm.

Second, conservancies cost the city nothing. The city benefits from the charitable and operational revenue generation of conservancies in the form of improvements to public assets, improvements which the entire park going public of New York can enjoy at no additional cost to taxpayers, so conservancies make financial sense.

And third, and I believe most important, conservancies provide a proven critical

ingredient to the success of urban parks and that's local engagement. Conservancies further the Parks Department's efforts to engender active participation in neighborhood parks from local residents, businesses and organizations including fostering volunteerism, providing eyes on the park, and cultivating issue-based constituencies.

Conservancies reflect the flavor of their communities and are attentive and responsive to local concerns. The local attention enhanced services and amenities conservancies provide can be the difference between a park that is simply serviceable and one that flourishes. I'm very encouraged to see the expansion of park conservancies across the city in the past decades, and the Parks Department's commitment to propagating them in areas of need through programs in conjunction with the City Parks Foundation and New York Restoration Project, whereas not too long ago perhaps just a few parks benefited from the work of conservancies. They can now be seen operating from Riverdale to the Rockaways, from community gardens to large parks, sharing resources and enhancing public assets, and I think this bodes

well for the ongoing health of our city's parks and our communities, and I thank you for allowing me the opportunity to testify today.

VERONICA BULGARI: Hello? Last speaker, good afternoon. My name is Veronica Bulgari and I'm one of the founding members of the Washington Square Park Conservancy. Thank you for allowing me to come before you to talk about our group.

During the course of the recent Washington Square Park renovation, we began discussing the formation of the neighborhood group to support the park. We recognize the wonderful investment that the city of New York was making in our community, and we really wanted to support these efforts and keep the park clean, safe and beautiful. We spent a lot of time looking at how different Friends Of groups around the city are structured, and we found that there were a broad variety of models and a broad assortment of names as you have seen today.

The model that we chose was a modestly sized neighborhood organization that will motivate volunteers and raise funds to supplement the maintenance and security budget of the Parks

Department. We've reached out to the Parks Department, and they encouraged us to proceed. We met with the Community Board, local elected officials and neighborhood organizations. We put a lot of effort into figuring out what would work best for our community, and we are pleased with the result. Our organization will modestly supplement the park, and the Parks Department will continue to operate the park.

Our goals are to organize a team of volunteer gardeners, provide safe and healthy activities for the diverse users of the park and support the Parks Department's efforts to keep the park clean and safe. As the key source of information about events, activities and other topics of interest, we will also help foster community support for Washington Square Park.

One of the great things about Washington Square Park is its ability to function both as a neighborhood park and as a world famous destination. Washington Square Park is a small but critical park in our city, and we want to keep it enjoyable and accessible for everyone. Thank you very much.



2 CHAIRPERSON MARK-VIVERITO: Thank you.

3 And, again, I want to thank everybody that came  
4 out. This was quite a lengthy hearing. I take  
5 your constructive criticism, you know, to heart. I  
6 think that there's probably better ways that we can  
7 communicate these hearings to the public. Always  
8 our information is online in terms of when hearing  
9 dates are, but in terms of sending it out is  
10 important, but thank you everybody that testified  
11 and stuck around, and with that it's almost 6  
12 o'clock and this meeting is adjourned. Thanks.

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C E R T I F I C A T E

World Wide Dictation certifies that the foregoing transcript is a true and accurate record of the proceedings. We further certify that there is no relation to any of the parties to this action by blood or marriage, and that there is interest in the outcome of this matter.



Date 09/24/2013