

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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March 27, 2014  
Start: 1:12 p.m.  
End: 5:10 p.m.

HELD AT: 250 Broadway - Committee Room  
16th Fl

B E F O R E:  
MARK LEVINE  
Chairperson

COUNCIL MEMBERS:

Fernando Cabrera  
Dalene Mealy  
James G. Van Bramer  
Andrew Cohen  
Alan N. Maisel  
Mark Treyger

## A P P E A R A N C E S (CONTINUED)

Liam Kavanagh  
First Deputy Commissioner  
Department of Parks and Recreation

Larry Scott Blackmon  
Deputy Commissioner

Karen Becker  
Director of Government Relations  
Department of Parks and Recreation

Robert Garafola  
Deputy Commissioner  
Management, Budget, and Public Programs  
Department of Parks and Recreation

Therese Braddick  
Assistant Commissioner  
Capital Projects  
Department of Parks and Recreation

David Stalk  
Assistant Commissioner  
Fiscal Management  
Department of Parks and Recreation

Michael Dockett  
Assistant Commissioner  
Urban Park Service  
Department of Parks and Recreation

Alyssa Cobb Konon  
Assistant Commissioner  
Planning and Park Land  
Department of Parks and Recreation

Hector Aponte  
Bronx Borough Commissioner

Kevin Jeffrey  
Brooklyn Borough Commissioner

Dorothy Lindowsky  
Queens Borough Commissioner

Adena Long  
Staten Island Commissioner

Tupper Thomas, President  
Prospect Park Alliance

Alison Tocci, President  
City Parks Foundation

Joe Puleo, President  
Local 983

Marlena Giga  
Park Enforcement Sergeant  
Local 983

Dart Westphal



CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: Good afternoon everybody. Welcome to the City Council Committee on Parks and Recreation. I'm Mark Levine Chair of the Committee. You have come to our hearing on the Fiscal Year 15 Preliminary Budget, as well as the Fiscal Year 14, Mayor's Management Budget. I'm feeling a little bit lonely up here at this big table. It probably would have been more efficient if all of you sat around this table, and I sat in the audience. But we're not going to do that. And, also this is a day where there are many competing simultaneous budget hearings on different issues including in the building. So we can expect that my colleagues in the Council will be coming in and out throughout our hearing.

In accordance with the budget process, as mandated by the City Charter, which will ultimately to the adoption of the Fiscal 2015 Budget, today we will hear testimony from the Department of Parks and Recreation on its expense and capital budgets for the Fiscal Year 2015. As outlined in the committee briefing memo, the Department's Proposed FY15 Expense Budget totals \$384.9 million, which is \$4.6 million more than the Fiscal 2014 Adopted Budget.

However, in real terms accounting for inflation, this represents a slight cut. This also represents a small drop of the Parks' budget as a percent of the total City Budget. Moreover, a broader view shows us that by almost any objective measure, New York City under-funds its park system. We devote only about .5%, half of a percent of our budget to our green spaces, less than most other big American cities ranging from Chicago to Seattle to Los Angeles.

New York's Parks Budget has stagnated for years at a time when we have added significant acreage to our system. And at time when park usership has reached record levels. The Parks Department has worked heroically to do more with less under these challenging conditions and has largely succeeded. But sometimes the reality is we end up being only able to do less with less. The long lead time between tree turnings, and the lack of PEP officers are just two of the manifestations of this reality.

The Departments system for rating parks on cleanliness and other general conditions show steady improvement over the years to the point where

1  
2 today 85% of parks have been rated in satisfactory  
3 condition by the Parks Department, a percentage that  
4 the Parks Department should certainly be proud of  
5 especially considering the challenging fiscal  
6 environment. But if you're someone whose park is  
7 among the 15%, which were rated unsatisfactory, these  
8 stats are nothing to cheer about. And we need to ask  
9 ourselves where are those 15% of parks? Are they in  
10 the city's tenuous neighborhoods? Are they on the  
11 Upper West Side, the Upper East Side, Downtown  
12 Brooklyn? Most likely, the answer to that question  
13 is no.

14 In part, this is because many parks in  
15 wealthier neighborhoods have private conservancies,  
16 which funnel millions of dollars to park maintenance.  
17 The impact on this private funding has been an  
18 unmitigated plus for many of our city's most beloved  
19 and heavily visited parks. But it has created a  
20 political environment in which it has been acceptable  
21 to allow the public sector funding to stagnate. That  
22 must change, and as Mayor de Blasio and newly  
23 appointed Parks Commissioner Mitchell Silver had made  
24 clear, they are going to focus on equity between  
25

privately funded parks, and the broader system as a center point of their agenda.

There is always some good news in the Mayor's preliminary proposal for the Parks budget. Unlike in past years, the Fiscal Year 15 budget does not include any program to eliminate the gap or pegs. This is because all of the funding restorations that were made by this Council in the last budget adoption including restoration for pools, playground associates, and tree stump removals were base lined in the November plan.

Similarly, all of the funding that the Council successfully negotiated with the Administration to restore in the last budget, including \$16.8 million for the JTP Program and \$11 million for seasonal workers are also baselined. However, despite these restorations it's clear that there are still some areas in the Department's budget that desperately need additional enhancements both in funding and in staffing levels.

Particularly I'm referring to the Department's Capital Program area, its PEP officers, and its Maintenance Program area. As such, we hope to hear from the department on how those areas I've



just mentioned can be improved. The committee also looks forward to hearing the Department's testimony on several important issues including the continuing recovery efforts from Super Storm Sandy, the Job Training Participants, JTP Program, the Department's efforts to ensure safety in parks, the status of its PlaNYC Initiative, head count changes, and the Four-Year Capital Program.

We will now hear from Deputy Commissioner Liam Kavanagh of the Department of Parks and Recreation. We look forward to continuing to work with Mr. Kavanagh and with his team and with Commissioner Silver, who will be officially leading the agency I believe beginning in early May.

Before we hear from the Commissioner, I just want to acknowledge that we have been joined by my colleague from Brooklyn, Mark Treyger. Also from my colleague from the Bronx, Andy Cohen. And I'm sure the rest will be arriving shortly. So with that I'm going to turn it over to you, Deputy Commissioner.

DEPUTY COMMISSIONER KAVANAGH: Good afternoon Chair Levine, Council Members Treyger and Cohen, and members of the Parks and Recreation

Committee yet to come. I am Liam Kavanagh, First Deputy Commissioner of the Department of Parks and Recreation. I'm joined here today by a number of our senior staff. On the panel with me are Deputy Commissioner Larry Scott Blackmon and Karen Becker, Director of Government Relations. Additionally, we have with us Deputy Commissioners from Management, Budget, and Public Programs, Robert Garafola; Deputy Commissioner of Capital Projects, Therese Braddick; Assistant Commissioner for Fiscal Management, David Stalk; and number of our senior staff including Michael Dockett, Assistant Commissioner for the Urban Park service. Alyssa Cobb Konon, Assistant Commissioner for Planning and Park Land. Hector Aponte, the Bronx Borough Commissioner. Kevin Jeffrey the Brooklyn Borough Commissioner. Dorothy Lindowsky, the Queens Borough Commissioner. Adena Long, the Staten Island Borough Commissioner, and other staff member.

CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: Is there anyone here who is not a Parks employee?

DEPUTY COMMISSIONER KAVANAGH: I hope not. And I also bring you greetings from Mitchell Silver, our new Commissioner appointed by Mayor de

2 Blasio last week. As you noted, he was transitioning  
3 between Raleigh, North Carolina and New York, New  
4 York. He will be joining us in a few weeks. But I  
5 know he's looking forward to working with the Council  
6 to bring Mayor de Blasio's vision of a progressive  
7 park system to life here in New York City. And we're  
8 eagerly awaiting his arrival.

9 And I want to thank you for allowing me  
10 the opportunity to discuss the Preliminary Budget for  
11 the Fiscal Year 2015. The Parks Department Fiscal  
12 Year 2015 Preliminary Budget is \$385 million, which  
13 is an increase of 1.2% from the Fiscal Year 2014  
14 adopted budget of \$384.4 million. Thanks to the  
15 support from the City Council our total agency full-  
16 time equivalent head count as of January 31st  
17 including seasonal staff and job training  
18 participants is 5,696. The Preliminary Budget  
19 contains 3,803 full-time positions, an increase of 41  
20 positions from FY14. With the help of the Council in  
21 FY14, the Parks Department enjoyed the largest  
22 expense budget in its history, and we are happy to  
23 see this trend continue.

24 The Fiscal Preliminary Budget preserves  
25 the new staffing added to the Parks Department's

1 ranks as the City emerged from the Recession.  
2 Staffing that has allowed us to improve service and  
3 launch new initiatives. Park and playground  
4 conditions as measured the Park Inspection Program  
5 currently stand at 88% acceptable for overall  
6 condition, and 92% acceptable for cleanliness so far  
7 this fiscal year, exceeding the targets set in the  
8 Mayor's Management Report, and the highest levels  
9 achieved from the last eight years.

11 We are adding new mobile technology for  
12 field staff as part of our Ops 21 Initiative to  
13 modernize daily operations. And a successful program  
14 focusing on playground equipment that was piloted in  
15 Queens is being expanded citywide. And the Way Tack  
16 Team is restoring heading and cooling systems to  
17 optimal working condition, which extends the useful  
18 life of critical mechanical systems while making our  
19 facilities more welcoming to the public.

20 Forestry staff developed a comprehensive  
21 program to inspect and manage over 48,000 trees on  
22 streets and in parks that are inundated by salt water  
23 from Hurricane Sandy. Contracts to remove and  
24 replace salt damaged trees are in the process of  
25 being awarded right now, and monitoring will resume

1                   this spring as those trees begin to leak out. And,  
2                   of course, the additional staff were invaluable  
3                   during the frequent storms we experienced this  
4                   winter.  
5

6                   The Mayor's FY15 Preliminary Budget also  
7                   baselines funding for key programs, as you noted,  
8                   including keeping all of our pools open for the  
9                   entire season. Restoration of the Parks' Opportunity  
10                  Program, The Kids in Motion Program, our seasonal  
11                  workforce, and funding for tree pruning and stump  
12                  removal. The baselining of this funding restores  
13                  roughly \$30 million to our budget, and allows us to  
14                  focus on planning and service delivery rather than  
15                  preparing for unfortunate contingencies.

16                  As we testified before the Committee last  
17                  month, tree maintenance is an important component of  
18                  our agency's mission and operations. Last year \$2  
19                  million was baselined into our budget for tree  
20                  pruning. And at this current level, parks will be  
21                  able to prune every mature tree that is greater than  
22                  five inches in diameter within a ten-year timeframe.  
23                  In addition to tree pruning, \$2 million for stump  
24                  removal was also baselined into our budget in FY14.

Stump removal has not been funded since Fiscal year '09 when NYC funding provided about \$2.4 million in the budget. The funding will help us address nearly 5,000 of the estimated 25,000 street stumps throughout the city. While sustainability has been at the forefront of the agency's mind since Super Storm Sandy arrived on our doorsteps in October of 2012, we were also able to obtain several notable achievements in the other three, recreation, rebuilding, and resiliency.

In recreation, our Recreation division operates 35 fee-based recreation centers, 11 field houses, and six centers programs by community-based organizations. Recreation center amenities include indoor pools, weight rooms, gymnasiums, indoor tracks, dance studios, art studios, game rooms, and computer classrooms. Recreation centers offer a wide range of programs for senior adults and children. Most programs are free or low cost, and are open to the general public. While programs include fitness and sports, after school programming for children ages six to 13. Teen programs for youth age 14 to 17, computer access and instruction, as well as a variety of leisure activities.

In 2013, Parks added a new category for membership at 35 recreation centers so that young adults aged 18 to 24 can join for only \$25 per year. This is an important goal for Parks as we work in partnership with other agencies to tackle the prevalence of obesity in our city. In the first year, we're pleased to report that we enrolled over 15,000 young adults in this category. Overall, our recreation membership is growing. There are currently 147,905 active members at the New York City Parks and Recreation Centers. This represents a 12% increase since the beginning of FY14, and a more than 32% increase in active membership since June of 2012.

Also in 2013, we opened a fully renovated Gertrude Ederie Recreation Center on Manhattan's west side; completed renovations of the Williamsbridge Oval Recreation Center -- and Council Member Cohen was there to celebrate with us in the Bronx -- and restored indoor pools in at the Brownsville Recreation Center in Brooklyn, and Hansborough Recreation Center in Manhattan. In Staten Island, from Staten Island to Queens, Brooklyn to the Bronx, Harlem to Chelsea hundreds of new pieces of top quality fitness equipment arrived in our gyms.

Hundreds of fitness classes taught by the best instructors in the city were available on a daily basis to any one who wanted to shape up or Walk NYC through partnerships with Empire, Blue Cross and Equinox Gyms.

Lyons Pool and Fitness Center unveiled a new state-of-the-art fitness room on June 6th. After the demise of the Cromwell Recreation Center three years ago, Staten Island lost its sport and fitness hub. Our Staten Island team, however, has been able to transform the Lyons Pool locker rooms into arguable the best fitness facility of our 35 recreation centers, representing a \$140,000 investment. All construction is completed Staten Island Park staff.

Also launched in 2011, January 2011, Swim for Life is dramatically changing as public agencies and private organizations work together to access swim facilities and deliver swimming instructions to New York City's public school children. With a centralized administration through New York City Parks and informed by some of the best swim models nationwide, Swim for Life has aligned New York City's lead swim providers with a common curriculum and



program delivery mechanism to provide swim instruction for New York City's second graders. Since 2011, this program has expanded from 10 to 35 sites and has served students at 193 public schools. More than 27,000 second graders have learned basic swimming skills through Swim for Life.

In January, the Flushing Meadows Corona Pool transitioned from a USA pool to private vendor to New York City Parks stewardship. Today, there are 50 New York City Parks employees that work at the site. They provide high quality swim instruction through our Aquatics Program; dedicated building maintenance through or normal park staff; safe and secure swimming under the watchful eye of our great lifeguards, and high quality customer service.

Our Kids in Motion program, which is something we're extremely proud of, and it's something that's been historically supported by the Council was recently baselined. It received 312,000 visits at 93 sites in the summer of 2013. Kids in Motion also works with the New York City Department of Education's Free Summer Meals Program to offer healthy and delicious lunches to all participants at

our sites. In 2013, more than 55,000 summer meals were distributed at Kids in Motion sites.

In previous years, the Council allocated funding of a million dollars that provided for staffing of 30 playground associates for year-round programming at recreation centers in parks citywide. Playground associates organized groups or team games, tournaments, multi-game events, and other recreation activities. Thankfully, that funding has also been baselined in the FY15 Budget.

Two other popular free programs run by our Recreation Division are Shape UP NYC and Walk NYC. Shape Up is a longstanding partnership with NYC Service and Equinox, and brought a new financial support from Empire, Blue Cross, and Blue Shield through the Well Point Foundation. Shape Up offers 261 free fitness classes at 134 locations, which include both park and non-park sites such as schools, senior and community centers, hospitals and libraries. Class offerings are varied, and include Yoga, Pilates, Zumba, kickboxing, and Cardio Sculpt.

Beginning in 2010, May 2010 through March 2014, Shape UP NYC has received more than 529,000 visits to more than 28,000 classes. In 2013 alone,

there were 143,000 visits to over 8,000 classes. In addition to Shape Up NYC, Empire, and Blue Cross, Blue Shield also provided financial support to Walk NYC. Walk NYC is a free citywide initiative encouraging New Yorkers to get fit, stay fit, and engage in healthy activity all while enjoying the outdoors and New York City's great parks.

With funding from Empire, Blue Cross, Blue Shield, the program provides qualified walking instructors to lead a program focused on stretching, form, and core muscle strength, not only as a part of the walk, but also as part of the designated warm-up and cool downs. Since April of 2012, Walk NYC has had 47,000 visits participating in more than 3,600 walks.

The Urban Park Rangers, which also fall under our Public Programming umbrella, operate 11 nature centers. Each serves as an in-park community center for public education, recreational activities, and environmental studies. The centers serve as starting points for walking tours and walking workshop sites for educational programs for the whole family. The Urban Park Rangers led 3,400 programs for 80,000 participants, and served, 12,800

additional people through nine nature centers in 2013.

The Rangers -- I'm sorry. The Rangers served a total of 34,164 people through 1,606 free weekend recreational programs; 3,695 summer campers led 154 outdoor recreation programs, and 9,400 people through 394 ropes programs. Ropes Course Programs are part of the Alli Kahn Adventure Course. In addition, non-UPR Community Groups and other partners led 164 programs for 4,380 participants at our Nature Center.

The Natural Classroom Program is a series of hands-on park-based education programs developed by the Urban Park Rangers in conjunction with the National Geographic Society, and the Department of Education to help students meet academic performance standards in math, English, science and social studies. Programs are available through Ranger Nature Centers, and New York City's flagship parks, or it can be scheduled in a neighborhood park. In 2013, 33,140 school children were served through 1,236 Natural Classroom Programs.

Parks Capital Budget includes \$2.5 billion over the next three years. This funding will

enable use to continue creating and building parks and playgrounds with some formative designs that contribute to what we modestly consider to be the country's best park system. On average, we completed 120 projects each year, and currently have 427 active projects in our design procurement and construction processes.

The Council has always been a major supporter and funder of park projects across the city. Recently, with the support of the local a local Council member we were able to complete several key projects, and I'm happy to mention just a few of them today.

In Morningside Park, the 123rd Street playground we completed the first phase of this projects that features new play equipment, safety surfacing, spray shower, basketball courts, a children's overlook, benches, game tables, picnic tables, and plantings.

Canarsie Park playground was completed in October when we opened the playground. Again, with new play equipment and safety surfing -- safety surfacing, the benches, fencing, and plantings, and infiltration gardens to conserve water and reduce

site runoff, and Canarsie is a great example of that. Longstanding partnership with a local Council member. Through which we were able to significantly renovate major portions of a major park in South Brooklyn.

Finally, three heavily used soccer fields in Flushing Meadow Corona Park were reconstructed with synthetic turf and reopened last year thanks to our partnership with a Council member. And this year the great work happening in our neighborhood parks, we continue to make progress on some of the larger park projects. In Manhattan at Fort Washington Park they're developing new waterfront parkland along the Hudson River. New Yorkers will soon enjoy expanded access to the beloved little red lighthouse, and spectacular views of the New Jersey Palisades and George Washington Bridge.

In South Brooklyn, Parks are transforming the 73-acre Calvert Brook Park located near Coney Island. The park currently features two synthetic turf fields, restored aquatic and coastal habitats; a main entry rain garden; parking lot; and security lighting; a comfort station and field house are currently in design and will soon be moving into construction. On Staten Island, New York City Parks

is partnering with the City's Department of Design and Construction on a world class indoor track and field facility at Ocean Breeze Park that will provide a home and training ground for children, high school, collegiate, and professional athletes, as well as an extraordinary year-round resource for the community.

In the Bronx at Soundview Park we've opened a new field house and restored a lagoon and wetlands complex, and construction is nearly complete on the Soundview track and field and Metcalf Avenue playground. In Queens where the Reservoir and Highland Park once served as the backup water supply for Brooklyn and Queens, we reconstructed the reservoir's perimeter walkways and trails so that New Yorkers can appreciate the natural landscape.

Rockaway Beach now offers sports courts, a synthetic turf football field, a skate park, a new comfort station, a climbing wall, and new playgrounds all of which weathered Sandy well as a result of their sustainable design.

And first opened in 1848, and standing majestically over the Harlem River the 1,200 foot long Highbridge walkway has been closed to the public for four decades. This year the restored high bridge

will once again connect the Bronx residents to Upper Manhattan, including the Highbridge pool and the recreation center and other Upper Manhattan parks.

It will also allow the people from the Bronx and from Manhattan to experience the Bronx.

In order to stay on pace with capital commitment while at the same time rebuilding our parks from the damage of Hurricane Sandy, Parks hired 30 temporary FEMA funded design professionals, including architects, landscape architects, and engineers. In addition, we've hired 43 permanent design and construction staff positions that the Council had advocated for on our behalf. Of course, after causing more than \$800 million worth of damage to our parks, Super Storm Sandy has taught us how important it is to prepare for the future.

Sandy inundated over 5,700 acres of the park system, and damaged approximately 430 park sites. We have been working since then not only to recover what was lost, but to actively build a more resilient park system. Eight public beaches underwent a \$270 million restoration in 2013 that allowed us to open them for the summer season, and we



greeted millions at those beaches as a result of that investment.

Now, we're hard at work with the Economic Development Corporation to design and build a new Rockaway Boardwalk that is stronger, more resilient, and it's integrated into a multi-layered system of coastal protection.

Sand replenishment is about to get underway, the second phase of sand replenishment in Rockaway is about to get underway in the next couple of weeks, which will result in three and a half million cubic yards of sand being added to the Rockaway Beach. And last summer, the Army Corps also brought 600,000 cubic yards on the beaches of Coney Island. And we're grateful to our partnership with the federal government for all that they're doing to help make our beaches stronger and safer.

Along Rockaway in Queens and at South, Midland, Newport, Oakwood, Cedar Grove beaches as well as conference house in Staten Island, a total of 55 linear -- 55,000 linear feet of protected berms were installed. In Rockaway we also built approximately 5,000 linear feet of concrete baffle walls, which were destroyed by Sandy, and that

prevents sand from migrating into the adjoining communities.

Much of our work in coastal communities is in coordination with the Army Corps of Engineers. We're closely collaborating with the Corps on the Rockaway Beach and Jamaica Bay Reformulation Study, which will develop new coastal protection strategies for those communities. We're also working with the Army Corps to complete Phase I of the Staten Island Shoreline Protection Alternatives, which runs from Fort Wadsworth all the way to Oakwood Beach. And a Phase II Study, or protection measures for Great Kills to Cotton Grove. [phonetic].

And Rockaway Parks is leading a conceptual planning process to create a blueprint for a comprehensive park system from Beach Ninth to Beach 149th Street, from beach to bay on the southern tip of Broad Channel. The planning for these recommendations to replace recreation amenities lost in Hurricane Sandy, and to integrate resiliency into New York City's Parks future plan. The final plan is currently being reviewed by our partners, and will be released this April.

Building sustainability and responsibly -  
- sustainably and responsibly is the norm at New York  
City Parks. Our Maintenance and Operations team has  
weatherized over a thousand buildings, and we are  
revamping boilers for maximum efficiency. We  
implemented the new storm water capture systems at  
sites such as the Bushwick Inlet Park in Brooklyn.  
And in the fall, completed in the fall of 2013, and  
at hundreds of Green Streets. We've built or  
retrofitted dozens of green roofs, and the New York  
City Parks facility known as the Five Borough  
Headquarters features a green roof laboratory that  
has been visited by experts from all over the  
country, and from around the world, in fact.

Capital and Planning Divisions are  
working to update the high performance landscape  
guidelines to ensure that all the parks that are  
built in the future are designed with sustainability  
in mind. And a new and unprecedented Science and  
Resilience Institute located in Jamaica Bay, New York  
City Parks and the National Park Service will be  
joined by the City University of New York in a  
Consortium of educational institutions for new

measures with which to face storm impacts and climate change in the years ahead.

This historic partnership includes one of our great natural resources even as it offers more outdoor recreation and access to everyone from boating and hiking to hiking and camping adventures. 148 miles of coastline, which is approximately 27% of the City's shoreline is in Parks' jurisdiction. The coastline and development of our Waterfront Management System are at the forefront of our resiliency planning efforts.

Parks plan to use information generated by a citywide waterfront mapping effort spearheaded by both the Office of Long-Term Planning and Sustainability, and the Economic Development Corporation to inform the design and implementation of a comprehensive Parks waterfront inspection initiative. Working with EDC Parks is developing a plan for comprehensive inspection, which will then compromise -- will comprise approximately 27% of the City's shoreline.

These inspections will enable Parks -- us to better understand the City's coastal resiliency needs, and continue Parks' responsible stewardship of

city's parklands. We envision advancing long-term resiliency for many short -- shorter and longer term initiatives. These include mapping and creating plans for community engage for vulnerable open spaces, playgrounds and facilities creating design standards for open space in water fronts.

Implementing a comprehensive program of stewardship, creation, consolidation, and management of wetlands and natural areas for climate change mitigation and flood attenuation. Expanding and integrating green infrastructure into open public design space processes. Enhancing recreation and public spaces as par of a communitywide protection strategy against flood and storm water risk, and mitigating heat impacts of climate change in urban heat island through tree and plant installations.

Dunes are essential protection against damage in coastal storms. Beach grass helps to increase the size of dunes by trapping wind blown sand, and its fibrous root system strengthens dunes by keeping sand in place. I've actually already started in March in Staten Island, but in April Parks will be holding several volunteer events to plant beach grass along the crest of the dunes and berms

that were built as community protective measures.

And we invite the Council to join us in those efforts. So we can give you the dates and set you up with the tools and the plants.

COUNCIL MEMBER: [off mic]

DEPUTY COMMISSIONER KAVANAGH: Okay.

Karen says we have flyers. These events have already taken place on Staten Island, but they'll be continuing next up on April 6th at Crescent Beach, and April 19th at Conference House Park, and then Rockaway on April 26 and 27. At the root of much of our success stands the commitment that receive from our dedicated volunteers. The volunteers are essential to achieving many of the goals including those related to resiliency.

Last year alone Partnerships with Parks, a joint program with Parks and the City Parks Foundation, provided support to nearly 500 community groups across the City. Partnerships assist community groups with coordination of over 115 services projects and 190 events. Facilitated over 25 meetings for partner groups, and attended nearly 400 community meetings to provide information and guidance. This does not include the work they do for

It's My Park Day, which has been expanded to It's My Park Month.

Where last year we engaged 11,250 participants, throughout the five boroughs benefitting 260 parks across the City. One of Partnerships' key programs of People Makes Parks, a joint project of the Hester Street Collaborative and partnerships that seeks to help New Yorkers design of parks and green spaces/People Makes Parks provides community groups with tools and resources to effectively contribute to building and design processes. The initiative promotes collaboration between invested communities and parks, encouraging a diversity of participants to participate in the creation of meaningful places.

On average, the neighborhoods where these projects are taking place have fewer acres of green space per resident than 59% of New York City's community districts. Another program is the Catalyst Program, which is a multi-year community development program that fosters engagement in neighborhood green spaces in undisturbed communities. Currently, Catalyst is focused on three waterfront park areas

East River Park in Manhattan, Kaiser Park in Brooklyn, and Soundview Park in the Bronx.

The program utilizes three core strategies: Engagement, programming, and physical improvements, and that's a recipe that's worked over and over again throughout the City. The Catalyst Program is committed to the formation and building the capacity of community groups to serve as stewards for the development of shared goals with the leadership and participation. Catalyst will be focused on the following sites beginning in Fall 2014 -- began focusing: Waver [phonetic] Park in Staten Island, parks and green infrastructure sites in East Harlem, and will continue to work in both Kaiser and Calvin Bronx parks in Brooklyn.

These two flagship programs of Partnerships with Parks are crucial to community engagement of New Yorkers and their parks. Partnerships with Parks is the only division of parks that actively engages New Yorkers, with other 600 community gardens. Our Green Thumb Program plays a pivotal role in communities that surround our gardens. Green Thumb is the nation's largest urban garden program focusing on sites and community garden



block grant eligible areas. Its mission is to educate and promote community gardens and urban farming while preserving open space.

While community and school gardens are hubs of activity providing a myriad of environmental, social, economic benefits to our diverse communities. By providing materials and technical support for our gardens, we enable the volunteers who manage them to strengthen their communities. With urban farming growing in popularity, and individuals concerned with obesity-related illnesses, the Green Thumb Program provides a key service in changing the urban landscape. We've been fortunate to receive \$50,000 from NYC Service to assist with rebuilding and repairing garden sites affected by Hurricane Sandy.

And actually, just this morning with the Design Trust Republic spaces, we issued a new publication that the Trust has developed on urban agriculture in New York City. It's a burgeoning field, one that we're really happy to play a role in, and we think that we have many things to contribute to in that area going forward.

And I just want to invite all of the Council Members to join us on Saturday at Hostos

Community College where the Annual Green Thumb Growing Together. It's the opening day for the community garden season. Over a thousand community gardeners show up at the Hostos Community College. We have a great keynote address. We have tabling. We have workshops all day, and if you have time to stop by, I urge you to do so.

Finally, the Natural Areas Volunteers was created to engage a network of volunteers who are actively caring for reforestation states across the city and our forests, wetlands and coastlines. NAV volunteers plant trees, shrubs, and grasses; remove harmful invasive exotic vegetation, care for street tree beds, and remove debris from our wetlands. Last year in the Natural Areas Volunteers Program hosted 108 volunteer projects with 4,066 volunteers contributing 14,231 volunteer hours.

Through the stewardship program called Navigators, they trained 47 long-term volunteers who logged a total of 555 independent hours to help improve reforestation sites. From our staff to our volunteers, from recreation to resiliency, there are so many people actively dedicated and engaged in making our 29,000 acres the best they can be. Thank

2 you for allowing me to testify before you today, and  
3 we look forward to partnering with you to make our  
4 parks greener and greater, and I'm happy to answer  
5 any questions you may have.

6 CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: Thank you, Mr.  
7 Kavanagh for your thorough and fascinating testimony.  
8 I want to acknowledge that we've been joined by my  
9 colleague James Van Bramer from Queens. Also by  
10 Council Member Chaим Deutsch from Brooklyn. Also  
11 from Brooklyn Brad Lander. From the Bronx Fernando  
12 Cabrera. Also from Brooklyn Alana Maisel.

13 Mr. Kavanagh, can you clarify whether you  
14 have made any additional funding requests of OMB?  
15 You made no reference to them in your testimony --  
16 since the Mayor's Preliminary Budget?

17 LIAM KAVANAGH: Yes, there are some  
18 technical adjustments in the budget that have to with  
19 things like -- Well, I could tell him. Some  
20 adjustments what we call differential shortfalls,  
21 annuity shortfalls. There is some PS baseline  
22 funding that we're looking for restorations for. But  
23 the two additions, which I think you're probably most  
24 interested in we requested additional funding through  
25 the Playground Associate Program, about \$4.5 million,

2 and we made an additional request for more seasonal  
3 city park workers.

4 CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: Was there a dollar  
5 in your testimony.

6 LIAM KAVANAGH: Yeah, it's \$4.2 million.

7 CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: Got it. Okay, and  
8 will there be additional requests coming from your  
9 office to OMB going forward or is that it?

10 LIAM KAVANAGH: We're discussing some  
11 funding for Green Thumb and Partnerships as well.

12 CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: Got it so obviously  
13 keep us posted on that.

14 LIAM KAVANAGH: Yes.

15 CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: I'm curious to know  
16 whether you calculate funding per acre or funding per  
17 park user, and what kind of trends do we see in those  
18 measures over recent years? As I mentioned in my  
19 opening testimony, since we've seen growth in the  
20 acreage of a system, substantially during the  
21 Bloomberg era and also growth in park usership, are  
22 you tracking measures relevant to those resources?

23 LIAM KAVANAGH: Well, utilization is a  
24 difficult thing for us to assess effectively. In  
25 some places we've been able to do fairly in-depth

1 studies that give us a good idea of how many people  
2 are using the parks, but for most parks, we don't  
3 have good baseline information. This spring and  
4 summer have -- or we are launching a pilot project of  
5 to experiment with a number of different measurement  
6 techniques that we think that if they're successful  
7 we will be able to apply broadly across the system.  
8 And have a better idea of how many people are using  
9 the various types of parks at different times of the  
10 days, different seasons, and what kind of demographic  
11 groups are using them. So we don't have enough good  
12 information to really make those kinds of assessments  
13 right now, but we're hoping to develop it in the next  
14 couple of years.

16 CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: Okay, well, keep us  
17 posted on that. By my rough calculation, funding  
18 amounts to about \$13,000 per acre in the proposed  
19 budget. What would it have been ten years ago,  
20 roughly? Could you even have speculated? It would  
21 have been less ten years ago?

22 LIAM KAVANAGH: Oh, ten years ago because  
23 our budget was significantly smaller at the time. We  
24 did have less acreage, but I think our budget was  
25 probably commensurately lower at the time.

CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: So the budget has kept pace with the additional acreage?

LIAM KAVANAGH: You know, the last two years since the Recession, we have enjoyed the highest expense budgets in the history of the Parks Department?

CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: And what's happened to acreage in the last two or three years?

LIAM KAVANAGH: I think we've added in the neighborhood of 700 acres.

CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: [interposing] Well, how many --

LIAM KAVANAGH: Allow me to get back to you with the exact number.

CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: Is it a challenge to squeeze out a good service out of a fixed budget when you're adding 700 new acres?

LIAM KAVANAGH: It's always a challenge to take on more, but most of the acreage that we have acquired in the last few years has been natural areas. And there's nothing that requires no maintenance, but the level of maintenance of natural areas requires much less than a heavily used active

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playground or parks in densely populated communities.  
So there is a balance there.

CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: I'm curious to know  
what the current permanent head count of the agency  
is if you exclude JTP and WEP [phonetic], and again  
how that would have compared to two years ago or five  
years ago.

LIAM KAVANAGH: We can provide you with  
all that number -- all those numbers in great detail.  
But as I mentioned in my testimony, I think our full-  
time equivalent headcount Right now is about almost  
5,700 and we have about 3,800 and change full-time  
employees in the Parks Department.

CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: But can you estimate  
whether that number 5,700 is more or less than it was  
two or three years ago?

LIAM KAVANAGH: Oh, it's definitely more  
than it was two or three years ago.

CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: Oh, it's definitely  
more than it was two or three years ago. A couple of  
years ago, our full-time headcount was probably  
around 3,100. So we've seen an increase of about 700  
in our full-time parks headcount.

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COMMITTEE ON PARKS AND RECREATION

CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: Does that make today's headcount an all-time high?

LIAM KAVANAGH: It's not an all-time high for the agency.

CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: [interposing] When was the all-time high?

LIAM KAVANAGH: There were times during the history of the Parks Department if go back as far as the Moses era, there were over 6,000 full-time employees. But, of course, at that time we didn't have things like the job training participant program, and we had different structure to our season plan. It's a completely different agency than what it was in the '80s and certainly the '60s.

CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: Could you detail what changes there are in you request for the maintenance budget versus last year. I think there's a small increase, is that correct, in the overall parts of the maintenance budget?

LIAM KAVANAGH: It reflects some of the new staff that we brought on over the last year, and these are staff that have been assigned throughout the entire agency. Every borough, every division has seen an increase in their staffing levels.



CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: And will that allow you to shorten the cycle of tree pruning, which I believe is currently at ten years, correct? And which experts would prefer to see at seven years, is that accurate?

LIAM KAVANAGH: Well, the \$2 million that was added in 2014 is carried over in 2015. It will allow us to maintain a level of about a ten-year pruning commitment. We would need additional funding on top of that, probably approximately \$2 million to reduce the cycle to seven years or less.

CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: This came up in the last hearing. So \$2 million would get us to a seven-year--

LIAM KAVANAGH: [interposing] Yes.

CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: --pruning cycle? Would allow us to prune within parks or is that most street trees?

LIAM KAVANAGH: We would be able to do more pruning in the parks with the contracts. We do pruning, of course, with our own staff in parks on a regular basis, but yes.

CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: But you don't adhere to a commitment of a ten-year cycle on every tree in every park currently, right?

LIAM KAVANAGH: I don't think we could make that commitment now, no.

CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: Right. Do you know what it would cost to achieve that?

LIAM KAVANAGH: No, I don't. We're going to be embarking on an inventory of all our park trees at least in the developed parks this summer, and we'll have a better understanding of what those numbers are --

CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: [interposing] Okay.

LIAM KAVANAGH: -- at the conclusion of that effort.

CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: What is the current number of PEP Officers system wide.

LIAM KAVANAGH: We have 161 -- we have about -- a total of 252 PEP Officers citywide. Some of them are contracted through independent non-profit organizations, Hudson River Park and Battery Park City primarily. We have 161 -- I'm sorry.

[Pause]

LIAM KAVANAGH: We have 161 who are working exclusively at park sites around the city.

CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: So on any given Sunday how many would there be on duty in the Bronx? A rough guess.

LIAM KAVANAGH: Any given Sunday? Our goal is to have at least two units on duty seven days a week for two shifts. So on a Sunday in the summertime, we're going to have more staff on than we would let's say a weekday in the wintertime.

CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: But that's two units for the entire Borough of the Bronx?

LIAM KAVANAGH: Oh, yes.

CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: That's a lot of acreage, right?

LIAM KAVANAGH: A lot of acreage, yes.

CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: It's several thousand acreage -- acres I would say like doing -- what's the historic trend line on this? Are we at historic highs, or are we lower than the peak on PEP Officers?

LIAM KAVANAGH: No, we're not at historic highs. There were significantly more PEP Officers in the late '80s and early '90s. It is a doubling of

what we had a year ago. Basically, we had 81 officers citywide a year ago. We're now up to 160.

CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: So the obvious question when one hears about reducing in enforcement personnel, is what's the impact on crime statistics? Can you speak to that?

LIAM KAVANAGH: I don't know that there's a direct correlation between our PEP headcount and crime statistics necessarily. Certainly, a uniformed presence and regular patrol is a deterrent to crime. No one would question that, but I don't think we're able to correlate that headcount and patrol regularity with direct crime reductions.

CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: Are you able to assess even broadly the trend level on crime? There have been reports on a spike in crime. Spike is too harsh of a word -- an increase of crime in large parks, or can you make a more large statement about the trend on crime?

LIAM KAVANAGH: We know that parks are safe. There certainly -- as the city has gotten safer, so have parks. As you know, the Police Department tracks reports on crime in 30 large parks, that is the six largest parks in each of the five

boroughs And based on those numbers, there has been an increase in crime in parks. It's largely in the grand larceny category, and it seems to be part of a citywide trend where --

MALE SPEAKER: [off mic]

LIAM KAVANAGH: Excuse me.

LIAM KAVANAGH: Where unattended property and if there is an unattended property that includes a credit card, it's considered grand larceny. And the theft of Smart Phones and iPads and Apple products, which Commissioner Bratton, I think commented on the other day. That seems to be the category the most, by certainly the most, and that seems to be part of something that's happening throughout the city, not just in parks.

CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: Okay. And the Council, as you all are aware, is pushing the Police Department to publicize park-by-park data in far more than just the 30 largest parks. I think that would be a tool to you. It would be a tool to us. It would be helpful to the public for sure. We have a \$2.5 billion capital budget coming up, correct?

LIAM KAVANAGH: Yes.

CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: But all of that is not committed currently, right?

LIAM KAVANAGH: No.

CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: Help me on it. So what would the breakdown on that be?

LIAM KAVANAGH: Because of the way it's budgeted, most of that money, the \$2.5 billion shows up in FY14. Some of -- the balance is spread out over the next three fiscal years. We have probably have it here somewhere. If you give us a minute, we can probably give you those numbers.

CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: Well, my question -- my final question really is your understanding of any connection between the staffing of your Capital Division --

LIAM KAVANAGH: [interposing] --yes.

CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: -- and your ability to quickly move these projects forward.

LIAM KAVANAGH: Uh-huh, yes. Historically, you know, the maximum amount that we've been able to commit and move through the process is about \$500 million, in that range every year. We do roll over significant amounts of capital dollars year to year. As we discussed with you recently, we're

all looking at ways to both compress the time it takes us for -- to get a project from start to finish, and to avoid having to roll over significant amounts of money.

CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: Can you assess what kind of bump-up in staffing in that division it would take to --

LIAM KAVANAGH: We have a proposal into OMB where we looked at how other organizations that design big projects, staff their projects. And based on discussions with several of those companies, we propose an additional 55 staff for the Parks Department both to accelerate designs ourselves and to supervise consultant designers who we think will be necessary to help us move projects through the process quicker.

CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: What would it cost? What would a budget for that be, ballpark?

LIAM KAVANAGH: We'll have to get back to you on the costs.

CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: Would it be like six or seven million maybe or --

LIAM KAVANAGH: Oh, yeah, in that range.

CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: --[interposing] in that range. I'm only speaking for myself, but I think we would be very interested to hear such a proposal. There is obviously a cost involved. If it equals a more expeditious capital programs in our communities we will celebrate that.

That's it for me. I'm going to ask Council Member Brad Lander. We're going to try? Are we doing comments? Okay. But in the time when you come in to testify, you're on your honor.

BRAD LANDER: I don't have a long list of questions. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Great to be here under your leadership, and Deputy Commissioner Kavanagh I want to thank you for your leadership in the Parks Department during this period of time, which has been great, and also for your role in helping move forward things in Prospect Park and the Lakeside Arena. And, of course, just to thank the entire staff of the Parks Department, especially my Borough Commissioner for all their great work.

I know this is not a hearing, or there will be a hearing. And then the Chair has talked about some of the broader issues and questions of equity in the Parks Department, which has been much



1                   in the news of late. And as you know, because we've  
2                   talked about it at previous hearings, I think one  
3                   critical way of attending to that is just through  
4                   some of the kinds of budgets that the Chairman was  
5                   asking it would be a lot easier for us to develop  
6                   good solutions.  
7

8                   And even just some further breakdowns by  
9                   park, by borough, by community district both on the  
10                  expense and capital side. So we were more able to  
11                  answer people's questions about sort of how that  
12                  money is flowing. I know just as an example from  
13                  Prospect Park that is the result of what comes from  
14                  the Prospect Park Alliance. Over the years, expense  
15                  money has been from the City's Maintenance and  
16                  Operating Budget to the park, which is totally  
17                  appropriate. But you don't see that in the materials  
18                  that we get. So I just wonder as you've been working  
19                  on this year's budget in light of this conversation  
20                  that's taking place. Although that's in many ways a  
21                  policy conversation, have you started looking at some  
22                  of these issues of equity within the budget? And how  
23                  we can understand them better both in the Parks  
24                  Department, in the Council, and more publicly.

25                  LIAM KAVANAGH: Yes, we have been.

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COMMITTEE ON PARKS AND RECREATION

BRAD LANDER: And can you tell us a little about that? A little bit. I understand that you're not here to say here's a plan for how to do things, but give us a little sense of that.

LIAM KAVANAGH: No, there are things that are going into that. We've been looking at capital spending across the city and where investments have been made and where they have not been made and to what doing and doing analysis in that area. We also, you know, are looking at on the expense side, there are lots of complications that come in because of the way the community districts are established, there is not consistency within and without the parkland or on how it relates to population density and other use factors, use factors. So while we can breakout spending by community district, and we do, we look at that, there are a lot of other factors that come into play when you determine where to invest money or to move money around. But those things that we're developing a better analytical base for, and those are things that we will likely be able to share more in the future.

BRAD LANDER: That's great, and you know, the Chair and I have a bill that would require some

1 of this additional reporting, and we look forward to  
2 talking to you to understand the complexities. We  
3 wanted to work with the Parks Department, but we also  
4 need a way to provide that information. And I would  
5 just flay on the capital side one of the challenges  
6 we've had is that over the years, a very high  
7 percentage of the capital that's gone into other than  
8 the signature parks, has come either borough  
9 presidents or council members rather than from any  
10 central capital resource that you -- that the Parks  
11 Department has. Of course, that's not a great system  
12 for ensuring equity either since it's sort of at the  
13 individual discretion of various elected officials.

14  
15 So, as you're looking at capital, you're  
16 also sort of tracking where it came from?

17 LIAM KAVANAGH: Oh, yes, absolutely. We  
18 keep very close tabs on where the funding came from.

19 BRAD LANDER: So we'll look forward at a  
20 future hearing I guess when one of the new  
21 commissioner is in place and we really can drill down  
22 on some of these equity question to seeing that  
23 information. It would be like a starting point for  
24 that conversation. It has to be a set of financial  
25 data that we simply don't have today both on the

expense side and the capital side to understand spending across the system.

LIAM KAVANAGH: I just want to add that we are developing an asset management system to help us understand our operations better, and it will track costs in very exacting detail to specific properties and ways that we're not able to do right now. We do have a lot of our -- not a lot but a significant portion of our operations are not assigned to a specific district. They're either borough wide or citywide, but when they work in a particular park or district, we will be able to track those costs directly to specific parks. And that will help us get a better picture of where spending is occurring.

BRAD LANDER: Which is great, and I think we all appreciate one of the things that's wonderful about our park system is it's history. And that includes doing some things in old ways, and I'm glad to know that the Tracking Asset Management and Financial Databases are being dragged into the 21st Century so that we can do an increasingly good job on these and these things. And all of that goes along with credit for even as we have over the years cut

the head count, maintaining the conditions of the parks in ways that are better than the amount of money that we have provided you to do so in many cases.

I want to ask a little bit -- and again I know we'll need to have a follow-up hearing on some of the ongoing issues we've had around the management and coordination of capital projects. This is a perennial issue. Usually this hearing is council members. We have newer council members this year so they have fewer years of frustration with their member item capital projects being behind. But we had a series of conversations with the, you know, in kind of the last year of the previous administration about evolving some new systems that both let you communicate with us better, and shortening the amount of time that those projects take. Can you give us an update on those efforts to streamline and improve the management process?

LIAM KAVANAGH: Yes. Over the last, I guess, six weeks, we met with the Chair to talk about our capital projects process. And just last week we hosted a sessions for the entire Council with many -- several members, and many staff people attended where

we went through the process in great detail. We discussed some of the issues that the Council and Council staff has had with our processes. One of the things that came up very clearly, there is a need to have a communication mechanism between us and the council members. And we're working on that, and we're going to have something to share with you shortly that we think will help in that regard. As I mentioned earlier, we are -- we're working on ways in which to improve our internal processes to get projects designed quicker through the procurement process faster and out into construction. And ultimately, into the public's hands again. One of the things that we've identified, which we think is important is that investment in staff that will help us move projects more quickly. There are a number of things. There are City Oversight processes. They're all important. They're necessary to make sure that public money is being spent properly, but we're hopeful there are ways we can reduce the time it takes to go through those procurement processes as well. Because in some cases it can take up to nine months from when a design is finished to when we

2 actually have a contractor working, and we need to  
3 reduce that amount of time.

4 BRAD LANDER: Yeah, nine months makes it  
5 sound extremely rapid relative to these periods that  
6 we've had.

7 LIAM KAVANAGH: [interposing] Oh, yeah.

8 BRAD LANDER: And I don't want to -- and  
9 we're -- it's the beginning of the Administration,  
10 and we're enthusiastic about improvements, but I  
11 will, you know, I do have to say that the very small,  
12 couple hundred thousand dollar Dematina dog run that  
13 was the first Parks project that I funded four years  
14 ago today. You know, broke ground a couple of months  
15 ago, and is still in construction. So four years  
16 later. So I'm not going to go into the litany, but  
17 it is something, and I appreciate your work to  
18 improve it. I should know the answer to this  
19 already, but the New Yorkers for Parks last year with  
20 resources that some of the Staten Island members and  
21 I allocated, did a research project. And I know  
22 you've been talking with them about and looking  
23 agencies. Have you see that yet and had a -- ?

24 LIAM KAVANAGH: We haven't seen the final  
25 product yet.

BRAD LANDER: [interposing] I think there's still --- there was a problem on that.

LIAM KAVANAGH: We have been, you know, cooperating with them, and we're looking forward to seeing what their suggestions are.

BRAD LANDER: So I know they're here and I assume they'll testify. Generally, when that report is done, Mr. Chair, I hope we can really look at it's recommendations in detail. They also looked across agencies. And one, as we've talked about before, is that while it's absolutely true that there are steps in this process, some agencies have found ways -- had different powers than the Parks Department does. And we should look at what's necessary to, you know, protect the money, spend it wisely, protect the workers, make sure everything happens in the ways that it needs to, but also streamline this process. So I look forward to the opportunity to talk about that. Thank you very much, Deputy Commissioner, and thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: Thank you Council Member Lander. Now I would like to ask Council Member Deutsch.



COUNCIL MEMBER DEUTSCH: Thank you Chair.  
Welcome to our Commissioner -- Commissioners.

LIAM KAVANAGH: Thank you.

COUNCIL MEMBER DEUTSCH: I am not on the  
Parks Committee -- the reason why I'm not is because  
I'm already on seven other committees, and if I  
joined the Parks Committee, although I didn't miss  
any meetings yet or any hearings, then I won't have  
time to enjoy our parks. So I'm just going to stay  
on the seven committees for the moment. But I'd like  
to discuss with you the trees, the damaged trees.  
After Hurricane Sandy, you mention here that there  
are 48,000 trees on the streets that need to be  
replaced. Do we have -- do you have a count of how  
many trees are in the parks, the actual parks?

I see the Chair of the -- we have Ydanis  
here, Rodriguez here, Council Member Ydanis. He's in  
charge of the Division of the Vision Zero Initiative  
in Transportation. But I mean Vision Zero is not  
just a traffic-related fatalities, but also it could  
be tree-related fatalities. And my concern is that  
now that that people are going to be hanging out in  
the parks, and they're sitting -- sitting on the  
benches. So do you have, number one, a count of how

many trees are in our parks? And number two, what the timeline is of taking care of those trees in the parks where people are actually sitting underneath them for countless hours?

LIAM KAVANAGH: Yes, we estimate there are approximately two million trees in the City's park system. That includes the forested areas, and natural spaces throughout the boroughs, and within the parks and playgrounds that most people use. We inspect the trees on a regular basis. Our park supervisors are required to perform inspections of all of the parks and playgrounds that are less than 20 acres every other week, and all of the properties are inspected at least once a month.

Trees are one of the items that they look at as part of their normal inspection. And if they see anything that is a concern to them -- They do receive some training in what to identify. There's a system in place for them to report it to Forestry, which will send out a forester to make a further assessment and determine what work -- what work, if any, is necessary for that. In addition to that, for the 48,000 trees in the Hurricane Sandy and Invasion

Zone, we've looked at all of the trees in parks, as well as those on the streets as part of that process.

We have removed hundred of trees in parks that were damaged by the storm. There will be more that will be removed by the contractors, that I mentioned in my testimony, who will be starting work in the next few months. And our inspectors will be continuing inspect those trees to make sure that they are still healthy and safe, and they don't require any attention on our part. So we agree that it's important to maintain safety within the parks, particularly when it comes to trees.

COUNCIL MEMBER DEUTSCH: Okay, and particularly in my district I have the Hollow Course [phonetic]Park, and I have the Beach Park in some other areas in Sheepshead Bay.

LIAM KAVANAGH: That's nice.

COUNCIL MEMBER DEUTSCH: So the trees that need to be replaced, what is the timeline like from now?

LIAM KAVANAGH: Well, our goal is to replace them as quickly as possible. We're hoping to do all the removals throughout the spring and the summer, and to start the replacements in the fall.

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COMMITTEE ON PARKS AND RECREATION

COUNCIL MEMBER DEUTSCH: Okay, I just want to make a recommendation. If we could just get the branches, whatever branches are potentially hazardous, that are falling down. Yesterday, there was heavy winds.

LIAM KAVANAGH: Yes.

COUNCIL MEMBER DEUTSCH: And there were a number of branches that were flying all over the place. So I just want to make sure the people are kept safe. Also, thank you very much on that. The second thing I wanted to mention is there a budget on beach mats? I have a very large senior population, and unfortunately, they cannot enjoy the waters. And we want to make sure that we could get beach mats for this coming season.

LIAM KAVANAGH: We do have beach mats. They're called Moby Mats. We've installed them at locations at every beach throughout the City. I know we have them at Manhattan Beach and at Brighton Beach and in sections of Coney Island. If there are additional locations where we would like to see them, part of the limitations on the Moby Mats is that the access to the beach has to be ADA compliant. And not all of our stairs and ramps leading from boardwalks

2 to beaches meet that requirement. But where  
3 feasible, we can install Moby Mats to allow people in  
4 wheelchairs or people with baby carriages to get onto  
5 the beach more easily. And it's been something we're  
6 very happy that we've been able to expand the use of  
7 the Moby Mats in recent years.

8 COUNCIL MEMBER DEUTSCH: Great. Thank  
9 you very much. I'd just like to -- if you could take  
10 notes at Brighton and 4th Street, Brighton 6th Street  
11 and Ocean Parkway --

12 LIAM KAVANAGH: U-huh.

13 COUNCIL MEMBER DEUTSCH: -- going to the  
14 beach. And in addition, Brighton 2nd Street the ramp  
15 that leads up to the Boardwalk is -- that ramp is  
16 closed. So I wanted to request that we could do a  
17 temporary ramp until the construction is done on  
18 Brighton 2nd Street.

19 LIAM KAVANAGH: We will look at that.

20 COUNCIL MEMBER DEUTSCH: Okay, and I also  
21 want to mention that I have had a town hall meeting  
22 on Ashley Park [phonetic], and I'm holding other town  
23 hall meetings regarding our parks. I know that the  
24 Parks Department has a wish list in certain areas. I  
25 just wanted to bring up that I'd like to take the

1  
2 recommendations that I'm getting from my constituents  
3 and bring that to the Commissioner if we could start  
4 those projects, and work on what's important to my  
5 constituents in addition to whatever wish list the  
6 Parks Department has for funding requests.

7           So I just wanted to have an updated  
8 meeting on any information that I get from my  
9 constituents that we should work on those areas  
10 first. And finally when we're talking about the  
11 budget, we have the Comfort Station, the very  
12 controversial Comfort Station in Brighton Beach. At  
13 the first hearing there was an EIS Study that came  
14 up, a lawsuit and now this consideration of moving  
15 the Comfort Station to another area.

16           So I want to make sure that we're going  
17 to have a senseless political process for a  
18 commonsense budgetary process and outcome. Whatever  
19 is going to be best to see where the Federal should  
20 not have to spend their money. When we talk about  
21 federal or city, we're still paying their taxes, and  
22 I want to make sure that whatever the outcome is, the  
23 City Council Members in the District and myself and I  
24 join with Mark Treyger, who shares the -- who has the  
25

2 Boardwalk and I have the residential area. So I want  
3 to thank you, and that's it.

4 LIAM KAVANAGH: Okay, as you know, we had  
5 the public hearing out in Brighton Beach a week or so  
6 ago. The public comment period is still active. It  
7 will be until the beginning of May. After that we'll  
8 assess the comments that we receive from the public,  
9 and as we said we'll be meeting with elected  
10 officials to discuss the next steps.

11 COUNCIL MEMBER DEUTSCH: Great. Thank  
12 you, Commissioner, and I just want to mention last.  
13 At the last hearing I brought up a few issues, core  
14 life issues that my constituents have, and they were  
15 all taken care of. So thank you.

16 CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: Thank you Council  
17 Member Deutsch. Next up, we'll be hearing from  
18 Council Member Treyger.

19 COUNCIL MEMBER TREYGER: Thank you, Chair  
20 Levine, and welcome Commissioner -- Deputy  
21 Commissioner Kavanagh and welcome to all of the  
22 Commissioners here from the Parks. In your testimony  
23 you had mentioned that there was over \$800 million  
24 worth of damage to our parks as a result of Super  
25 Storm Sandy. How much has been reimbursed as far as

dealing with these costs? How much are we in receipt of from FEMA. Any figures that you have on that would be very helpful to the Committee.

LIAM KAVANAGH: I'm sorry. The receipts to date are relatively small. It's probably in the neighborhood -- well, we haven't received any reimbursements for capital work that we've done so far. The FEMA process is very involved, and they -- and I don't think they actually reimburse until after a project has been built and has gone through a rigorous federal review to determine its eligibility. So while we have spent hundreds of millions of dollars on capital restoration since Sandy, I don't think we have actually received reimbursements from FEMA yet.

COUNCIL MEMBER TREYGER: So how much have you -- how much has Parks spent on capital, you know, projects dealing with Sandy damage?

LIAM KAVANAGH: Well, you know, as I mentioned in testimony, we spent about \$270 million restoring the beaches last year, and much of that was capital work to repair the beaches and restore facilities that were destroyed during the storm. And we estimate that we have 246 park sites, which will



cost approximately \$155 million to completely restore to their use, to their normal use prior to the storm damage.

COUNCIL MEMBER TREYGER: So that \$155 million in damage to parks, many of which were in my district, as well and Hines [phonetic] and others, and about you spent over \$240 -- you said \$240 million beach restoration, is that correct?

LIAM KAVANAGH: Yes.

COUNCIL MEMBER TREYGER: Now, is that in conjunction with the Army Corps?

LIAM KAVANAGH: Not directly with the Army Corps. The Army Corps is funding the sand replenishment that occurred in Coney Island, is going to start again in Rockaway in a few weeks and some other project like that.

COUNCIL MEMBER TREYGER: And just to be clear, so far Parks has received zero dollars in capital reimbursements from FEMA?

LIAM KAVANAGH: In capital reimbursements. We have received reimbursements for expenses related to emergency response in the storm. For example, about \$24 million in Forestry related emergency response including our own staff time, and

1 contractors that we hired to help with those tree  
2 emergencies. I think the City has received  
3 reimbursement for that, and some other -- There are  
4 discrete categories like that that were related to  
5 the response and not to the capital restoration of  
6 sites that were damaged by the storm.  
7

8 COUNCIL MEMBER TREYGER: But to be clear,  
9 Parks is applying for capital reimbursement?

10 LIAM KAVANAGH: [interposing] Oh,  
11 absolutely. We meet every week with FEMA and review  
12 all of the projects, all of the status. It's a very  
13 detailed process that you have to go through.

14 COUNCIL MEMBER TREYGER: What is the hold  
15 up?

16 LIAM KAVANAGH: It's simply the level of  
17 detail that the federal government requires in order  
18 to document the level of damage, the repairs or the  
19 restoration work that has to -- we believe that has  
20 to occur, and there is a -- it's a very involved  
21 process is all I can tell you.

22 COUNCIL MEMBER TREYGER: Because I have  
23 to tell you there seems to be a pattern across the  
24 board from other City agencies with regard to FEMA.  
25 I mean we had dealings with NYCHA and temporary

1                   boilers and that was an involved process until we  
2                   exposed the fact that we were spending \$3 million a  
3                   month on faulty boilers at NYCHA. And it seems that  
4                   we are running into the same problems here now with  
5                   the Parks Department.  
6

7                   LIAM KAVANAGH: Well, I have to say that  
8                   it is a -- it is a very arduous process, but  
9                   fortunately the Administration and OMB have allowed  
10                  us to spend the money in advance of having a final  
11                  agreement with FEMA on the reimbursement level. So,  
12                  it's not holding up our work so much. It is a little  
13                  bit of an unknown as to how much the City will  
14                  eventually receive for all of that work. For  
15                  example, on Shore Parkway where we restored the  
16                  sections of the seawall that were damaged by the  
17                  storm, OMB allowed us to enter into those contracts,  
18                  and have the work performed, but we haven't received  
19                  a final reimbursement from FEMA for that.

20                  COUNCIL MEMBER TREYGER: Well, I  
21                  definitely would like to follow up on that making  
22                  sure that whatever monies we need to move forward  
23                  because it's not just about repairing, it's about  
24                  it's also about being more resilient moving forward,  
25                  and I'm sure that's a goal that FMEA would like to

see as well. I'd to just go, you know, and discuss the Boardwalk that stretches across Brighton Beach into Coney Island and so forth.

To me, I am really using a different terminology to describe it. To me it's not just a recreational space. It really is the first line of defense against mother nature. That beach and that boardwalk is a piece of our neighborhood's infrastructure, especially in an area that is prone to flooding in coastal events. What is-- is there a cost estimate that the Parks Department has to fully repair damage done by Sandy, and to repair the overall structural damage that has pre-existed even prior to Sandy?

Because even prior to taking office, there were reports of people falling through the boardwalk particularly near the west end in Coney Island not just by the amusement district. Is there is a number that Parks Department has as far as the full, you know, restoration and full -- how to make the boardwalk complete and more sound and safe? Not for the enjoyment of residents and tourists, but to make sure that our infrastructure is safe and sound? Is there a number that you have for that?

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COMMITTEE ON PARKS AND RECREATION

LIAM KAVANAGH: We do have the number. I don't have it handy, and I don't want to speculate, but we can get you the number. We have looked at in great detail what it would cost to completely replace the entire Coney Island Boardwalk. There are sections, as you mentioned, that are in poor repair. Others, however, have been replaced, and repaired over the years and are in good condition. So it's not a wholesale replacement as we're doing in Rockaway, but you're right.

The Boardwalk is part of the coastal defense for this community. Fortunately, the work that the Army Corps in the '90s did what it was supposed to do during the storm. The community didn't -- the Boardwalk didn't suffer the structural damage that we saw in other parts of the City. And while in the beginning it was flooded and suffered enormous problems as a result of that, we didn't see the same structural damage caused by either the waves, or the damaged boardwalk as we saw in Rockaway and other parts of the City in Coney Island.

COUNCIL MEMBER TREYGER: Is it your view that the Boardwalk repairs and the Boardwalk work is this something that is reimbursable from FEMA?

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LIAM KAVANAGH: No. We don't think that would be reimbursable from FEMA excepting in very few situations. For example, the pier was damaged by the storm very clearly. We've rebuilt the pier, and it's open to the public again, but that we expect to receive reimbursement from FEMA.

COUNCIL MEMBER TREYGER: Well, I mean, there's been concern that the amount of sand pushed into the Boardwalk underneath the Boardwalk where it's actually just bulging out underneath the Boardwalk, and we're starting to see boards lift. So I would just take another look at the damage that was done, and some it we might not see yet. It's still unfolding. It's still developing. So, I really - I want to really just start defining that Boardwalk as infrastructure, and not just a place where people have fun.

LIAM KAVANAGH: Yeah.

COUNCIL MEMBER TREYGER: Because to me I know the tourists enjoy it, but they come home. But the people who live there all year round, they see that as their first line of defense. In your testimony, you talked about Calvert Park. It's physically in Council Member Gentile's district, but

2 it was a park that some years ago was discussed as a  
3 big regional park that could be enjoyed by the  
4 regional community, which includes my district. The  
5 original plan called for more than just a couple of  
6 peers.

7 LIAM KAVANAGH: Right.

8 COUNCIL MEMBER TREYGER: The original  
9 plan called for more than just two fields.

10 LIAM KAVANAGH: Yes.

11 COUNCIL MEMBER TREYGER: They called for  
12 six soccer fields and other baseball diamonds and so  
13 forth. In our part of Brooklyn, and I'm sure other  
14 parts of the city is a growing demand for soccer, a  
15 growing demand for more international sports. What -  
16 - just so I'm clear, what is the state of that plan,  
17 and what happened to it?

18 LIAM KAVANAGH: Well, the plan still  
19 exists and we are continuing with parts of it. For  
20 example, the Comfort Station and Field will go into  
21 construction soon, the parking lot that joins that  
22 facility I think was recently completed. The fields  
23 that were built, the landscaping, the lights are in  
24 place. And the other components of the plan can be  
25 built. Unfortunately, when the Recession hit, the

2 Parks Department had to reduce its capital budget  
3 across the board. We took significant reductions  
4 both in capital and expense, and many of the regional  
5 park plans that were in plan nicely, none of them  
6 were eliminated. But many of them were reduced in  
7 scope. The plans are still there. If funding  
8 allows, they can be implemented. But right now, we  
9 don't have funding for those additional phases of  
10 Calvert Parks.

11 COUNCIL MEMBER TREYGER: And what -- it  
12 was a \$40 million project.

13 LIAM KAVANAGH: Approximately.

14 COUNCIL MEMBER TREYGER: Approximately,  
15 but I think that in discussions with Parks Zoning  
16 officials they ran into some issues with regards with  
17 what's down underneath the ground --

18 LIAM KAVANAGH: [interposing] Yes.

19 COUNCIL MEMBER TREYGER: DO you -- are  
20 there particular numbers that you can provide to my  
21 office with regards to the full restoration of that.  
22 Because there are some groups that are willing to  
23 also put in private monies to see soccer fields built  
24 there. And I think that a public-private partnership  
25 can be definitely the way to go. And I will -- I'll



stop here, but I definitely would like to follow up further with regards to FEMA reimbursements making sure that our parks, and making sure that our parks and boardwalks are much more resilient moving forward. Thank you.

LIAM KAVANAGH: I'll be happy to do that.

CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: Thank you, Council Member Treyger. Next up we'll be hearing from Council Member Maisel.

COUNCIL MEMBER MAISEL: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Good afternoon, Commissioner. First of all, I want to thank you for mentioning Canarsie Park in your testimony. Canarsie Park is spectacular. I think the Parks Department did a tremendous job. It's not finished yet, but it's really going to be great, and the public really has been enjoying it. I wasn't going to mention this, but since Council Member Lander mentioned the frustration about the Parks projects on the city budget. As a former assemblyman who has still projects that are in the pipeline some of them have been there for quite some time. I would hope that the Parks Department is doing everything they can to make sure that the money does not get lost. One of my biggest fears when left

the Assembly to go to the Council is that the money that I had put in for medians and new streets and park equipment would be lost. So I hope that's continuing to be liaised with the Ways and Means Committee and the State Assembly to make sure that that money does not get lost.

LIAM KAVANAGH: Yes, we have checked on that in advance of hearing and the money is there, and we are advancing the project.

COUNCIL MEMBER MAISEL: All right. Actually, what I really wanted to talk to you about is the Marine Park Golf Course. As you know, the Marine Park Golf has been neglected for a very long time. They have new owners and they are in trouble because the contract that they signed with the City was not a good contract for them. And mainly because of the water usage.

LIAM KAVANAGH: Yes.

COUNCIL MEMBER MAISEL: And Marine Park Golf Course has become a very valuable asset to Marine Park, as well as the Mill Basin Communities. And what I'm afraid of is that if the Parks Department drags its feet and does not address the issues that are brought to you by the golf course

2 people, that they'll go out of business. And if they  
3 go out of business, you're going to have to bring  
4 somebody in, and they will not repeat the same  
5 mistakes that the current people have made in terms  
6 of dealing with the water issues. There's a lot of  
7 bureaucracy. We've got to cut through that  
8 bureaucracy, and make it so that they are actually a  
9 profitable company. They cannot be in this to lose  
10 money. And there is too much bureaucracy, too much  
11 red tape, too much delays. Decisions have to be  
12 made. I think there's a grant that they are --  
13 they're going to receive from the State. I think  
14 April 18th is the deadline.

15 LIAM KAVANAGH: Yes.

16 COUNCIL MEMBER MAISEL: But I understand  
17 that the Parks Department has to do some  
18 certification, and they haven't done it yet. And if  
19 they don't do this certification, they're going to  
20 lose, I think \$500,000?

21 LIAM KAVANAGH: \$500,000 yes.

22 COUNCIL MEMBER MAISEL: They're going to  
23 lose it, and this can't be. Something -- people have  
24 to step up to the plate, and just get this thing  
25 going.

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COMMITTEE ON PARKS AND RECREATION

LIAM KAVANAGH: Council Member, I can tell you that I reviewed the grant with our Planning staff on Tuesday, and we're in complete support of it. I'm not familiar with all of the time tables and deadlines, but we support the grant application.

COUNCIL MEMBER MAISEL: Well, April 18th is staring us in the face.

LIAM KAVANAGH: We'll make sure that we're complete with whatever we have to do.

COUNCIL MEMBER MAISEL: Yeah, then there's an issues about \$5 million, which is I think money that they were supposed to spend when they took over the management of the Parks Department -- of the facility. But the water bills have gone up to the point where they can't maintain the park the way they would like it to be maintained because of soil issues, and all those other problems. It's got to be resolved. Otherwise, we're going to lose this management company that really is doing a wonderful job. So I just urge you to do everything you can to move this ahead.

LIAM KAVANAGH: We want our concessioners to be successful. We have been working with the Marine Park operator, and we agree. They're doing a

good job out there, and we would like to see them stay.

COUNCIL MEMBER MAISEL: They're very frustrated.

LIAM KAVANAGH: Excuse me?

COUNCIL MEMBER MAISEL: They're very frustrated.

LIAM KAVANAGH: I can understand. It's a complicated issue.

COUNCIL MEMBER MAISEL: Please unfrustrate them.

LIAM KAVANAGH: I - we will do our best, but it's a very complicated issue with the water table and other things out there that limit what you can do in terms of providing creative solutions to the water problem.

COUNCIL MEMBER MAISEL: Okay, thank you.

CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: Thank you, Council Member Maisel. Next up is Council Member Rodriguez.

COUNCIL MEMBER RODRIGUEZ: I had a few questions. One is on the criteria that the Parks Department use to determine how many workers are assigned in our parks?

LIAM KAVANAGH: It's based largely, of course, upon what head count we have throughout the system and nature of properties in any community district, and the level of care that they required. So as I mentioned earlier, we are required by charter to operate co-terminates with the community boards. However, the community boards vary greatly in the number, the nature, the size, and the use of parks in those districts. And we take those factors into account when we assign staff to any of those districts.

COUNCIL MEMBER RODRIGUEZ: Well, you should know about us. Today, we read in the Times that schools in New York State and the City are one of those more segregated. The same feelings that we have throughout the city. Parks is one of those institutions that is more segregated when it comes to number of workers assigned to our parks.

[Pause]

LIAM KAVANAGH: I don't know that that's the case, Council Member.

COUNCIL MEMBER RODRIGUEZ: How many workers do we have at Central Park?

LIAM KAVANAGH: City Parks Department  
workers?

COUNCIL MEMBER RODRIGUEZ: Yes

LIAM KAVANAGH: We have approximately 30.

COUNCIL MEMBER RODRIGUEZ: Thirty. How  
many other workers are paid through the Conservancy?

LIAM KAVANAGH: There's approximately  
200.

COUNCIL MEMBER RODRIGUEZ: So, money  
determines how many workers we have in our parks.  
And with all respect, you know, I have two daughters  
and I go to Central Park. And I believe that every  
single park should have the same number of workers.  
We cannot have more PEP at the Battery Park than few  
PEP having at the park at 125th Street. So, I hope  
that with the new leadership that we had from our  
friend and Mayor on parks, we address the big issue  
that is affecting us. How many workers do we have in  
our Lower Manhattan Park, all three parks combined,  
Highbridge Park, Island [phonetic] Park, and Fort  
Tilden Park?

LIAM KAVANAGH: I can't give you the  
number off the top of my head, but we can provide  
that.

1 COMMITTEE ON PARKS AND RECREATION 80

2 COUNCIL MEMBER RODRIGUEZ: Like 20s, like  
3 20s.

4 LIAM KAVANAGH: Excuse me

5 COUNCIL MEMBER RODRIGUEZ: Like it's in  
6 the 20s.

7 LIAM KAVANAGH: I don't know off the top  
8 of my head.

9 COUNCIL MEMBER RODRIGUEZ: That's the  
10 number, and you can double check. It was in the 20s.  
11 It was in the 20 on the 2010, and then being reduced  
12 in 2010. So we don't have a conservancy. However,  
13 those three parks together combined make the second  
14 greenest area after Central Park. So I just want to  
15 highlight, you know, a need that we have in our city  
16 when it comes to -- You know, money cannot be the  
17 only factor that determines how many PEP we have. At  
18 Central Park at Battery Park I don't know whether it  
19 has increased or not.

20 But I know the last two years ago, there  
21 was only like three or six PEP that we have in all  
22 parks above 125th. So, we are new fact, a new  
23 different relationship, and I know as I said, I  
24 having nothing against a upper middle-class community  
25 that is able to put a conservancy together, raise



millions of dollars and have 200 workers paid by the conservancy. But I believe it is our responsibility to provide seamless services to all other communities that they don't have that fund in our city. And this is a matter that affect many people of color, too.

[Pause]

LIAM KAVANAGH: Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: Thank you, Council Member Rodriguez. Next up, Council Member Kallos.

COUNCIL MEMBER KALLOS: Thank you, Chairman Levine. Thank you, First Deputy Commissioner Kavanagh. I'd like to provide special recognition to my Borough Commissioner Castro. He's been incredibly helpful. I've been on the job less than a hundred days, but Parks are a big deal in my district. And also for me, I've been a huge fan of the Shapeup Centers. I've been publicizing them in my newsletters for more than two years now. I'm a tri-athlete. I spend a lot of time in New York parks training. You've helped me lose about 40 pounds. And whether it's swimming across the East River from Brooklyn Bridge Park to South Street Seaport, swimming in the Hudson for the New York City Triathlon. Or, running up and down the East River

Escalon up to 125th Street down to 59th Street Bridge and back because that's our piece and we can't actually go past either of those. We're blockaded at both.

I want to talk to you a little bit about that. So I'm Council Member Ben Kallos. I represent the East Side. That's east of 2nd Avenue east of Lexington. I don't have Central Park. My district doesn't have access to it. In fact, we have the least parkland of any district in the city, and I also have El Barrio. And so, we're dealing with this issue of not having very much park space, and then as my colleague Council Member Treyger brought up we're dealing with the post-Sandy world, and my district. And my district is rated a Category AE Flood Zone, which that it is one of the -- it is the highest flood rating there is.

So if there's a flood, it's hitting my district, it is hitting my parks. And so what I wanted to talk to you about is the East River Esplanade. That is for all intents and purposes we have a couple of small parks, but that's our big park that serves most of the community. And we have a university, Rockefeller University. They're going to

1            build three and a half square blocks over the FDR.  
2            They're going to take hundreds of square feet of our  
3            parkland so that they can use it for a private non-  
4            profit use.  
5

6            They are going to have a closed campus,  
7            except for three hours a day. So three hours once a  
8            week, a day on Fridays, the public will be invited  
9            onto the campus. So giving up three and a half  
10          blocks, we're getting three hours of usage a week. I  
11          actually want to thank you, my predecessor, Council  
12          Member Jessica Lappin had you guys do a 2012-2013  
13          Work Study. The result of that was that our  
14          Esplanade needs \$115 million in repairs, and that if  
15          we don't do those repairs, what we're looking is  
16          reconstruction costs of \$430 million.

17          And that's in 2012-2013 dollars, not in  
18          ten years from now. So I guess my quick question is  
19          just in the \$2.5 billion capital construction budget  
20          for 2014-2017, what is your total commitment to the  
21          East River Esplanade?

22                LIAM KAVANAGH: I don't have that number  
23                in front of me right now, but we can provide it for  
24                you.

25                COUNCIL MEMBER KALLOS: Is it included?

2 MALE SPEAKER: [off mic] I thin \$3  
3 million is included.

4 LIAM KAVANAGH: We have some money, \$3  
5 million to deal with a specific issue at 114th  
6 Street. There may be other funds tied to other  
7 development projects along the East River Esplanade,  
8 but I just don't have the figures.

9 COUNCIL MEMBER KALLOS: So, if I could  
10 ask you if you have an answer.

11 MALE SPEAKER: [off mic]

12 COUNCIL MEMBER KALLOS: So the East River  
13 Esplande runs from 60th Street in my district up  
14 through El Barrio, which is still my district, into  
15 Melissa Mark-Viverito's, the Speaker's district. So  
16 this is on her behalf, too. It's an issue for both  
17 of us. We also parts of the park, we have piers that  
18 have been closed, and are no longer being used as  
19 park land and need \$11 million over and above \$115,  
20 but I guess the question is, Will you join me in  
21 trying save \$315 million by a stitch in time saves  
22 nine and investing the \$115 that we need.

23 LIAM KAVANAGH: We agree that the East  
24 River is in need of serious attention. As I  
25 mentioned in my testimony, we are working on a

comprehension inspection and maintenance plan for the coastline that falls under the Parks Department's jurisdiction, including parts of the eastern Esplanade. I can't give you a firm dollar commitment sitting here right now. But we do recognize both the importance as a recreational facility, and the role it plays in protecting the community from flooding.

COUNCIL MEMBER KALLOS: Thank you, very, very much, and when you come back for the final budget testimony, if we can have a concrete number set aside. So that we can make sure that we do have resiliency for Manhattan and the East Side that we do have the parks and that we are saving that \$315 million that would otherwise have to be spent if we ignore this problem, and just let the East River Esplanade fall into the river. Thank you very much for your attention on this. It is absolutely crucial.

LIAM KAVANAGH: You're welcome.

[Pause]

CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: Thank you, Mr. Kallos. Next up, we'll be hearing from Council Member Cohen.

COUNCIL MEMBER COHEN: Thank you Chairman Levine. Thank you Commissioner. Thank you, I just want to quickly acknowledge how many times I run into you into the Bronx. So I appreciate the attention that you bring to my borough. In your testimony, you talked about approximately 147,000 involved in the rec centers.

LIAM KAVANAGH: Yes.

COUNCIL MEMBER COHEN: I wonder how that relates to capacity. Although that sounds like a big number, I think there are a lot of people in New York City who benefit by being member, and I wonder with the New York capacity if there's room for growth there.

LIAM KAVANAGH: We're not at capacity in our recreation centers. Of course, as any gym or facility like that there are peak times where you do have to wait to use equipment or perhaps take turns in the swimming pool, but we're not at capacity. We can handle more -- most of that. You raise a good question. Assessing capacity and utilization are some of the things. As I mentioned in my testimony, we're doing it in parts this spring and the summer. But we're also doing it in the recreation centers to

1  
2 understand better when we have excess capacity  
3 because it does occur during parts of the day, and  
4 what constituencies can we reach out to sort of fill  
5 those voids. So, it is something that we're looking  
6 at, but now we don't think that we're at capacity  
7 yet.

8 COUNCIL MEMBER COHEN: I'm embarrassed to  
9 admit that I don't remember her name, but the  
10 Director of the Rec Center at the Williamsbridge  
11 Oval, for instance, I see her all over the place  
12 trying to drum up business. And I wonder if there  
13 are any resources for marketing to increase awareness  
14 of the availability of these services.

15 LIAM KAVANAGH: We do have a marketing  
16 unit. It's small, but it's feisty. They are able to  
17 get the word out. We do have campaigns that we  
18 launch for our recreation centers periodically.  
19 We'll see if we can do something for Williamsbridge  
20 Oval, but actually the membership there is pretty  
21 good. It's over 4,000 members since we opened, and  
22 we're continuing to get really nice reviews from the  
23 public as they sort of become familiar with the  
24 facility.

COUNCIL MEMBER COHEN: The facility is beautiful.

LIAM KAVANAGH: Yes.

COUNCIL MEMBER COHEN: Regarding the PEP officers, how are they allocated? Are they assigned? Is that analogous to the police where there's borough command. How are they assigned?

LIAM KAVANAGH: We have borough commands in most boroughs we have substations where, you know, a few officers are assigned. For example, we opened up a station in Crotona Park recently thanks to the addition to staffing that we received, and I think it's been well received in the community. But we only have at most two or three sites that we work out of in any given borough for our PEP officers.

COUNCIL MEMBER COHEN: Finally, I was surprised to see the size of the capital budget, pleased to see the size of the capital budget. How much of that is -- Excuse me if the innuendo is not correct here. But how much of that money is city tax revenue, and how much of that federal dollars I guess related to Hurricane Sandy?

LIAM KAVANAGH: The vast majority, I think 85% or more is city dollars. It's either



mayoral, council, or bureaucratic. Am I right or am I wrong? [laughs] I'm right.

COUNCIL MEMBER COHEN: Thank you.

LIAM KAVANAGH: And the remaining 15 -- roughly 15% comes from state, federal, and some grants from foundations and things like that.

COUNCIL MEMBER COHEN: I do have some district-related questions, but I would point out I am meeting with Commissioner Ponte tomorrow. So I'm going to -- I'll save this for tomorrow. Thank you very much.

LIAM KAVANAGH: You're welcome.

CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: Thank you, Council Member Cohen. I just want to update the group that Council Member Rodriguez informs me that he's got a confirmation that the total staffing at Inwood, Fort Shrine [phonetic] the average park size --

COUNCIL MEMBER RODRIGUEZ: [off mic]

CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: Inwood and Fort Shrine needs to have six permanent staff. Six permanent staff at Inwood and Fort Shrine. I want to just close out this session with one other short line of questioning, Commissioner, which is on Green Street's much loved program that reclaims unused road

space for plantings and other plantings. PlaNYC had projected a target of getting to 3,000 green streets by 2017 with a 40 green streets per year pace. Could you update us where we are to meeting that goal, and what our pace is currently?

LIAM KAVANAGH: Well, the original goal envisioned in Replant NYC has been reduced. Again, as I mentioned when the Recession hit, and the capital budget was cut, we reduced programs across the board including the Green Streets component of PlaNYC. We did build 350 new Green Streets through PlaNYC, but we don't have additional money in that program to build more and to get up to what was originally envisioned of a goal of 3,000.

However, we are partnering with DEP, Department of Environmental Protection on their Green Infrastructure Program, which is using much of the -- many of the same concepts that went into Green Streets to provide bio-swell and storm water retention installations in communities. Right now, they're focused on what they call their priority sewer sheds, the areas that contribute most to combiner sewer overflow. It's a major initiative.

They are just -- will be I guess unveiling the first 300 or so this year.

But in the next couple of years, there are going to be more than 6,000 of these installations built in communities around the city. And we really think of that as the future of the Green Streets Program in some respects. It's a DEP program. It's primarily designed to capture storm water before it gets into the city's system. But it does have many of the same benefits that Green Streets provide. It's nature right on people's doorsteps in their communities. It's provides biodiversity. It creates all of the things that Green Streets do in local neighborhoods. So we're pretty excited to be part of that program.

CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: Does it bring park benches and other features that you would expect in a park?

LIAM KAVANAGH: They won't have park benches. I have to say that. Very few of our Green Streets actually have park benches. For the most part, they're just traffic triangles, or medians that have been converted from asphalt or concrete into green spaces.

CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: So just to understand. So there's no further -- there will be no further development of traditional Green Streets?

LIAM KAVANAGH: Well, we develop them if a council member funds it through the capital budget, and some of them choose to do that. Council Member Maisel actually when he was in the Assembly, he was able to provide to provide funding for Green Street to his district. And that's some of the funding that we're still using to build out the last of the ones that he identified as being important additions to his community. So we still -- we'll do that and we'll continue to do that.

CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: Where do we stand now on the way to our goal of 3,000?

LIAM KAVANAGH: We're over 2,500, well over that. We don't envision, however, approaching the 3,000 goal with the traditional Green Street model.

CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: Is there a map or line or another form that would show us where these Green Streets are borough by borough, council district by council district?

LIAM KAVANAGH: Yes, and we can provide that to you.

CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: We'd love to see it. Does it show a fairly even distribution?

LIAM KAVANAGH: There is -- obviously, there is a more preponderance of Green Streets in Brooklyn and Queens simply because of the size of those boroughs. And the grid system in Manhattan it's great for many things, but it's not great for Green Streets. Green Streets you often find the most fruitful places for Green Streets at these odd intersections, which don't exist much in Manhattan because of the grid system. But they are in all five boroughs and we can show you exactly where they are.

CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: Great. Thank you so much for your time and your testimony. We really appreciate it. Thank you.

LIAM KAVANAGH: You're welcome.

CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: We're going to call up our first panel as we enter the Public Session.

[background discussion]

CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: I'd like to call up Tupper Thomas [phonetic] and Alison Tacci.

[background discussion]

[Pause]

CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: Let the record show that our Fish and Parks Department leadership has already produced a map. I guess they had a laser printer in their pocket. Because we have a long list of speakers for the public session, we're going to ask folks to limit their remarks to three minutes. I'd like to ask the Sergeant of Arms to make sure the time is all queued. And Tupper, I'll ask you to take it away. Thank you.

[Pause]

TUPPER THOMAS: **[01:11:16 to 01:11:31 NO AUDIO]** Oh, we had way more people. I didn't realize this was none. We had way more people at that time than we do certainly now from city - from the park system who are permanent employees and I think it's important to create a real jobs program that creates jobs. On the issue of PEP that you raised, I think it's very important to understand that the PEP Program is essential to operations in the parks. It's really more the Squeegee approach that the Police Commissioners talked about because they address all of those issues that are not necessarily crime but that lead ultimately to crime. So that

1           having additional PEP officers in these lower income  
2           communities would make an enormous difference because  
3           they address the kinds of issues that make people  
4           feel uncomfortable in their public park. The other  
5           thing that I would like to recommend is obviously to  
6           add at least \$2 million to the tree budget for Parks  
7           Department because I think that's essential to  
8           starting to work in the parks. Okay, that's it. I  
9           had one more thing to say about the capital money,  
10          which I just think is going to be very important for  
11          guys to be able to help allocate that in a way to  
12          these lower income parks.  
13

14                 CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: Thank you so much,  
15          Tupper, and for your leadership on this issue. I  
16          just want to understand where you see the current  
17          scale in this shortfall in staffing being. Can you  
18          give us a sense of this, in the dozens of staff, in  
19          the hundreds of staff.

20                 TUPPER THOMAS: So for me it's really  
21          having a real parkie in every park, but the isn't  
22          that the staffing members are inaccurate or not  
23          really enough. It's that they are temporary  
24          employees who work only for six months at a time and  
25          then change again. And that is not what creates a

1 great sense of being there. So if you took those  
2 same numbers and made more of those people into  
3 permanent year-round employees, I don't think you're  
4 as far off as you think. So if you could get a good  
5 job training program that takes people, trains them,  
6 and then hires them so that you had permanent  
7 employees, I think that would make an enormous  
8 difference in parks throughout the city.

10 CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: And based on your  
11 own expertise, can you compare New York City's  
12 allocation of approximately .5% of our budget to park  
13 land to other cities, other big cities in America?

14 TUPPER THOMAS: Supposedly, when they  
15 matched them all up, if you talk to the Trust for  
16 Republic Land we're up pretty high. But I think  
17 those numbers also include all of the federal parks,  
18 all of the state parks, all of the everything else.  
19 And that we really have so much heavier usership of a  
20 certain percentage of our parks that if you looked at  
21 the really heavy usership of our parks and what  
22 they're now going through, it really doesn't matter.  
23 We don't have enough. We just know that if you walk  
24 into a park, you're not going to find a parkie. And  
25



2 that to me is the most important thing about really  
3 making these parks feel welcome.

4 CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: You referred to  
5 parkies. You don't mean a maintenance staffer  
6 necessarily?

7 TUPPER THOMAS: Not necessarily. A  
8 gardener, what we used to call playground associates  
9 that I see now it's call kids doing something -- in  
10 motion, Kids in Motion. That kind of a person so  
11 that there's always somebody there that you -- that  
12 is -- that can be held responsible for what's  
13 happening in that park. It's a much better  
14 management tool. Certainly, Central Park has found  
15 that to be completely true where they have a zone  
16 person in every one of their -- how many zones that  
17 they have. And it works, it totally works.

18 CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: Great. Thank you so  
19 much, Tupper. We really appreciate it.

20 TUPPER THOMAS: Yeah.

21 CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: Okay, Alison,  
22 please.

23 ALISON TACCI: My name is Alison Tacchi  
24 and I'm the President of City Parks Foundation. I  
25 want to thank you for your time today in allowing me

here to testify. I don't think I'm introducing you to the organization, but I'm here specifically to request your support for City Parks Foundation's \$200,000 City Council Leadership Expense Request. So that we can continue to provide programs for youth and seniors, and our community organizing initiatives across all five boroughs.

It's important to point out that City Parks Foundation is the only nonprofit that puts free programs in parks across all five boroughs, and that our mission is to work in high need neighborhoods. So within the context of all this discussion about equity, City Parks Foundation is there and has been there for decades for doing just that. That is our mission. We're the only non-profit that offers free programs in parks, as I said, across all five boroughs. We focus on providing those programs in parks that have the most need.

And by supporting our work, we'll be providing those free programs in rec centers, parks, and schools and assisting in the creation and development of numerous Friends of Groups across the five boroughs. In addition, CPF through our Partnerships for Parks, which is a joint program

between City Parks Foundation and the Parks Department operates the Catalyst for Waterfront Parks Program. This program has focused on three large waterfront parks over four years, providing an intense amount of resources and free programming.

We have three full-time staff people working on each of these parks creating Friends of Groups for Soundview Park, and providing support to existing groups at Kaiser Park and Calvert Vaux in Brooklyn, as well as East River Park on the Lower East Side of Manhattan. Beginning in the fall of 2014, Catalyst for Waterfront Parks will be at two new waterfront locations, one in Favor Park in Staten Island and the other one in the East River Esplanade, which is from East 96th to East 135th Street in Manhattan.

We will also be continuing our work at Kaiser and Calvert Vaux parks in Brooklyn, and we'll be staying in and working in these communities through 2018. Our Youth sports program reached tens of thousands of kids citywide with instruction in track and field, tennis, and golf, and emphasizing sports for a lifetime of fitness. City Parks Foundation provides all of these programs, not just

the instruction, but all of the equipment as well for free to address the needs of the whole child: physical, cognitive, emotional, and social in a supervised, structured, and supportive environment.

With childhood obesity on the rise, our free regularly scheduled sports programs provides kids with opportunities to stay active through their local parks. Along with free sports programming, we operate the Junior Golf Center in Brooklyn. That is an \$8 million facility that we privately raised funds for, and built in Dyker Beach Golf Course. It's operational from May through October. That alone costs \$300,000 a year for us to operate, and every year since it's opened we have taught golf to more than 2,000 kids a year between the ages of 7 and 17.

Our education programs provide hands-on learning opportunities, professional training for teachers, transferrable skills for youth, internships for high school students, and food for the local communities. We've received college scholarships in sports, and had our work featured during the Tribeca Film Festival by some of our students. Detailed descriptions of all of the work that we do are submitted with my testimony, as well as all of the

2 parks that we work in. As I said, we're the only  
3 non-providing these free programs citywide in high  
4 need neighborhoods, and all of that is attached to  
5 this document. And we work closely with the Parks  
6 Department, as you know, in all of our efforts.  
7 Thank you very much.

8 CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: Thank you very much.  
9 Can you explain where the work that you perform and  
10 services and programming in the parks begins, and  
11 where those services provided by the Parks Department  
12 ends? Have you divided up the geography? Are you  
13 offering programming in the same park in some cases?

14 ALISON TACCI: In some cases, but City  
15 Parks Foundation is its own private 501c3. So, you  
16 know, we raise all the money that we spend, and we --  
17 we're raising our own funds for that. Our  
18 partnership with the Parks Department is about  
19 Partnerships for Parks. Two-thirds of the staffing  
20 is Parks Department. One-third we provide and pay  
21 for. So it's about 21 people or so, 29 people, and  
22 we decide together. We decide on the mission of  
23 where the efforts will go. For example, in the  
24 Catalyst Program, waterfront was a huge initiative.  
25 That turned out to be still a very important need

1 given what happened after Hurricane Sandy, and the  
2 work that we did there was -- it was evident, the  
3 outcome. After Hurricane Sandy we were able to  
4 mobilize through all of our Friends of Groups, 8,000  
5 people within the first week after the hurricane to  
6 go out and help volunteer. So we work in  
7 coordination certainly with the Parks Department on  
8 that, if that answers your question.

10 CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: I'd like to  
11 acknowledge to that we've been joined by my colleague  
12 on the Parks Committee, Council Member Darlene Mealy  
13 from Brooklyn. Thank you for being here. Also, can  
14 you gauge demand versus supply in your services? Are  
15 there often waiting lists? If you know the same for  
16 the Parks Department services as well, I'd like to  
17 gauge helpful coming to meeting needs of the  
18 programming areas?

19 ALISON TACCI: I think the demand far  
20 outweighs the supply. If you're talking about the  
21 work that we do, for example we provide what we call  
22 technical assistance. So we provide classes for  
23 people. There's lots of people out there around  
24 their neighborhood parks that want to help. They  
25 want to volunteer, and they want to help make their

2 park a safe place with programming. We also provide  
3 the programming, as well as helping start the Friends  
4 of Group, and they're not really quite sure how to go  
5 about that. So we offer technical assistance in the  
6 sense that we'll help they figure out how to start a  
7 website, how to become a 501c3. All of the -- you  
8 know, how to network, how to advertise for what they,  
9 you know, to get other people involved. And there's  
10 always a line out the door. There's tremendous  
11 demand for that, and we can only do as much as we can  
12 do with the budget that we have. You know, we get  
13 our funding from four places: from government,  
14 foundations, corporations, and individuals. And  
15 government is the smallest of that. It's less than  
16 nine percent. And much of it is Department of State  
17 for our Catalyst Program. So it's a struggle and the  
18 demand far outweighs the supply. But the model  
19 works. The model that exists works. There is a  
20 mechanism for reaching these high need neighborhoods  
21 with all of our programs. Mechanism exists. The  
22 funding is the challenge.

23 CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: Thank you very well  
24 much, and thanks to you as well, Tupper. We'll move  
25 to our next panel. Thank you.

ALISON TACCI: Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: I'd like to call up  
-- I hope I pronounce the names right. Marlena Giga  
[phonetic], as well as Joe Puleo.

[Pause]

JOE PULEO: Good afternoon, City Council  
people. I see a lot of new faces. I work with you  
all here, and I'm sure you do a good job. I'm the  
President of Local 983 District Council 37. I  
represent at the height of the season approximately  
2,000 park workers. I represent the Urban Park  
Rangers, the PEP Officers, the Associate Service Park  
workers, City Seasonal Aids. Parks Department, if  
you haven't already realized by now, is suffering  
tremendously when it comes to budgeting.

And the money that the Parks Department  
does receive through these conservancies are not  
distributed equally to all parks. I mean they do  
great, and parks of wealthy neighborhoods, but when  
it comes down to middle-class and poor areas, then  
hey don't get the funding that they should need.  
[applause] So we definitely need more funding for  
all parks, and I noticed the Mayor has commented on  
this. I think he's taking the approach where he's



2 trying to divert some of the conservancy money back  
3 to the other parks.

4 I don't know how successful this is  
5 ultimately going to be because the people with money  
6 like to keep the money in their parks. So we do need  
7 the funding. I've heard other people express the  
8 same things about the parks numbers are probably, you  
9 know, workers are probably at the lowest that they've  
10 been in decades. So we definitely need the money for  
11 parks. Park crime is on the rise. The latest I  
12 think statistics in the Wall Street Journal say 18%  
13 rise.

14 The Union along with other advocacy  
15 groups have been instrumental in putting this new  
16 legislation that report park crimes. There's a five-  
17 year more comprehensive plan that would report  
18 eventually at the end of the five years would report  
19 parks that are under an acre. That was another  
20 issue. Parks under an acre weren't on the grid. So  
21 if violent crime were to be committed in these parks  
22 they wouldn't show up as being in a park. This is a  
23 good thing. You know, this would show -- it would  
24 show just how much really happens in parks that's not  
25 report.

2 So again -- I don't want to take up all  
3 your time -- Parks needs to be better funded. There  
4 needs to be more money put in when it comes to  
5 enforcement in our parks. Our Parks Enforcement  
6 Officers do a great job. They under their -- they're  
7 underfunded. We'd like to see more. We'd like to  
8 see them go back to the height when we had 450 PEP  
9 officers versus under 200. The other problem that we  
10 have with this group of people is that they don't  
11 stay on the job long because their salaries, you  
12 know, don't permit them to. We're talking about  
13 people that make an average of \$35,000 a year  
14 annually. So hopefully with the -- hopefully, we'll  
15 see some more -- some more funding. Thank you.

16 MARLENA GIGA: Hi, good afternoon. My  
17 name is Marlana Giga, and I worked as a Park  
18 Enforcement Sergeant for 14 years. I'm currently  
19 working for 983, and I represent the park enforcement  
20 officers, park rangers, and maintenance personnel. I  
21 would ask that you allocate more money for PEP  
22 officers and rangers and PEP vehicles. PEP officers  
23 are the first line of law enforcement in the parks.  
24 We have made felony arrests. We are familiar with  
25 many isolated areas, wooded areas, and parks that

2 would take NYPD a long time to find, if they ever  
3 even find them. I've been on calls waiting 45  
4 minutes for an EMS bus to arrive because they cannot  
5 find the location. We do homeless outreach working  
6 to combat homelessness, and working to get the  
7 homeless population off the street. We do everything  
8 that the NYPD does. We also need vehicles. Most PEP  
9 vehicles that the officers are driving have over  
10 100,000 miles, and often they break down while we're  
11 on patrol responding to a call. I would ask for more  
12 funding for full-time maintenance personnel, and to  
13 stop relying on the JTP workforce. That's the  
14 Welfare to Work. They only work three days a week,  
15 and they don't have the skills that a full-time  
16 employee has. Thank you.

17 CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: Thank Ms, Giga and  
18 Mr. Puleo, and thanks to your members for the hard  
19 work that you're doing day in and day out in the park  
20 system. I just want to clarify.

21 JOE PULEO: Yeah.

22 CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: You said that there  
23 was a peak number of PEP officers of 450.

24 JOE PULEO: In the mid '90s that's right.  
25

CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: Mid '90s, and today,  
am I right, that it's about 250 or so?

JOE PULEO: The problem is the retention.  
There were a hundred -- I forget. About 200 maybe.  
I mean we probably don't have the exact numbers. But  
we did hire 80 people during the summer. So we had  
an additional-- The problem is retention. Because  
the salaries are so low, people leave the job. They  
go to the Police Department, they go to the Fire  
Department, they go to Sanitation, Corrections.

CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: What is the starting  
salary for a PEP Officer?

JOE PULEO: It's about -- it's about  
\$33,000.

CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: Thirty-three, okay.

JOE PULEO: And it doesn't go up much. It  
goes up to maybe like \$37,000.

CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: But even a veteran  
with ten years serving, what would that -

MARLENA GIGA: [interposing] It doesn't  
go up.

JOE PULEO: No, I mean we're

MARLENA GIGA: It does not go up.

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JOE PULEO: I mean we -- we've -- we just had them reclassified as a -- as a uniformed force. So hopefully the Mayor will take a different liking. They are 24-hour peace officers. They do make less. They do issue summonses. You know, they're out on mounted patrol, mobile patrol. They even have a harbor patrol. They probably -- it's probably the only group of people that do what NYPD does in the park, in the park system. They're a vital service. I mean a lot of these people do it obviously not for the money, but because -- because they like their job and they like to see that the people in the parks are safe.

CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: Do you know for comparison sake -- these seem like very low salaries -- what NYPD or Port Authority police might pay?

JOE PULEO: Well, they pay a lot more. You know what I mean? I think NYPD --

MARLENA GIGA: [interposing] Probably make 40.

JOE PULEO: -- 40, \$44,000, and then, of course, they go up to the high.

MARLENA GIGA: [off mic]

2 CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: But you attribute  
3 the retention problem to the low salaries and the  
4 incentive to move to the NYP or others.

5 JOE PULEO: Yeah, the lack of all to the  
6 morale, you know, the way these people are treated  
7 from their superiors as well. I mean they're held  
8 to, you know, military standards, but they don't get  
9 the level of compensation of that they -- that they  
10 deserve.

11 CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: And your local has  
12 2,000, correct?

13 JOE PULEO: That's with the City season  
14 legs at the height of the season, correct because  
15 they're season employees.

16 CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: So other job  
17 categories include park rangers.

18 JOE PULEO: Uh-huh.

19 CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: Is that correct?

20 JOE PULEO: Yeah, that's part of that  
21 group.

22 CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: And then we have the  
23 --

24 CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: [interposing] You  
25 mentioned, yeah, the other job categories.

2 JOE PULEO: Okay, and then we have the  
3 associate park service workers. They're the ones who  
4 operate the garbage trucks. They operate machinery.  
5 They helped rebuild during Sandy. You know, these  
6 are the guys that helped put the piers up. These are  
7 the guys that do the mulching, get the mulch, and put  
8 it on the container trucks. So they do all various  
9 things.

10 CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: Have there been  
11 reductions in head count in other categories?

12 JOE PULEO: Yeah, tremendous --  
13 tremendously. I mean, you know.

14 CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: Can you give those  
15 numbers like for Park Rangers? How many Park Rangers  
16 do we have today?

17 LIAM KAVANAGH: It's under 12. It's down  
18 to like 12.

19 JOE PULEO: Are we talking about Park  
20 Rangers? Yeah, they're probably down to 12.

21 CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: Twelve for the whole  
22 city?

23 JOE PULEO: For the whole city, correct.

24 CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: There are 12 Park  
25 Rangers in the City of New York?

2 JOE PULEO: Correct. We used to have  
3 more -- we used to have more Park Rangers than Parks  
4 Enforcement Officers.

5 CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: Do you know how many  
6 we had at the peak, the peak number of Park Rangers?

7 JOE PULEO: I would say about 200.

8 CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: So do you -- was  
9 that in the mid-90s.

10 JOE PULEO: Yeah, something around there.

11 CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: So we've had --  
12 we've had more than a 93% reduction --

13 JOE PULEO: [interposing] Throughout the  
14 years, yes.

15 CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: -- in the force of  
16 park Rangers.

17 JOE PULEO: And it compares with the rise  
18 in crime, you know, in the park system. Since the  
19 State diminished park has -- parks crime has gone up.  
20 So we don't have as many tours in the park. We used  
21 to have a lot more tours that people could attend,  
22 you know, which free of charge for the public. These  
23 have dissipated tremendously.

24

25



2 CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: And do you know  
3 numbers on the associate park service workers? How  
4 many members do you currently have in that category?

5 JOE PULEO: We have approximately 350.

6 CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: And how does that  
7 compare historically? What did you have?

8 JOE PULEO: I don't have the exact  
9 numbers, but they have dwindled throughout the years.  
10 Not as dramatically as the Urban Park Rangers.

11 [Pause]

12 JOE PULEO: Yeah.

13 LIAM KAVANAGH: There's less than 180.

14 JOE PULEO: The total is less -- there's  
15 about 180 PEP Officers.

16 CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: I'm sorry, so it's  
17 about 180?

18 JOE PULEO: Yeah, about 180.

19 MARLENA GIGA: As fast as we hire the PEP  
20 Officers, they leave like within the first two years.

21 CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: And that is --

22 MARLENA GIGA: [interposing] So, we  
23 can't keep them.

24

25

2 CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: And that is because  
3 -- is that primarily because of salary or are there  
4 other issues with that?

5 MARLENA GIGA: Salary, they move on, and  
6 they didn't -- they're not treated fairly.

7 CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: They're not treated  
8 fairly?

9 MARLENA GIGA: Right.

10 CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: Because you --

11 MARLENA GIGA: Well, the PEP Officers,  
12 the majority of them their -- their commands are in  
13 old bathrooms.

14 CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: Their commands are  
15 in --

16 MARLENA GIGA: They're housed -- they're  
17 housed in bathrooms.

18 JOE PULEO: I'll give you an example. In  
19 Flushing Meadow, Corona Park, they used the urinals  
20 from the World's -- the 1964 World's Fair as their  
21 command.

22 CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: That's terrible.

23 MARLENA GIGA: [interposing] Right.  
24  
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2 CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: Unacceptable. That'  
3 sounds like something we need to explore further in a  
4 future hearing for sure.

5 MARLENA GIGA: Thank you.

6 CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: I'd like to ask --  
7 acknowledge my colleague Council Member Mealy. Do  
8 you have some questions.

9 COUNCIL MEMBER MEALY: I'm sorry for  
10 being tardy. I was in my district. I only have one  
11 question. I was -- with the last mayor with regard  
12 to the rangers, do you know how many summonses you  
13 have given or you staff have given for cigarettes or  
14 smoking in a public park?

15 JOE PULEO: It was a few hundred. I  
16 couldn't give you the exact number. A lot of it,  
17 though, were warnings. They wouldn't just approach -  
18 - they didn't approach people, but the ones that did  
19 not comply, you know, after they were told, then  
20 those people were given -- were given summonses.

21 COUNCIL MEMBER MEALY: Would you say  
22 there was a significant increase with these  
23 summonses?

24 JOE PULEO: I don't think they really  
25 impacted that much.

2 MARLENA GIGA: No, it was probably a  
3 nickel in the whole budget.

4 COUNCIL MEMBER MEALY: Thank you.

5 MARLENA GIGA: We were told to give  
6 warning, and if the person didn't comply that's when  
7 we would issue the summons.

8 COUNCIL MEMBER MEALY: Thank you. I just  
9 wanted to make sure. I knew I was right. Thank you,  
10 Chair. Oh, can I ask one more thing?

11 CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: Right.

12 COUNCIL MEMBER MEALY: How much money  
13 would it take for the PEP workers to be at full  
14 salary?

15 JOE PULEO: When you say -- ?

16 COUNCIL MEMBER MEALY: Or have they  
17 proved to be workers?

18 JOE PULEO: What do you mean, increase  
19 their current salary -

20 COUNCIL MEMBER MEALY: [interposing] Yes.

21 JOE PULEO: --to?

22 COUNCIL MEMBER A decent that they  
23 expect.

24 JOE PULEO: [interposing] For a decent  
25 salary, the comparable to PD for --

2 LIAM KAVANAGH: [off mic]

3 JOE PULEO: -- I guess -- I think the PD  
4 Officers top out at about \$80,000 so they would  
5 probably -- have to more than double their salaries  
6 to get what New York City police officer gets.

7 COUNCIL MEMBER MEALY: Oh, okay. I  
8 didn't know that.

9 MARLENA GIGA: Please understand that we  
10 do everything that NYPD does. Our jurisdiction is  
11 the parks, beaches, pools, recreation centers. So we  
12 do patrol all of those areas.

13 JOE PULEO: Yeah, but the difference that  
14 they're not armed, and that's at the discretion of  
15 the Commissioner. So they could immediately be armed  
16 if the Commissioner decided to do so. And that's one  
17 of the things that we're trying to get accomplished  
18 so that they would have a greater -- a greater impact  
19 on the safety of the people.

20 COUNCIL MEMBER MEALY: Right, you all are  
21 doing so much with so little.

22 JOE PULEO: So little, I know. That's --  
23 that's why we're here every year.

24 COUNCIL MEMBER MEALY: I commend your  
25 department.

JOE PULEO: Thank you.

MARLENA GIGA: [interposing] We're dedicated. We're dedicated to this job 100%.

COUNCIL MEMBER MEALY: If you love what you do, it becomes easy. So I'm looking forward to work with my -- the Chair here to see what we can do. Things have to change. Thank you, Chair.

CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: Thank you. Thank you panel. Thank you very much.

JOE PULEO: We have here Jeff Brock [phonetic] with New York -- New York City Park Advocates. He's here with us.

CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: Are you on the speakers here?

JEFF BROCK: Yes, I can go down --

[Pause]

CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: I think we have you on the upcoming panel, Jeff, just to keep our thing flying, but we'll get to you, though. Thank you. Thank you, Jeff.

JEFF PROCK: Okay.

CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: Would anyone here from the Parks Department, do you feel compelled to weigh in on any of the first two panels? Okay, if

2 you don't -- I just want to give you the opportunity.  
3 So we can all -- we'll make that opportunity later in  
4 the proceedings. Okay, the next panel will be  
5 Deborah Martin, Lee Maniachi [phonetic], if I'm  
6 pronouncing that incorrectly, forgive me. Dart  
7 Westphal and Vincent Wiggins [phonetic].

8 [background discussion]

9 CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: We'll start on what  
10 will be the right hand of this panel.

11 [Pause]

12 DART WESTPHAL: Good afternoon. My name  
13 is Dart Westphal, and I have worked on open space  
14 development issues in the city for 35 years from  
15 building gardens with the South Bronx Open Space Task  
16 Force to helping to found the Bronx River Alliance.  
17 In all of these various strains of efforts, support  
18 and resources would have to be woven together to make  
19 extraordinary things happen. I believe that remains  
20 the case. How can this weaving together of public  
21 and private resources be continued in a way that is  
22 equitable and serves the public broadly?

23 First, the public support of New York  
24 City Department of Parks and Recreation has to be  
25 sufficient. This is particularly true when so much

has been invested in the capital reconstruction and expansion of the system. One of the talk and transition sessions last summer with former Commissioner Bernanke [phonetic] suggested that the full-time year round park staff should be increased from about 3,700 to 5,000. Whatever the right number is, some increase would be required as new parks come online or are more fully developed.

Bronx examples include Soundview, Bridge Park, Pugsley Creek, Ferry Point, and Jerome Park Reservoir. The parks development must be sufficiently funded to do the things that it does such as keeping parks clean safe, the field mowed, bathroom and spray showers running, fixing things when they break, and running recreation programs. That probably means the 2015 expense budget should be much bigger than has been proposed here today, and much bigger than the 2014 budget.

At the same time, secondly, funding from other sources has to be found to make every park a source of pride for every community. Gardens, sophisticated turf care, and natural areas management, and increased programming and community engagement are all areas where private philanthropy,



volunteers, service lending opportunities, and partnerships with other levels of government can make all of New York City's parks welcoming places of beauty for all.

Partnerships for Parks, and Natural Areas Conservancy and all of the partnering groups around the city need the support and assistance of everyone who cares about parks. They also need to know that their efforts are not replacing resources that should come from the City. I've had personal experience of raising money for a staff person for a park only to have a city park worker transferred out of that same park in return.

Some sort of maintenance of effort has to be understood if partnerships are to be forged for the long term. It is harder to develop resources in poorer communities than in rich ones, but we all must work at it or we will have some communities that have truly splendid parks, and some that have merely adequate parks, and that is just not fair.

Thirdly, if we are to have a unified system there has to be planning for the long-term capital needs, and that means a means a citywide long-term capital budget with a long cycle. Local

2 elected officials have done marvelous work providing  
3 capital funds for parks in their communities, but  
4 some parks such as Van Courtland [phonetic] Park  
5 require more than local capital allocations can  
6 provide. Relying on funding from unrelated capital  
7 projects like stadiums and water filtration plants is  
8 not a rationale way to fund the park system. The  
9 Parks Department needs a capital budget, enough  
10 funding to hire enough people to do its job, and the  
11 support of every facet of the civic community.

12 CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: Thank you, Mr.  
13 Westphal. Thank you for your comments on equity.

14 RAYMOND LANDRY: Hello. I'm Raymond  
15 Landry [phonetic]. I'm President of the Jackson  
16 Heights Beautification Group, a civic and  
17 environmental group in Queens. We've been  
18 volunteering in parks for about 25 years as a number  
19 of the folks here could attest. Most New Yorkers.  
20 that folks here could attest. Thank you for this  
21 opportunity to testify. Most New Yorkers need only  
22 take a walk in the park to find an example of Mayor  
23 de Blasio's Tale of Two Cities.

24 Our high profile parks are under the  
25 extraordinary care of a large and well trained army

of gardeners. Meanwhile, too many of our less blessed parks look like dust bowls come the end of summer. This is no knock on our wonderful Parks Department. We all know the reason. The well-tended parks are bankrolled by their affluent residential and business neighbors. Other parks get by with much less money from the City. What's to be done? The suggestion to redirect 20% of this private money to ordinary parks met with opposition.

Critics said it was unfair to donors, who intended to help specific parks, and their private donations would dry up. But we don't believe we need that battle. There's a two-part solution to help all our parks. First, get a citywide non-profit carrying a New York City brand to raise big private money for the majority of our parks. Donors to this foundation would get recognition, and parks used by most New Yorkers would get help. This idea is not without risk, however.

Once private funds come rolling in, money that would have gone to parks could be shifted to other uses. That would leave our parks in essentially the same shape, but even more beholdling to the wealthy. Thus part two. The City should

commit to sufficient park funding to its annual budget. In other words, one percent for parks. Parks now get by on one-half percent, much less than other cities according to the Trust for Public Lands, and as noted by Chairman Levine.

The need for parks will only grow in coming years. With a growing population living in a denser city, New York will need more parks. And with the city facing rising sea levels, our parks, especially those along the water, will do double duty. They will serve as places to play, and places that defend the City. It's time to make our parks places for New Yorkers. It's time to make our parks places New Yorkers now and in the future can be proud of. Thank you again for this opportunity.

CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: Thank you very much for your testimony. Okay.

DEBORAH MARTIN: Good afternoon, Chairman Levine and Committee Members. I'm Deborah Martin. I'm Executive Director of New York Restoration Project. And I was just listening to my colleague, and I want to say we're Restoration Project, NYRP. We are a citywide non-profit. We're the only citywide non-profit, and we exist specifically to

bring resources to under-resourced parks and open spaces. We've been doing that since our founding in 1995, and I'm going to tell you today a little bit about how we do that, and where we do that.

So I work closely with three general buckets. We work in parks, we work in community gardens that we own, and in the City's parks where we are actually are planting a million trees. We're responsible for a quarter of those Mayan trees. We do -- we work citywide, but our work concentrates in the South Bronx, East Harlem, Central Brooklyn, and Northern Manhattan. Working closely with Parks Department, we helped turn around Fort Tryon Park, Fort Washington, and Highbridge parks, pulling trash out of the land and basically changing the face of those parks very profoundly.

We're still in Highbridge, and we manage the north 40 acres of Highbridge Park. We also are very quick responders in times of trouble. For example, after the tornado that hurt Maria Hernandez Park, we replanted about 75 trees that within months of the -- the park being destroyed after Super Storm Sandy. We deployed crews from all over the city out to Staten Island to work in places like Conference

House Park to replant trees. So we can respond very quickly.

We add that value to work at the Parks Department. So everyone does every day. So we also created a park. Sherman Creek Park is about at 163rd Street to Dyker Street on Harlem River. We've invested \$20 million there to date out of the \$120 that we've invested since our founding in the work that we do. We built the Peter J. Shaw Boat House, which revived boating on Harlem River there. And now is the home for Women Work that trains kids to work through to get them into college.

And we're about to embark on the last phase of development of that park, which will be the building of a community boating facility, and other classrooms there. Reintroducing the Dyke House community and Inlet and the Fort Washington Communities that work is ongoing. So that work is ongoing, and that's kind of a summary of our work in parks.

In our community gardens we acquired 52 sites that were being sold for development in 1999. We still own and run those, and they will be in the public use in perpetuity. We grow thousands of

pounds of produce every year. And, in fact we have a proposal before the City Council right now for a \$250,000 grant to support a program called Garden Growers where we'll teach kids how their food is grown, and then engage families in the communities through their kids' participation in the work that we do in our gardens. So that's just a little sample of how we manage those open spaces, and we very closely also with Green Thumb and with community groups in every part of the city that we're in, and those gardens are in all five boroughs.

COUNCIL MEMBER: [off mic]

DEBORAH MARTIN: Finally, a million trees. We are pretty much at the end of that. We're almost at a million trees. This spring alone we'll give away 12,000 trees to get trees into places where the Parks Department would be unable to dig up, which is at this point private residential ground. Twenty-six percent of our city is private property, and we'll partner with community group across the city to give trees away. We'll help people, steward them. We'll teach about stewardship, and we monitor those trees after they're planted. So we're very much engaged in making sure that our city has a healthy

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ecology, whether that happens on parks property or elsewhere. So in conclusion I just want to say that whether we're planting trees on State Island, whether we're creating new park space, supporting community gardens across the five boroughs. We improve air quality, water quality, reduce energy usage, all of those things. But all in the service of better value and strengthening our communities, because we understand that public open spaces are critical gathering places for the citizens of the City, and they need to be at their highest quality whatever community they're in. Thank you for your time.

CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: Thank you, Deborah.  
Thank you. Next up.

VINCENT WIGGINS: Good afternoon,  
Chairman Levine, Members of the Parks and Recreation Committee. My name is Vincent Wiggin, and in being respectful of your time I do have a testimony that I would like to include in the record, and I also have one that's redacted just in case I cannot go to three minutes and 30 seconds. I just wanted you to be prepared, and the copy is right here.



CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: We'll enter the full version in the record, and if you could read the redacted now that would be wonder.

VINCENT WIGGINS: My name is Vincent Wiggins and I guess I'm going to talk to you about the citizen-stakeholder shift in this whole process. I think that would be kind of fruitful, and I'm here basically to advocate for Partnerships for Parks all because I have had extensive involvement with them. I'm a founder of Bright Leadership Coalition, which was founded in 1985 by mother and myself to specifically build a bridge of understanding and fellowship between the youth and childhood development.

One of the major supporters during that challenging time was Council Member Priscilla Whitten [phonetic] who was always an advocate for the necessary capital funding to renovate, and are named to Linden Park specifically. Linden Park is for many the only oasis in this local neighborhood. BLC, which is Bright Leadership Coalition, continued its activism as a park volunteer. During the 1980s, the City had some real budget challenges that result in

park personnel layoffs, and shortages of resources to maintain parks.

With the help of the involved president Harry Golden, the Park Volunteer Program was born. He made available everything from paint brushes, glue and shovels, gloves, garbage bags, and more, but all the stuff to make our parks sustainable. BRC took responsibility to help with the maintenance from general clean-up, the painting of handball walls with lines. In fact, BRC is directly responsible for developing the methodology for keeping the walls graffiti free, the handball, and Parks Department employee the same techniques until today.

I would like to give special recognition to PFP, Partnership for Parks, Outreach Coordinator for Linden, Emily Sharad [phonetic], and her predecessor Jani Biamada [phonetic] and Ahsan Key [phonetic], who have move on to other assignments. The Park Volunteer Program has now transitioned to an improved Partnership for Parks. PFP is a stabilizing BRC is a stabilization organization that encourages community participation to initiatives to keep our urban oasis sustainable.

The input and suggestions should be considered when space is an issue and when grants. We believe that established PFP members should have priority to that space and waiver of all fees even special events. We know when a community take ownership of a sustainable -- the sustainability of our urban oasis the quality of life improves. So I want to thank you for all that you guys do, and also for the extra time that you might have given me. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: Thank you so much, sir. I truly appreciate your input. Thanks to this panel. Thank you very much.

[background discussion]

CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: Okay, we've been rejoined by Council Member Cohen. Thank you. Our next panel will be David Rososko, Kay Webster, Valerie Jo Bradley, and I'm having trouble reading this last name, but it's Jamira Opharules -- [phonetic].

JAMIRA: Ducrupulo.

CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: Ducrupulo, okay. Forgive me.

[background discussion]

2 CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: Thank you. We'll  
3 start on the right end of the table again. I just  
4 want to remind folks that we have a three-minute time  
5 limit, and when you hear the chirping, please wrap  
6 up. Thank you.

7 DAVID ROSOSKO: Is the mic on? Firstly,  
8 allow me to speak on behalf of myself, August  
9 Santiago, and the entire team of the Woodside  
10 Association. And thanking the Chairperson Mark  
11 Levine and other members of this committee. And the  
12 Committee on Parks and Recreation for this  
13 opportunity to testify on behalf of our organization  
14 as it pertains to the proposed Fiscal Year 2015  
15 Budget for the New York City Parks and Recreation.  
16 IT is indeed an honor --

17 CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: Can you state your  
18 name, sir, for the record as well?

19 DAVID ROSOKO: Well, I've got a record,  
20 that's on the record.

21 CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: Okay.

22 DAVID ROSOKO: Okay, the Woodside  
23 Neighborhood is small in size with almost no funding  
24 but underpinned by substantial determination,  
25 wavering willpower has, we strongly believe based on

the evidence of our work, restored large sections of the Woodside zip code in good order at no cost to the taxpayer. And indeed raised the level of our enterprises and those of our people.

Under our three pillars of greening, clean, and graffiti remediation, conceived and interwoven in such a way that the entire public space is renewed to almost pristine condition. But, moreover, the spirit of our people in this town of Woodside has strengthened. All these actions easily visible examples of this work. That our hope prepares the next generation to carry on the struggle to preserve and as it were expand our endeavors of each street up to the very borders of our home.

Today, we must tell you of the critical work in the greeting area. Being in our view the turnkey that nourishes all other brackets. The Partnership for Parks under the Greening Western Queens projects is the very moment our destinies cross paths. It has been the single most important piece of this complex and overlapping plan our group has initiated. The sheer number of initiatives made possible through their programs and expertise not only raises our skill level with respect to greening.

It is even this day adding value so that one day to be sure a future generation will sit under a tree or on a park bench maintained in its proper order because of their belief in us, and our faith in them.

The small parks in Woodside people -- ones people actually utilize have witness routinely painting of public fixtures, varnishing of the benches, trimming of the trees and bushes, cleaning and all of this with tools, materials, and expertise provided by the Partnership. Much of this involves having established a green club at PS11 in Woodside. Again, another project fully inconceivable without the material and professional support of the partnership.

I could as well highlight the Tree Stewardship Program, which the Partnership facilitated to train our people in proper tree care, and tree bed care of the Vision Incentives or It's My Park Day. With the Partnership predictable event days where volunteers can bear witness to the core team and the Partnership, and wonderfully simple element. You may also take careful note of our relationship with New York Restoration Projects and

Mike Mitchell. Yet again, an example of a link formed to the direct intervention of the partnership.

Now, the partnership as an organization is made of individuals who I believe are, not just because of the fancying of it in my words, but because of the sheer simplicity of our actions. I need to speak of them here, Kyle Richard, Ben Fenzing [phonetic]. Just another couple of seconds. The current Outreach Coordinator, Julie Welch, all of the staff of the City Parks Foundation and the Partnership for Parks have stood with us knowing full team where hands meet iron was operating solely on the strength of its members.

This I might also add includes the broad and deep network the Partnership has with the New York City Department of Parks and Recreation in our area. Men such as Jacob Marlin, Stephanie Scott, five years volunteering for the Parks Department without pay. William Schmidt, Joseph Flock, Lin Union [phonetic] all foresters who have helped us and all as a direct relationship to our understanding and collaboration with the department.

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CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: If you could wrap up, and return to the desk. We have your full statement for the record.

DAVIDA ROSOKO: Okay, you have it for the record, but I just wanted to make it duly noted into the -- and recorded in proper form. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: Thank you so much. It's Ms. Bradley, is that right?

Yes. Good afternoon, members of the Committee. My name is Valarie Jo Bradley. It please me to have this opportunity to speak about the work the Marcus Garvey Park Alliance, and the invaluable assistance our group has received from the City Parks Foundation. As a 34-year long resident of my community, I have come to know and love its dynamic and eclectic nature. Harlem is a magical neighborhood in this wonderful city that we all love. Like the rest of the city, Harlem has many world famous sites, but it's unique in its reputation as the capital of African-American culture. Home to many famous night clubs and theaters where Black entertainers and the literary giants found inspiration and honed their skills, Harlem also has a treasured oasis of calm and green space, Marcus



Garvey Park, formerly Mount Morris Park for which the surrounding neighborhood was named. It has been canonized in such literature as Ralph Ellison's *Invisible Man*, Henry Roth's *A Star Shines Over Mount Morris*; Rosa Guy's *the Friends*, and in the autobiographies of American music genius Richard Rogers, and *On the Waterfront* with screenwriter Budd Schulberg.

With help from the City Parks Foundation and Partnership for Parks, the Marcus Garvey Park Alliance has taken back the park for the community. And it is once again a place where all stakeholders from around the city, the country, and the world come to enjoy both quiet times and an exciting array of dynamic culture events and programs. The City Parks Foundation has provided financial support and technical assistance to the Alliance since the earliest days of the Alliance's existence. We received a \$10,000 capacity building grant from the City Parks Foundation, Mellon Foundation Grant Program. With help from CPF we applied for and were granted a \$295,000 matching grant from the New York State Department of Parks and Recreation and Historic Preservation that was matched by then City Councilman

Bill Perkins. With that money we were able to repair the pathways leading up to the Acropolis in the park, the location of or iconic and landmark fire watch tower. CPF acted as our fiscal sponsor until we became a 501c3 organization. In 2001, CPF assigned a Catalyst Coordinator to Marcus Garvey Park, whose work continues to yield benefits to our organization and to the park. Tamala Greenfield, the Partnership for Parks Catalyst Coordinator helped inaugurate several events, such as the Annual Film Festival, the Dance Harlem Festival, and the Interfaith Holiday Celebration that continue to this day. More important, she helped us organize two important community visioning sessions. One where the community established the priorities to revitalize the Amphitheater, and to revitalize the Fire Watch Tower in Acropolis. And second, the session that identify what the Amphitheater should contain to accommodate world class events. The NPA has successfully worked to attract a variety of exciting cultural programs to the park. As a result of our efforts, we have our own events including our annual Historic Parks Film Festival, Dance Harlem, and the Easter Egg Hunt. And we are attractive programming

to the park. Due to our successful campaign to revitalize the Richard Rogers Amphitheater, the community and visitors from across the country and around the world, have now enjoyed CFP theatrical, music, and dance performances every summer.

CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: Ms. Bradley.

VALERIE JO BRADLEY: We will continue to introduce new features such as the Reading Circle and new equipment events and programming to the park. The success of the Alliance is revitalizing and reclaiming Marcus Garvey Parks for the community.

CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: Ms. Bradley, we would ask you to wrap up, please. You've gone way over time.

VALERIE JO BRADLEY: Okay. I've got one sentence: Is built upon the commitment of our community group working in collaboration with the City Parks Foundation and Partnerships for Parks. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: But now is that a wonderful final sentence, and a great testimony. I actually do have a question for you, Ms. Bradley. Do you have an Operating Agreement where Marcus Garvey

Parks lists the Central Conservancy? Do they provide you services or assistance?

VALERIE JO BRADLEY: No, we don't have an operating agreement. I understand that there possibly will be one. We have worked with Central Park Conservancy in an informal way as well as three other historic Harlem parks in which they provided maintenance services in our parks to free up our gardeners for beautification projects. In addition to that, the Woman's Committee of the Central Park Conservancy held a fundraising luncheon some years ago. And that money raised was given to the four historic Harlem parks and we applied that money toward playgrounds for children.

CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: Thank you for that verification. Okay, Ms. Turina.

JAMIA DECRUPALO: Can you hear me? Can you hear me. Good afternoon, Chair Levine and Members of the City Council's Parks and Recreation Committee. Thank you for allowing me to testify at this Preliminary Budget hearing. My name is Jamia Decrupalo [phonetic]. I'm a volunteer parks steward and volunteer gardener in Christopher Park located in

Greenwich Village bordered by Christopher and Grove Streets.

A park of some historic significance visited by people from around the world, Christopher Park is home to Joseph Pallia's bronze statue of a Civil War Calvary Commander General Philip Henry Sheridan. A flag pole that commemorates several members of an elite Civil War unit that wore uniforms styled after African tribesmen. And Philip Segal's statute which honored the Gay Liberation Movement.

I'm a member of a volunteer group, Christopher Parks Partnership, formed in 2001 with the assistance of Partnership for Parks. We're not a 501c3 a non-profit yet. However, we have a fiscal sponsor, the City Parks Foundation. Christopher Park Partnership has succeeded in bringing in many positive changes to Christopher Park. Some of our accomplishments include beautifying the park by planting and maintaining a variety of plants and flowers, which yield a color pallet in spring, summer, and fall, caring for all the street trees, which surround the park.

Sponsoring an annual community event that includes a pumpkin and painting party for children.

Christopher Park Partnership does this because we care about the community we live in and believe that a clean well-maintained park filled with plants and flowers and trees and bees and worms is essential to living a good life in the city. It provides balance. We could not accomplish this without a strong relation with Partnership for Parks, and more specifically a relationship with our Outreach Coordinator, Kirsti Dandridge [phonetic].

Partnership for Parks provides guidance, advice, and support to our volunteer groups. They are the people to go to in all matters concerning Christopher Park. They never hesitate to reach out to people who are able to assist us in any matter that may arise. In recent years our volunteer group dwindled from a high of ten to a low of two people, and it was quite a struggle to keep up with the demands of the park. Partnership for Parks was instrumental in getting the word out that we needed help, and within a relatively short period of time, a new group of volunteers joined us.

And it's with this renewed energy and sense of purpose Christopher Partnership has begun a new chapter in our goal to make Christopher Park a

destination to take in the glorious flora and fauna, to learn about history, and to experience the joys of people watching in Greenwich Village. Thank you for this opportunity to testify.

CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: Thank you very much. You have exquisite timing. There goes the buzzer. How do you like that? Okay. Next up, yes.

KAY WEBSTER: Hi, thank you for this chance. I'm Kay Webster from the Sara Roosevelt Park Community Coalition. We're on the Lower East Side. We are the home of the M'Finda Kalunga Community Garden, and the Hua Mei Bird Sanctuary, which are both community steward spaces within our park. The Parks Department has been our active partner in caring for this essential open space in our crowded and diverse neighborhoods. We appreciate Partnership for Parks for their ongoing support of this Alliance.

Parks need the community working in them, deciding, gardening, creating in collaboration with Parks Department and not outside the fence waiting to be served. We want a dynamic ongoing relationship where they come together to the table with common goals, disagreements, and with each group's unique expertise. We get smarter together. Our parks and

open spaces, our country homes, science labs, and nature preserves, places of play, respites, and community gathering for most city dwellers.

They keep life more alive here.

Therefore, our parks need dedicated assured funding commensurate with these vital roles and funding for an expanded role we think they now need to play going forward. We need a living wage for our underpaid rep workers. We can't maintain our parks on the backs of poor people. But urgently, climate mitigation, resiliency, and recovery must now be part of the Parks Department's core mission. We need innovative and decisive actions to meet the challenges of climate change in the present lack of adequate financial resources.

We need to be a cadre of skills and savvy citizen stewards, and parks workers to meet both those challenges. Every park can become a model of sustainable practices from solar lighting to recycling. Like in the beacons of information about birds and bee habits, indigenous plantings, and water reclamation. Our parks buildings can provide sites of learning on climate resiliency, sites of recovery, solar powered charging stations, bike repair shops,



and think tanks where technologies would show the way forward.

We can educate our city on their stake in their own environment. Our city also has a global reach. We can join efforts in earnest to shift the balance on climate disruption. Military leaders, 90% of scientists, along with us tree huggers all agree, we're at a tipping point. This will be challenging, and we can do it, and there really isn't any other choice.

The only other thing I wanted to add was about Parks funding. You know, time private wealth donates to one park over another, I feel that they are determining Parks' policy. And I think that has to be thought about and how that's going to be working going forward. We know that our parks are under-funded. We know efforts to try to do something stopped that. Personally, I would like people to pay their taxes, and so that we fill the city coffers and we have a working system. That's it. Thank you for your time.

CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: Thank you, Ms. Webster. Thanks to all, our entire panel. Thank you.

We're lucky that our next speaker is our colleague in government, my friend State Senator Daniel Squadron.

[Pause]

CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: We are very excited that you're here, Senator Squadron. Your plan has been referenced directly and indirectly in our hearing today.

SENATOR DANIEL SQUADRON: My ears have been ringing.

CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: So it's good that you're in person to tell us more.

SENATOR DANIEL SQUADRON: Thank you so much, Chairman. I really appreciate it, Council Members and staff. As you know I have a number of budgets on my mind today, but I didn't want to let this opportunity pass especially with the thoughtful and energetic engagement that you've brought to this already. I really wanted to weigh in. I'm State Senator Daniel Squadron. I represent Lower Manhattan and parts of Brooklyn in the State Senate. And I want to begin by saying that while I appreciate work being done, the conversation today is inevitable today incomplete.

It focuses by its very nature on only one piece of the overall funding in the city's parks. The budget we're being taught that we're talking about today doesn't include the allocation of millions of dollars of third-party spending by conservancies and advocates. And it doesn't include grants that elected officials make through so-called discretionary funds. You're Bill Introduction 154 along with Councilman Lander would bring increased openness, and transparency to Park's funding, and I support that movement enormously. It would make this conversation more complete.

But it wouldn't change the underlying reality. In fact, you're rarely told to continue speaking. It wouldn't change the underlying reality, which we have a patchwork for funding our city's parks today. And it's a wholly and completely inadequate model for three reasons: First, there is chronic and long-term underfunding by the City. Second, as has been referenced today, the lack of a dedicated capital budget, and third, there are unintended consequences of conservancies.

For those New Yorkers who are fortunate enough to live near one of our marquis parks, it's

probably not obvious that parks funding is inadequate. Those parks are doing better than ever, and it would be easy to believe that a park's budget has increased based on these parks alone from Central Park to High Line, from Brooklyn Bridge Park in my district to Prospect Park. But a visit to St. Mary's Park in Woodhaven [phonetic] in the Bronx, or Flushing Meadows Park or Sara Roosevelt Park in my district where we just heard from Kay Webster exposes that there really is a crisis.

In 1986, the Parks Department budget was .86% of the city's overall spending. During the 2000 election -- 2001 election season, 1% per parks was a rallying cry. Of course, we never got there. The campaign dissipated, and today the Parks Department budget being discussed today is a paltry .52% of the City's overall budget, almost identical to what it was 14 years ago. The fact is because the marquis parks are doing so well, the momentum for doing something about the lack of funding for other parks around the city has dried up.

Fourteen years ago there was greater outcry about a Parks budget that is an identical fraction of the city's budget to the one being

discussed today. What's the biggest difference between then and now? The increase in dollars that generous conservancies spend to maintain and improve a small number of fortunate parks in affluent neighborhoods. Until every park, playground, and plaza in the five boroughs is maintained to a state of good repair, the budget will continue to be inadequate regardless of the patchwork of sources.

The fact the Parks Department has no discretionary capital of its own is a gaping hole in the funding structure as well. New Yorkers for Parks I know has spoken about this and I couldn't agree more. But in order to fundamentally create more equitable funding within parks and change the current budget dynamic, I believe we should pursue my Neighborhood Parks Alliance proposal, which would form partnerships between well financed conservancies and parks that are most in need.

The proposal has been described previously, but the key fact to remember that it would supplant the need for additional City and State support for parks. Those of us with budgetary responsibilities must never forget that. In fact, MPA would help change the game for a City and State

1 parks funding. The successive conservancies have  
2 inadvertently contributed to the problem. Let me be  
3 clear. Conservancies have arisen to fill a serious  
4 gap in public funding of our parks, and it is  
5 undeniable that they do tremendously good work.

6 But because we know that conservancies  
7 will raise the funds to keep our major parks in a  
8 state of good repair, the City does not dedicate the  
9 funds necessary to maintain all of its parks.  
10 Instead, the polished jewels sparkle while around  
11 them, the system falls into disrepair. This year we  
12 have finally turned the conversation toward the role  
13 of conservancies, and that's a good thing. Private  
14 donations have become an integral part of financing  
15 our parks and we should continue to encourage these  
16 philanthropic donations.

17 And the fact that we have enacted a  
18 discussion about the role of conservancies means we  
19 are making progress. But the conversation must  
20 actually lead to two practical changes. The first is  
21 a greater connection between all of the parks in the  
22 system. The second is more funding for the system.  
23 That's a goal I believe we all share. We're one  
24 city. We all want and need great parks. We need a  
25

2 budget that will create access to great parks for all  
3 New Yorkers, and remedy the vast disparity between  
4 the jewels in our system, and those in desperate need  
5 of repair.

6 My neighborhood parks alliance will not  
7 erase that need. It will not solve the dollar gap  
8 that so many parks in so many parts of the city face.  
9 What it will do is be a game changer for the way that  
10 the crisis thought about, and it will help targeted  
11 parks across the city be able to improve themselves.  
12 That's why I believe that it's a critical part of  
13 moving forward this budget, and an increased Parks  
14 budget over time. So that more parks in more parts  
15 of the city are a little bit closer to those jewels  
16 of which we're all so proud. Thank you for the  
17 opportunity to testify.

18 CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: Thank you so much,  
19 Senator Squadron. You raised a number of compelling  
20 points. You referenced sources of money other than  
21 the City's Park Department budget. Could you tell us  
22 what is your total private money coming into parks  
23 now?

24 SENATOR DANIEL SQUADRON: We think that  
25 my proposal would probably be about \$15 million which

at 20% of sort of the large conservancies. There are a whole lot of conservancies that are sort of below the threshold that we include in our proposal that I think would create a total that's even greater. You know, as I say, there's not a great -- there's no single place to add all of that up. There is not a great deal of transparency. Your proposal along with Council Member Lander would be a big part of understanding where we are a whole lot better than we do today.

CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: The fact that all of us don't know that number is actually a big problem, and one that we're trying to fix for sure. If you don't know that's okay, but you also referenced the discretionary grants given out generally by council members. Do you know in total what that would amount to a year? Or maybe someone on the Council staff knows the total.

[Pause]

CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: The unprecedented act of a committee chairperson pleading his staff on the spot. Very unfair. But I'm told that it's about \$10 million a year as well.



SENATOR DANIEL SQUADRON: I do believe that there some transparency reforms that should make that number more accessible.

CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: I couldn't agree more, and might that catch you to that State Senate my friend. You spoke powerfully about the underfunding of the Parks Department. Could you talk about the ways in which that underfunding manifests itself either quantitatively or qualitatively how are we seeing that out in the parks?

SENATOR DANIEL SQUADRON: Right. Well, look, I think the previous panel did a good job of talking about some of their local parks. The neighborhood that I represent in the Lower East Side is I think often not considered to be a neighborhood in need, but it is in many ways. And we look at Sara Roosevelt Park and we had the head of its Conservancy here on the previous panel. You know, it's a place in the middle of, you know, one piece of Manhattan where you have crumbling sidewalks, peeling paint on the park benches.

You have the buildings partially accessible and partially not. You know, in Flushing Meadows Corona Park, which really is, if you think

about the parks system as a whole, one of the great parks in the city. They were told at the end of the last administration the only way they could have a well funded conservancy would be to take a stadium in their park alienating a fair amount of the parkland. We've actually sent out teams to some of the parks outside of my district; St. Mary's in the Bronx and others.

And there you see any combination of pools that have become stagnant, standing water; graffiti that is clearly not being dealt; swings -- swing sets with no swings; slides with no slides. Everything with the playgrounds that don't work, to a park that feels either forgotten or in disrepair. And it's happening in big and small parks across the city. The truth is it's more likely to be happening in neighborhoods where there's less wealth, and where the kids in the community are least likely to have other options.

[Pause]

CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: Conservancy have responded to your plan often by saying they could provide free services, TA technical support. Could

2 you talk about that as a feasible solution or an  
3 adequate if you deem it such?

4 SENATOR DANIEL SQUADRON: So let me  
5 reiterate. When you look at some of these  
6 conservancies and the work that they're doing in  
7 their parks, and the folks who are able to enjoy  
8 those parks, it's an enormously positive  
9 contribution. And I'll be very clear, this is not to  
10 say that the inadvertent consequence of their success  
11 is either purposeful or means they are anything other  
12 than a valued and positive part of the system in my  
13 view. I do believe that they bring some expertise  
14 and experience to a partnership between communities  
15 or non-profits and the Parks Department, and there's  
16 a lot to learn there. I think you see that in the  
17 large conservancies like Central Park and Prospect  
18 Park. We've seen that in my own district where  
19 members of the community have come together to create  
20 little conservancies in Roofa Roola Playground  
21 [phonetic] and we connected them to Camden Park in  
22 Brooklyn where a group of community members wanted to  
23 know their experience. The sharing of expertise and  
24 experience at the high level and at the grassroots  
25 level is critical, but it's not sufficient. The

1 truth is there's a dollars problem here. The  
2 dollars problem has two components: One is the  
3 conservancies that get the most funding, happen to be  
4 in the communities where there's the most funding to  
5 get. The second is I believe that the success of  
6 those conservancies has vastly decreased the pressure  
7 on all of us in the public sector to truly consider  
8 the crisis of Parks funding overall. If you deal  
9 with expertise, with absent dollars, I don't believe  
10 that you fundamentally change that relationship. And  
11 so, I do think that the expertise is an important  
12 part of my proposal. It's one that's been in there  
13 since I first floated it and sometimes that gets  
14 forgotten. So I'm glad the conservancies are focused  
15 on it. My concern that it not get focused on to the  
16 exclusion of dollars as well.

18 CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: Okay, I'm going to  
19 ask Council Member Cohen to chime in.

20 COUNCIL MEMBER COHEN: Thank you Senator  
21 for coming down at this time. I appreciate that. In  
22 your proposals do you have any idea of how many  
23 conservancies would be sort of be kind donors, and  
24 you mentioned a threshold. I don't remember what the  
25 threshold is.

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SENATOR DANIEL SQUADRON: Yeah, sort of the initial proposed threshold that we had was \$5 million. And there's no question that there has been some debate about who was included. New Yorkers for Parks did an analysis of this that I think was pretty strong. And they included Central Park, Prospect Park, the High Line, Randall's Island, Asphalt Green I believe. There is some question about a couple of the other conservancies, Brian Park, Union Square, are part of very large organizations, but it is something less than ten for sure.

CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: Are you aware -- Pardon me. I've got a question to ask the Commissioner, but are you aware if any of these conservancies are in a formal way are chipping in, so to speak. I've had informal conversations with people, conservancies who --

SENATOR DANIEL SQUADRON: Look they are. And again, I believe people who run conservancies care a lot not just about a single park, but care a lot about parks. And I actually believe in contrast to some of the arguments against my proposal, that the vast majority of those who contribute to conservancies will continue to be excited about

1 supporting their local park, and also other parks in  
2 need. They're already doing that in the rights-of-  
3 ways. Central Park Conservancy certainly has a  
4 couple of parks that it sort of sees as partners in  
5 Upper Manhattan. I don't know if they're in the  
6 Chairman's district or not, but it's north of Central  
7 Park. Certainly, Prospect Park Alliance has  
8 partnered. They're going to come to sort of  
9 expertise, and a number of sort of non-dollar  
10 resource sharing here. There is also believe that has  
11 been created that I think needs to be challenged that  
12 each conservancy is a universe unto itself. And that  
13 it and its park are no longer part of the network.  
14 That's a notion that I reject.

16 CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: Thank you. Thank  
17 you Council Member Cohen and State Senator Squadron.  
18 Our plan for the April meeting is to focus on the  
19 issue of equity, and come back from your busy work  
20 promoting transparency in the State Senate to speak  
21 to speak to us again.

22 SENATOR DANIEL SQUADRON: I will. I plan  
23 to say verbatim exactly what I say today at half the  
24 pace that I did today. So I appreciate the  
25 invitation. Thank you.

2 CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: And we'll hear it  
3 with fresh ears.

4 SENATOR DANIEL SQUADRON: Thank you for  
5 having me.

6 CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: Okay, great. So the  
7 next panel to join us which is Diana Lamar, Michael  
8 Rosario, -- Rosano, excuse me. John Medina, and Jeff  
9 Croft. We have -- we've opened the windows here.  
10 Let's be democratic. By a show of hands is anyone  
11 cold? Don't be shy if you're cold. Okay. Only my  
12 Legislative Director Amy Slattery, but we're going to  
13 overrule her. If you're feeling that it's cold at  
14 some point, mention it to one of the sergeants-at-  
15 arms. We'll -- we'll take care of it.

16 [Pause]

17 CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: Our convention is  
18 starting to the right, Mr. Croft. So perhaps an  
19 ironic seating for yourself, you're first up.

20 JEFF CROFT: No, I'll go second.

21 CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: Okay.

22 [Pause]

23 DIANA LAMAR: Oh, hi. Good afternoon, my  
24 name is Diana Lamar. I am a gardener, a born again  
25 environmentalist, and a student of sustainability in

1           permaculture. In 2011, I formed a volunteer based  
2           organization, Envy Harlem. Imagine that. Promoting  
3           green initiatives in the West Harlem community where  
4           I've resided for the past 16 years. I thank Chairman  
5           Mark Levine and Council Members of Parks and  
6           Recreation for the opportunity to offer testimony  
7           today. I do so on behalf of myself, the many  
8           volunteers that have worked on Envy Harlem community  
9           projects, my neighbors and the like-minded community  
10          organizations in West Harlem.

12                 I'll now address a few specific issues.  
13          Vacant land and green spaces. Green Thumb empowers  
14          citizens to know what their rights are in their  
15          efforts to create more green spaces and navigate the  
16          city's bureaucracies to determine land ownership and  
17          opportunities. News flash. There is one Green Thumb  
18          outreach coordinator per borough. Former Manhattan  
19          Borough Scott Stringer attempted to allocate funding  
20          for tree guards with capital money in 2012. But  
21          funding was disallowed by the Office of Management  
22          and Budget. If tree guards are not capitally funded  
23          or eligible, alternative funding streams to allow for  
24          their installation must be identified. Manhattan  
25          Borough President Gale Brewer's office has been kind



1           enough to provide me with the 2012 list of applicants  
2           desiring tree guards. Envy Harlem is administering a  
3           grant to install tree guards within Hamilton Heights,  
4           and I hope that there is a way to work cooperatively  
5           to fulfill all the original Greener Block Grant  
6           requests and more. Five hundred seventy-three of the  
7           754 tree guards requested fall within the general  
8           Hamilton Heights West Harlem area.

10                   Inadequate Park Staffing. Outreach  
11           coordinators at Partnership for Parks connect people  
12           to people, direct volunteers to supply sources and  
13           grant opportunities. Not only do they build parks,  
14           they create an atmosphere for friendships, build  
15           stronger and safer communities, and that contribution  
16           is priceless. We depend on them, and they are  
17           stretched thin. I am witness to the outcomes that  
18           Partnership for Parks produces. Their support of the  
19           Monte Fiore Park Neighborhood Association resulted  
20           not only in a park's transformation but community  
21           building. If I don't know my park recreation manager  
22           and they don't know me, there is a problem, and I'm  
23           not suggesting that they're not doing their job. I'm  
24           suggesting that the Parks Department is understaffed.  
25           If they had smaller districts to oversee, there would

be more supervision, and greater interaction within the communities they serve. In addition, POP is the largest welfare to work program. It is a highly valued program. However, lack of training and supervision is a disservice to those enrolled in the program, and results in inconsistent park maintenance increasing burdens on permanent park staff and volunteers. Quickly.

West Harlem. Whether you are homeless, poor, working class, middle-class, disabled or privileged, our parks, park amenities, and the quality of those amenities should be available to everyone in our communities. But a small percentage of the City Budget is spent on parks. There are fewer health and fitness opportunities available in my neighborhood parks. Our residents suffer high asthma rates. We endure toxic air quality indoors and out, excessive residential burning of No. 6 oil, bus depots, highway exhaust, and the toxic emissions from the North River Waste Treatment Plant ingeniously disguised as a park.

For this reason, I urge you to allocate funding for the development of our waterfront, Dog Runs, and to ensure that the 135th Street Marine

Transfer Station ownership is transferred to the Parks Department for suitable future development. In addition Parks is an ideal partner to assist in local composting projects. And I hope that this type of initiative will garner your support.

In closing, programming offered through Partnership for Parks, Green Thumb, and City Parks Foundation allows for the potential for a more even playing field. So that the Parks Department and these organizations can do what they already do a more effective job at what they already do so well, and are deeply passionate about. Please fund these programs --

CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: [interposing] Okay.

DIANA LAMAR: --and increase our parks' budgets. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: Thank you, Ms. Lamar, and thanks for your work beautifying the Seventh Council District. Next up.

MIKE ROSANO: Good afternoon, Chairman Levine and members of the Committee. My name is Mike Rosano. I'm a longstanding member of the American Society of Landscape Architects. I work for NYC Parks in the Capital Division, and I am currently

President for the Gardeners and Landscape Association of New York. On behalf of the Association, I want to thank the Committee for the opportunity to speak this afternoon.

I've come here to speak here to speak today about the one million trees NYC Program, and the Association's important role in this vital, remarkable, and successful initiative. Before I get to that, there are several issues and allegations concerning members of the Association that were made this committee's February 25th Oversight Hearing, and then echoed in the March 9th New York Post, which singles one of members. We cannot allow this unfortunate and misleading report copy dated by Mr. Wasaki [phonetic] then further exaggerated to the report of the New York Post to go unchallenged. I will be blunt. Through a series of half truths, clever sentence structure, and outright lies the attorney represented himself as a speaker on behalf of workers drag this community to a representation dispute between two rivals. With the existing contract between our members and Local 175, which represents our workers, about to expire, there is a window for the members of Local 175 to choose another

1 unit. Local 1010 has been has already begun  
2 approaching our employees and causing them to choose  
3 Local 1010. The attorney repeated here accused our  
4 members of cheating workers out of fair wages,  
5 deliberately vandalizing trees, double billing and  
6 other illegal acts in fact represents -- Excuse me.  
7 Billing and other illegal acts, in fact represents  
8 Local 1010. So, while there is a lot more to the  
9 story, I promised not to take too much of your time  
10 today. The members of the Association will be more  
11 than happy to meet with the members of this Committee  
12 to discuss the issues in detail, and answer any  
13 questions.  
14

15 Let's talk about the One Million Trees,  
16 NYC Program. It is perhaps the most successful  
17 initiative of the previous administration. Launched  
18 in 2007 and scheduled to be completed in 2017. the  
19 program is nearly two years ahead of schedule. The  
20 800,000th tree was planted last November, and we're  
21 proud to say that nearly 90% of those trees were  
22 planted by Union workers employed the association.  
23 Workers were paid the prevailing wage as well as  
24 health, pension and other benefits as outline in the  
25 Comptrollers' Prevailing Wage Book.

This work was performed in original detail of protocol status for the NYC Parks and Recreation. Before any sidewalk tree is planted, the site is visited, a plan is created and approved by NYCDPR Forester. When the tree is planted, each crew is accompanied by a city inspector prior to the work being approved. If something happens to that tree within two years, sometimes it cannot withstand the transplanting shock, the contractor is obligated to replace the tree. And for the record, if a tree is vandalized, the contractor is responsible to replace the tree at no cost to the City.

Let me provide you with some numbers. According to the records dating back to 2004, one of members has planted more than 13,000 trees. Yet, he was required to replace 7.5% of these trees due to mortality. Overall, a total 17 trees, less than one percent had been vandalized. In fact, the member mentioned in the New York Post article has the best of these percentages. Similarly, according to the 2004 Parks Department Audit or the recording of the 18,000 trees planted that year, less than one percent was vandalized. The record is clear, one million trees only sees successful. We can only hope that

2 winter will finally end, and we've already lost the  
3 of the planting season. And once we begin planting  
4 again next month, let's stop in 2015. Let's continue  
5 to improve our air quality, beautify our streets and  
6 sidewalks, long after that one little tree has been  
7 planted. Thank you for your time.

8 CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: Thank you, Mr.  
9 Rosano. I have some information that my Financial  
10 Staff has supplied on total discretionary council  
11 money to parks. It turns out in 2013, it totaled  
12 \$105 million and in 2014 it totaled \$70,000.

13 CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: Okay, thank you sir.

14 COUNCIL MEMBER: [off mic]

15 CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: Year together, five  
16 years. Okay, Mr. Croft.

17 JEFFREY CROFT: Good afternoon. My name  
18 is Jeffrey Croft. I'm the President and founder of  
19 New York City Park Advocates. Quote, "This budget  
20 isn't a true budget. It is a sham. It does not  
21 reflect the demands of the department." That was  
22 Parks Department Commissioner Robert Moses testifying  
23 before the City Budget Director in 1935 after being  
24 instructed by Mayor La Guardia to submit a less than  
25 appropriate budget.

I'm here today to give testimony on the FY15 Budget for the Parks Department, specifically the Expense Budget. Each year, our elected officials allocate a fraction of the necessary funds needed to properly maintain, program, and secure our public parks. And this year, at least so far, unfortunately appears to be no different. Mayor de Blasio's \$301 million proposed budget for parks and tax levy funds represents one-half of -- one-third of what the agency needs to properly maintain, operate, secure, program our 28,000 acres of public parks. One-third.

It also represents one-half of one percent in total city tax levy expenditures for 14% of the city's land, 14%. This is unacceptable. The Parks Department is in dire need of thousands of additional workers, and hundreds of millions of dollars of expense funding. Funding and personnel many say the agency will never receive. This is shameful. The City routinely allocates one-third of what the Parks Department actually needs. It is imperative the city allocate a budget that properly reflects the true needs of the Parks Department.



Unfortunately, this one does not come remotely close as usual. For more than four decades the city, state, and federal governments have allocated a fraction of the funds. The city's parks, once the most celebrated and unprecedented public works in the nation have become dumping grounds, many of them. Their maintenance and safety have plummeted under the weight of a crippling budget cuts. For decades, the public has been told the expense funding it needed to hire the skilled laborers, the gardeners, climbers and cleaners, foresters, park enforcement, qualified managers among other positions that are so desperately needed are not available for our public parks.

This proposed budget is an unfortunate and consummate reminder of how in good economic times and bad public funding for parks is simply not a priority. Our elected officials refuse to allocate adequate funding. The political will necessary to provide funding for safe and well maintained parks, that every neighborhood deserves simply does not exist. And although this is a citywide problem that affects virtually every segment of the population, it

is no secret that a disproportionate amount of the more severe issues exist in poor neighborhoods.

These are underserved communities namely, the working class, the poor, and the disenfranchised, and in areas populated by people predominantly of color. This is, of course, the great irony considering these are the communities that rely on these public services the most. This pattern of neglect must be reversed. The cities increasingly rely on so-called public-private partnerships to plug the enormous fund gaps due to the elected official's refusal to properly fund the agency.

This has resulted in a vastly inequitable distribution of services, and it has quickly become quote "A tale of two cities." Experience with public-private partnerships over the past 20 years has proven that private subsidies to individual parks has created an enormous gap between the haves and the have-nots, ignoring the real problem that our parks are not funded as an essential city service. Many officials have attempted to pass the responsibility off to private groups or to concessions.

The City continues to try to advocate its responsibility by entering into these agreements,

1 which the elected officials are not only allowing,  
2 but active encouraging. Besides the enormous  
3 disparity these public-private partnerships create,  
4 they also hand over enormous power and decision and  
5 policy to these groups with little transparency and  
6 accountability on what is supposed to be public land.  
7 In some cases these deals such like the one currently  
8 being established in Flushing Meadows and Corona Park  
9 and supported by a Parks Department partner group,  
10 New Yorkers Parks, only weaken communities and make  
11 it easier for the next commercial encroachment.  
12

13 We strongly -- we are strongly against  
14 this proposal. It's is the government's  
15 responsibility to fund its parks, not private  
16 businesses. I'm closing up. Please let me make this  
17 very clear. The solution to the lack of park funding  
18 and inequality issue is quite simple. If the  
19 Administration is interested in ensuring that all  
20 communities have access to safe, well maintained  
21 parks, then it needs to take responsibility and  
22 allocate the proper resources and make sure they are  
23 distributed based on need and not on politics or  
24 private ventures.  
25

CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: Thank you. We have so many people waiting, Mr. Croft. That's all.

JEFFREY CROFT: That's great.

CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: Okay.

JEFFREY CROFT: That's fantastic.

CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: I appreciate testimony, and we'll submit the entire document I hope for the record.

[Pause]

CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: I'd like to ask. I believe I have a name, right. Is it Mack Levine? No relation?

[Pause]

CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: Okay. Hello, Levine. Yes, if you can hit your button. There's a red button. There you go.

MAC LEVINE: Good afternoon. Chair Levine and Member of City Council's Committee on Parks and Recreation. My name is Mac Levine and I'm no known relation to the Chair. I'm the Founding Executive Director of Concrete Safaris of East Harlem a base non-profit that empowers children to become leaders to transform their health and their environment. Concrete Safari is City Surfers a bold

group of 7 to 12-year-old students enrolled in our after school and summer program are developing critical thinking skills and problem solving, independence and self-esteem as well as building strength and endurance in New York City parks like Jefferson Park, East River Esplanade, Randall's Island, and Central, to name a few.

In the 2012-13 school year, City Surfers high-attenders achieved 3,890 hours of total physical activity burning 1,890,021 calories in New York City parks. From October to December of 2013-14 school year, in just three months, high-attenders have accumulated a total of 2,335 hours of total physical activity burning 248,279 calories also in New York City Parks. With our fleet of 60 children's bikes these numbers include an accumulation of 1,067 hours of cycling, a total of 4,101 miles in the 2012-13 school year, and an accumulation of 439 hours of cycling, a total of 740 miles between October and December of 2013 at the start of this school year, all in New York City parks.

Don't tell the City Surfers, but kids in their neighborhood of East Harlem have the highest rates of obesity and diabetes. In addition to

1                   cycling, City Surfers have also hiked, fished,  
2                   climbed, studied environmental health and sciences,  
3                   and played team building games all in New York City  
4                   parks. We do no marketing for our after school  
5                   program, and have a waiting list for kids to play and  
6                   learn outside five days a week year round. City  
7                   Surfers are also designing obstacles in a carnival  
8                   for a 5K family race and children's race called  
9                   Jungle Gym 2014 to be held this fall.

11                   Partnership for Parks was instrumental in  
12                   the development of this race, which began as an  
13                   annual event last year in Jefferson Park. Helping to  
14                   set up meetings with key New York City staff, and  
15                   advising on step-by-step instructions creating a  
16                   successful event. In turn, New York City staff have  
17                   been wonderful in helping to explain requirements,  
18                   and working through the details with Concrete  
19                   Safari's team to create and replicate this event.  
20                   From the marketing managers to park managers to the  
21                   maintenance crews to the administrators at every  
22                   level, New York City Parks have been top notch and we  
23                   want to thank them.

24                   One area where more resources are needed  
25                   in New York City Parks is in the Aquatics Department.

2 The Department of Health's rules were enforced last  
3 year requiring camps and summer programs to hire  
4 their own life guards and Aquatics directors in order  
5 for children for children to swim. As you may know,  
6 56% of Latino children and 58% of African-American  
7 children in the United States do not know how to swim  
8 in urban areas.

9 CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: Could you wrap up  
10 for us.

11 MAC LEVINE: Okay, so basically what I'm  
12 asking for is more attention to a community aquatics  
13 directors and pool life guards.

14 CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: And will your young  
15 associates be testifying or would like to introduce  
16 them. We'll have him speak for a moment.

17 MAC LEVINE: He can introduce himself.

18 ALI SANCHEZ: My name is Ali Sanchez.  
19 I'm in the fifth grade in school PS102, and I'm with  
20 Ms. Mac, the leader of Concrete Safaris. And I would  
21 like to say four things about parks. The reason why  
22 I like parks are because everyone enjoys them and  
23 everyone has fun in side of them. I always see  
24 smiles from the community across the parks. Parks  
25 are like homes for animals. People bike, fish, and

enjoy parks across the community. Some things I do in parks are bike. I bike in parks. I play in parks, and I do other cool stuff inside parks. Thank you.

[applause]

CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: That may have been the best testimony we've heard all day. And does the young lady have words as well? No.

MAC LEVINE: I don't think she does.

CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: Okay. Thank you all you very much.

MAC LEVINE: He sounds like he's done.

CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: Well, he did wonderfully. Thank you all for being here. Our Panel. Christina Taylor, Mista Abdu. I think I got that right. Michael Palma and Camilla Hanks.

[Pause]

CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: Okay, we'll start on the right end of the table first.

MISTA BOBDIN: Good afternoon. First I'd like to thank the Committee of the Parks. My name is Mista Bobdin [phonetic]. I'm a CEO of a non-profit organization. Actually, I'm the only the only president and this is the first time I'm doing the first testimony so if I'm nervous please forgive me.



1 I'm here to support Mr. Richard's [phonetic] I'm here  
2 to report on Mr. Richard's comment. The reason we  
3 have a park in Eastern New York. Actually, I gave  
4 testimony and on the second page there was a picture  
5 also.  
6

7 There's a small park called City Line  
8 Eberling Park, and it's been for decades nobody  
9 touched it. And our non-profit organization for  
10 three years has been working with the Parks  
11 Department, and they have been hand-to-hand. And the  
12 most worst thing that we have a monument, which is  
13 rest place of the heroes who died in World Ward II.  
14 And there's a monument, and this moment has been  
15 stolen by someone maybe ten years ago, and it has  
16 been replaced. And we've been trying for the last  
17 ten years calling Parks Department, the community  
18 boards just to respect those heroes who lost their  
19 lives to save the United Sates.

20 And also there's a park and I have a  
21 park. I have a picture. There's no --there's  
22 graffiti, there's no lock on the gate, there's a  
23 monument, they've got weed all over the side. And  
24 this is a very -- this is Eastern New York and this  
25 is a very highly crime zone. People come here and

2 they do drugs and everyday. One day we call the cops  
3 to come in so we can clean up. They supported us.  
4 We went inside. We cleaned it and we took all the  
5 children out and did cleaning, and also we took some  
6 pictures of benches. That's the only park within  
7 maybe -- within one square mile, and you can look at  
8 the chairs have been broken. They're not fixed. So  
9 I came here to support New York City Parks  
10 Department for the monuments for budgeting and thank  
11 you very much, and I apologize. I'm kind of nervous  
12 today.

13 CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: So we're saying [IN  
14 FOREIGN LANGUAGE] Okay, thank you. Hi.

15 KAMILLAH HANKS: Hi. Good afternoon.  
16 Thank you so much. My name is Kamillah Hanks. I'm  
17 the President and CEO of the Historic Tappen Park  
18 Community Partnership in Staten Island. I would like  
19 to thank the Committee on Parks and Recreation for  
20 giving me this opportunity to testify on behalf of  
21 the Historic Tappen Park Community Partnership in  
22 Stapleton, Staten Island. In 2010, the City Parks  
23 Foundation encouraged a small group of residents,  
24 business owners and artists to start a Friends of  
25 Group to program events at Tappen Park. The purpose

was to provide the group with small grants and technical assistance with the goal that the group would eventually become a self-sustaining entity that would take on the lead of the programming events and activities in Tappen Park.

I'm here today to speak about the importance and the success of Partnerships for Parks and the City Parks Foundation's Catalyst Park Programs that facilitate and organize residents, businesses and community groups in the neighborhoods that have under-served community parks. Further, I would like to impress upon this committee how the essential resources and technical support helped our fledgling group transform what was commonly known as Stapleton's Needle Park, which is now proudly regarded as Historic Tappen Park.

Stapleton is a low income neighborhood and the home of the largest housing project. Our neighborhood was widely thought of as unsafe and unclean. The Partnership for Parks gave us an opportunity to turn our neighborhood around by turning our local park around. Citywide Programs such as It's My Park Day encouraged the Stapleton Community to participate in the beautification and

2 planting of its local park. We are now the Historic  
3 Tappen Park Community Partnership thanks to a grant  
4 by the City Parks Foundation to form an official  
5 501c3 non-profit organization. With their assistance  
6 and support, we changed the narrative and the future  
7 direction of our neighborhood with plants, shoves,  
8 rakes, and dirt.

9 In conclusion, I still want to talk about  
10 how important the support of these organizations and  
11 foundations are to our small little community group.  
12 Our story can be duplicated in neighborhood parks  
13 throughout the City of New York. To date, our  
14 organization continues to bring thousands of visitors  
15 to the park during its event season, making Tappen  
16 Park the centerpiece of economic revitalization in  
17 the Stapleton Town Center. The health and wellbeing  
18 of a local park reflects the health and wellbeing of  
19 the neighborhood in which it resides. Let's continue  
20 to make that a success. Thank you

21 CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: Thank you very much.  
22 Mr. Palma.

23 MICHAEL PALMA: Good afternoon everybody.  
24 My name is Michael Palma, and along with other  
25 volunteers we run the Monte Fiore Neighborhood

Association in the heart of Hamilton Heights. Monte Fiore Park itself is located on 137th Street and Broadway. Since 1994, when Adela Palma founded the Monte Fiore Park Neighborhood Association, it has been one of many grassroots organizations promoting parks as a way to increase the quality of life in our Hamilton Heights neighborhood. A community, which has keenly felt the depredation of poor city policies of the 1960s; the government's continued divestment in the 1970s; and the ravages of the drug epidemic in the 1980s.

Monte Fiore Park and indeed Hamilton Heights has come a long way since then. Indeed, the heart of the sweeping urban renaissance occurring in our city right now, but slow to reach our neck of the woods in Hamilton Heights is spurred by newly revitalized parks. One only has to look at the High Line in the Lower West Side as perhaps the most prominent and shining example of how parks can change a neighborhood. But there are many other examples. Going on 20 years the Monte Fiore Park Neighborhood Association has worked cooperatively with city agencies to care for and maintain, and physically improve Monte Fiore Park.

In order to revitalize and bring back a sense of community to Hamilton Heights. Many of our park programs and activities would not have been possible without support of the Parks Department and the direct assistance of its community outreach Partnership for Parks. Partnership for Parks provides workshops for volunteer park leaders to be better community organizers, programmers, and advocates. Their technical assistance has led to the creation of our first website [montefiorepark.org](http://montefiorepark.org), and our program brochure, which builds our capacity to increase community involvement.

But it also facilitates security permits, providing gardening tools, supplies, and plants, and help us learn how to navigate intricate city agencies; introduce us to key players; and often a joyful and empowering citywide opportunity to engage our neighbors like It's My Park Day. As Partnership for Parks provides us with the technical assistance, for a broader outlook and community vision, our collaborative efforts with the Parks Department focus on more immediate and physical park concerns.

In all our park activities with Parks and Recreation managers, and the Parks maintenance and

1                   operations teams have been key partners in our  
2                   success to bring family programming and multi-  
3                   generational community events to Monte Fiore Park.  
4                   Because of this, it has been painful to observe how  
5                   thinly park staff members are spread over their  
6                   districts. And how the number of parks they are  
7                   responsible for almost exceed their ability to give  
8                   each park their proper attention.

10                   This I have been told is largely due to  
11                   budget cuts and staff cuts over the last few years.  
12                   I beseech you please to reverse this short-sighted  
13                   and hurtful budget cut trend. To sum up, as active  
14                   volunteers, and on behalf of all residents of  
15                   Hamilton Heights and the great City of New York, we  
16                   urge you to create a capital and increased expense  
17                   budgets to ensure that the Department of Parks and  
18                   Recreation can continue to improve our parks. And  
19                   maintain a consistent skilled and ample maintenance  
20                   operation team so that every park in New York City  
21                   neighborhood --

22                   CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: [interposing] Right.

23                   MICHAEL PALMA: --can be a livable and  
24                   glorious as each should be. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: Thank you, Mike, and thank you for all the work that volunteer to do at Monte Fiore Park, a park that I know and love in the heart of my district.

CHRISTIAN TAYLOR: Good afternoon. Thank you so much for letting me speak today and a special thanks to our Council, Andy Cohen, for all of his support. My name is Christina Taylor, and I am the Executive Director of Friends of Van Cortlandt Park. The friends is an independent community based organization, which actively promotes the conservation and improvement of Van Cortlandt Park through environmental education, and restoration and enhancement of the park, its forests and trails. Last year we served over 5,000 people through our environmental education and stewardship programs. Over the years, we have worked closely with the Parks Department, Partnership with Parks, the Van Cortlandt Park Conservancy, and many other groups to help conserve and improve Van Cortlandt Park.

The Friends was founded in 1992 by a Bronx a resident in response to a New York Times article describing the impact of declining budgets for parks like Van Cortlandt that lacked wealthy



1 benefactors. It is unfortunate that over 20 years  
2 later the Parks Department is still not adequately  
3 funded. With the largest park in the city Pulham Bay  
4 and the third largest park, Van Cortlandt, the Bronx  
5 has more parkland than any other borough. But we  
6 often wonder if we are getting our fair share of the  
7 budget to maintain these parks and keep them at the  
8 level Bronxites deserve. The Friends of Van  
9 Cortlandt Park would happily join you to urge the  
10 mayor to increase funding for New York City parks,  
11 especially those in the Bronx.

12  
13 For the upcoming fiscal year we have a  
14 few specific things we would like to request funding  
15 for. First of all, we want funding for a pedestrian  
16 bridge over the major deacon to connect Van  
17 Cortlandt's eastern and western path. In 1999, the  
18 City Council determined that the New York City  
19 Department of Environmental Protection should build a  
20 pedestrian bridge if it was feasible as part of the  
21 original agreement for building a filtration plant in  
22 our park. A study found it is feasible, but the DEP  
23 still has refused to pay for it. This broken promise  
24 to the community needs to be fixed.

The Friends are asking for funding to be allocated for the restoration the hiking trails in Van Cortlandt Park. We have a trails plan that if implemented would all for will allow the 20 plus miles of hiking trail in the park to be a hiking best nation in New York City. People don't need to get in their cars and drive out upstate to go hiking for the day. You can hop on the one or the four train, take it to the last stop and go hiking.

Finally, maintenance funding. We strongly believe the New York City Parks is not funded at the level needed for the agency to properly maintain and care for all of its parks. Each year we see funding allocated for capital projects, which vastly improve our parks through building of new playgrounds; repairing the sporting fields; and installing bathrooms, et cetera.

But we do not see an increase in maintenance to keep these facilities in good shape. Instead, after a few years they fall into disrepair and need new capital funding to restore them. This can be avoided with ongoing maintenance. The Friends of Van Cortlandt Park fully support the New York City Department of Parks and Recreation in its efforts to

2 maintain and improve all parks in New York City. It  
3 is important to the future of the City that we fund  
4 our parks. Thank you.

5 CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: Thank you so much.  
6 Okay, thank you panel. Our next panel will be Greg  
7 Mays, Scott Kierney [phonetic], Terry Bubbins  
8 [phonetic]. Take it away, sir.

9 GREG MAYS: Okay. Good afternoon. Good  
10 day, I'm Greg Mays, Founder and Executive Director of  
11 A Better Jamaica. We're a non-profit community  
12 service organization engaged in activities design to  
13 strengthen Southeast Queens neighborhood that's known  
14 collectively as Jamaica. In the summer 2006, I went  
15 Over to Forest Park with a couple of nephews and next  
16 door neighbor's kids and sort of Wizard of Oz. I had  
17 a fantastic time. I just left there said, Why do I  
18 have to leave my neighborhood for this kind of  
19 community building experience? Lo and behold I did  
20 not.

21 It was the reason why I started my  
22 organization, A Better Jamaica. With \$5,000 from  
23 Councilman LeRoy Comrie [phonetic] at the time we  
24 exhibited two films at St. Alban's Park, Happy Feet  
25 and Pride. This past summer we exhibited 21 films

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spread across five parks in Jamaica, Queens with equipment that we own and with a crew of semi-youth employment workers. Let's see. Basically, we view what we do as providing a free means to just sort of renew family and/or community ties. And just bring folks together, and watch a good movie.

We obviously couldn't do what we need to do without clean and safe parks. Until recently because we're a non-profit, we were not charged for using the parks. But several years ago due to budget cuts, we were asked to start paying overtime for park folks that we kept in the park until the movie's end. That overtime is to the tune of about \$3,000. And for an organization with a budget of less than \$60,000 collectively, that \$3,000 kind of put a hurting on us, if you will.

Despite these additional costs to them here, to just sort of sing the praises of the Parks and Recreation Department, my involvement with Parks just sort of started with my doing movies in the parks. I'm currently the Chair of Community Board 12, the Parks Committee. And essentially we do anything to just sort of advocate for the appropriate

amount, nature, and quality of parks in Community Board 12, if you will.

Let's see. I relish my role as Chair of the Parks Committee Board 12. Why? Because I know for some folks the parks in New York City are the equivalent of the Hamptons, a place to retreat, especially during the hot house summers. In fact, we have everything that the Hamptons has except for the fabulous homes. But we have beaches. We have film festivals. We have fancy restaurants like the Shake Shack, and our beautiful green spaces for folks to enjoy movies in the parks.

So here again, I'd just sort of encourage you guys to just sort of increase the budget so that small organizations like my own do not have to pay overtime to parks for staff, keeping staff into the parks at the end of the evening. I'm also just sort of as Chair of Board 12 we're advocating for a skate park in Southeast Queens, and we have a rally coming up this coming Saturday so that young people in particular can just sort of demonstrate their interest in the skate park. That's it. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: Thank you, Mr. Mays.  
All right.

SCOTT KIERNEY: Hello, my name is Scott Kierney [phonetic]. I've been working for this town for 30 years building the parks, and I certainly agree with everybody about funding and needing more of it. But I'm here to talk about something else. The Comptroller in 2012 came up with an audit to find ways to save money rather than asking for more money. And all we need to do is look in our phones and type in "Public Design Commission to Raise Jobs" and several articles will come up.

This report will come up. New York -- Wall Street Journal articles, articles from local newspapers throughout the five boroughs telling stories about playgrounds that are said to be dangerous by the Parks Department but being held up in PDC. PDC should try to incorporate some of the recommendations that the Comptroller made. The comptroller is very fair, though. He said asking to put a burden on a project to cost more, its not within their charter of responsibilities.

So if they're asking for a park to be delayed or to have a budget, that's greater than it has, that's not really their business. What the Comptroller asks is that cost benefit analysis be

done to hand over to the agency that they're delaying the job. We use the 5% factor for every year a job is delayed for inflation. If you have a \$500 million job, a one-year delay is \$250,000. That's it. I hope that the new administration will be more friendly. The Bloomberg administration as you'll see in the Wall Street Journal essentially didn't care if this comptroller's audit showed that there needed to be the forms. And I hope this audit can be revisited.

CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: Thank you, Mr. Kierny, and I look forward to reviewing the audit myself.

SCOTT KIERNEY: It is good.

HARRY BUBBINS: Greetings. Thanks a lot. My name is Harry Bubbins. I'm the Executive Director of Friends of Brook Park in the South Bronx, one of the worst neighborhoods, and it's great to see the entire City Council here today. I'll just hit some bullet points. You've heard a lot of statistics. We support the Parks Department, the Partnership for Parks, City Parks Foundation. It's clear that more money is needed for the Parks Department. And where would that money come from?

For example, corporate subsidies left over from the Bloomberg Administration. Scott Stringer has recently rescinded three separate contracts, and I would draw your attention to the almost \$80 million in city funding that was proposed to Fresh Direct to take over our waterfront in the South Bronx. And there's hundreds of millions of dollars available. Instead of corporate subsidies, like to a billionaire soccer stadium in the Bronx that could go to the general parks populace.

Mr. Squadron happened to mention St. Mary's Park in our neighborhood. You'll have baseball benches that haven't been there since I played PSA high school baseball there. The lights were recently cut down. The lamp posts were so decayed they were cut down in St. Mary's Park. And the tennis courts in St. Mary's Park are not there. All of this is in the South Bronx. I bike around the city. I go to Upper West Side, Upper East Side, Lower East Side.

Everywhere the tennis courts are open. In St. Mary's Park in the South Bronx, they're closed, locked, and there's not even a net there. Number two, that hasn't been discussed. There's a



lot of parks in our neighborhood especially Sawmill Playground where the park is left open, and the police stalk our young people of color and arrest them. We also through our Brook Park project or Alternatives-to-Incarceration Program.

So we're working with young people that have encountered the criminal justice system to get them on track. And they have to stay away from police encounters. And we know all about stop and frisk already. But they're arresting they're arresting young people in the parks for being there after dark, but the park is left open. So that's quite unfair, and that's been at the Sawmill River Park, and I'm sure it's going on throughout the city.

Number three, we have to stop alienating parkland, period. Union Square Park with the restaurant, Flushing Meadows with this nonsense. It's just stop the alienation period. And if these people want to d these private businesses, go buy the land somewhere. Related to that is in the post card you have. We need a law to protect Community Gardens. Unfortunately, the previous speaker thwarted that effort. And just in this last month alone or in the last couple of months, Coney Island,

Community Gardens, Coney Island, and the Children's Magical Playground on the Lower East side over here have been under threat, demolished. With a law to recognize the value of Community Gardens instead of these not protective law -- rules that were promulgated during the previous speaker, we can preserve those gardens. And we have a draft law, we have a legal memorandum. Just define it. We'll be glad to work with this community to pass that.

And then finally, the South Bronx shoreline in general. There's about seven miles of waterfront land that is totally inaccessible to the community. That's where Fresh Direct was proposed with \$130 million of our tax money. So I encourage through the Partnership for Parks Catalyst Program that you heard about today to put money in the budget specifically for a waterfront coordinator to organize the South Bronx waterfront. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: Thank you, Harry.

NANCY PEREZ: Hello. My name is Nancy Perez. I'm from Astoria, Queens, and I represent 27th Street Community Builders. Partnership for Parks has enabled 27th Street Community Builders to Flourish as we began working together to form a group

of neighbors, who wanted to get together and work together to make our streets more green, and to get to know each other. Living in New York City is a challenge and neighbors often find themselves isolated in the City of money.

It was one of the focused of that group to break away from that, and to get to know each other and build relationships among our neighbors. We began with a social gathering in order to get to know each other, as well as setting up workshops that we participate in during the year. In April, 2012, we drafted and distributed flyers to announce our 27th Street spring season gathering. We noted that our harvest season gathering the prior October had brought out many neighbors to our initial information session on the needs of trees on our streets, which had been taken down.

I have photos from the original owner from the 1940s when the houses were built. There were trees across the street from my house, and they were all taken down either mud truck them down in a storm. They were never replaced. So we started just educating our neighbors and letting them know. I live very close to Kindison [phonetic] Plant in

Astoria, and the amount of dust that I receive in my home was incredible. I grew up only two hours away, and just two hours closer to Con Ed it's incredible the amount of dust.

So just by learning what we could do to protect ourselves in own homes, we started letting our neighbors know, and they got involved. And we started wanting to plant more trees in the area. With that, we received some funding. We were able to apply for a Capacity Fund Grant, and that helped us plan to build these tree guards on our street around each tree. That's helped out. We also had the first tree care workshop on our block. We assembled the tree guards. And in preparation of that day, many of the neighbors got together at my home to just build and cut up the materials and package them together in shopping bags.

And we just distributed them to the neighbors on the block. And it was great because people started getting to know each other during that. All this work has helped give shape and vision to the future of our 27th Street Community Builders. The summer gave way to many passersby who commented on the feel and the look of the work we had done, and

1           it was a well laid out plan. Neighbors enjoy the  
2           positive reaction of those strolling on the street  
3           and the burgeoning fall planting, which we did in the  
4           last two weeks of November. And they're just  
5           starting to bloom now, which is very nice.

6                     It is with the supporting guidance of  
7           Partnership for Parks that we have been able to  
8           develop the vision for our street and have made it  
9           possible. They have been able to connect us with  
10          people and resources and city agencies that have  
11          helped us become more self-sufficient in continuing  
12          our plans for a better healthier street and  
13          community. One more line. For example, I will soon  
14          be able to begin a fellowship with Partnership for  
15          Parks, and it's my intention to learn and to start up  
16          a block association with their help.

17                    CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: Thank you, Ms. Perez  
18          and to the whole panel. Our final panel is going to  
19          be supersized. We're going to have five you. We  
20          have an extra chair I believe the sergeant of arms  
21          will bring over. I'd like to call up Paul Markowitz,  
22          Sarah Foster, Elizabeth Detano [phonetic], Kathy  
23          Romanelli, and Anna Marie Moore. Thank you all for  
24          waiting for what must have been hours, and I want you  
25

1 to know that your patience and perseverance is not  
2 lost on myself or the staff here. I'm glad you stuck  
3 around, and I promise every word you utter will be in  
4 the record and on the video, and in the transcript.  
5 Well, I've given you my full attention, and this will  
6 be on the Internet for time immemorial. So, we'll  
7 continue to start on the right, sir. Go ahead.

9 PAUL MANKOWITZ: Good afternoon. My name  
10 is Dr. Paul Mankowiz. I've been working on New York  
11 City infrastructure and green infrastructure for 30  
12 years. I built the first green roof in the Bronx,  
13 and the first 15 Mayor's plans for water capture  
14 systems, and the first Green Street park in the Parks  
15 Department. I'm going to say something very simple.  
16 Right now because parks cover about two-fifths of the  
17 city, an inch of rainfall that falls on those parks  
18 does not go into the combined sewer.

19 That literally defers about two billion  
20 gallons from going into the combined sewer treatment  
21 and having to be treated. That would cost us about  
22 \$8 million. That same water where we refeed it  
23 through natural systems, park space in central parks  
24 and the small parks all over the city, is where  
25 something like 130 times that, that would save a

1 billion dollars in air conditioning value. So for  
2 every park that's being advocated, really, all we  
3 need to do is cut open the water capture, and we have  
4 a mechanism by which to actually add that.

5 To recognize the value added of the park  
6 in the budget just by having parks collaborate with  
7 the exquisite combined Green Infrastructure Program  
8 with, DEP, DOT and the rest. The street sides are  
9 immensely valuable. I'm certain of this. The value  
10 here added was in real estate value. We can  
11 literally drop the body temperature of the City, the  
12 peak load requirement. And by doing parkland, but  
13 also bringing storm water into those. And I'll stop  
14 here.

15 CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: Thank you, Mr.

16 Mankowitz.

17 SARAH FISHER: Hi, I'm void today because  
18 I don't have prepared remarks. My last name is  
19 actually Fisher, not Foster, and it's Sarah. I'm a  
20 resident of Inwood, and I just wanted to briefly  
21 bring something to the Committee's attention. And I  
22 will talk about it more at the next hearing, which is  
23 with respect to equity is to encourage the Parks  
24 Department to consider equity when it comes to  
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different populations. And here, I'm talking about the disabled population.

The Parks Department puts a lot of attention into what they call Universal Access that tends to apply basically to those with physical, and not mental disabilities. And also they don't -- when they set fees for certain areas like the tennis courts and the recreation centers that have fees attached to them, they give no consideration to special fees for the disabled population. In other words, you can ride -- both seniors and the disabled pay the same half price fare to ride a bus.

But in terms of using our park facilities, if you're disabled, you pay the retail price. So for a tennis court permit, you are elderly, you pay for permit \$20 a year. If you're a junior, you pay \$10, and if you're an adult, whether you're disabled or not, you're paying \$200 for a tennis permit. In the recreation, which the Commissioner, which the Assistant Commissioner said were underutilized, we're trying to identify voids. Again with those, the adults between adult age 18 to 62 everyone is paying the \$100 or \$150 fee regardless of disability.



1                   If we want to look at precedent not in  
2 New York from the Department of Transportation, we  
3 can look at the Department of the Interior. They  
4 also consider the needs of the disabled. The  
5 instituted passes for government land, which again  
6 with them, most public lands remain free. But for  
7 certain locations they did institute entrance or  
8 amenity fees. And there are four different passes in  
9 the interagency program. The most common is their  
10 interagency pass, which is \$80.

11                   And it's unlimited coverage of entrance  
12 into the parks. Senior citizens 62 or older can  
13 purchase a \$10 lifetime pass, and citizens with  
14 permanent disabilities can receive a free lifetime  
15 access pass. So again, I think that New York City  
16 Parks should follow the spirit of that in setting  
17 fees. They also have something, which I think would  
18 be interesting for the parks to consider. Which is a  
19 volunteer pass for volunteers who accumulate more  
20 than 500 hours can get a pass into our national  
21 parks.

22                   And if we're looking at ways to maintain  
23 and service the parks, this would be a good way to  
24 encourage volunteers. Anyway, with respect to the  
25

population I'm most interested in, which is the mentally ill, this is a population that has a life expectancy 25% less than the general population. I think that if the City encouraged the mentally disabled through making fees that were equitable to use the parks, we could see better life expectancy. So thanks for your time.

CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: Thank you very much.

ELIABETH DETANO: Hello, my name is Elizabeth Detano [phonetic], and I'm on the steering committee of Friends of Gulick Park. Luther Gulick Playground is located on the south side of Delancey between Gulick and Columbia Streets on the Lower East side. The neighborhood demographic north of the park is predominantly low income. It was built in the 1930s, and offered recreational space and programs for a diverse and vibrant community. Over the years, it was neglected and fell into misuse.

The final blow came in the last 1990s when an infestation of the longhorn beetle took hold and 90% of the trees had to be destroyed, and benches and tables were removed. It became a wasteland of cobblestones and weeds and a neighborhood desperately lacking green space. In the spring of 2009, a

lifelong Lower East Side resident looked at the derelict at the end of his street and decided to take action. With encouragement from the Parks Department and Partnership for Parks, he founded Friends of Gulick Park, whose mission was to restore and renovate the park to once again serve the community.

Friends of Gulick Park began at the Parks Academy where we acquired the tools to advance our work. Through Partnership for Parks grants we developed a logo and website, held visioning events and produced a comprehensive report on the community's wish list for their park. With support from parks where It's My Park Day events we swept, raked, planted, painted, and slowly transformed that once desolate space. When our fundraising efforts hit the \$1 million benchmark, we began to work closely with parks landscape designers to ensure that the community's vision for their park was realized.

As a result of our efforts, the unwavering support of the City Council and other elected officials, and couple of unexpected funding sources, today we now have \$5.5 million to renovate Luther Gulick Park in one phase. You may say mission accomplished, but our job is far from over. We now

are focusing our energy on developing programs for the park, finding funding to add restrooms and addressing maintenance, security, and sustainability concerns.

We are planning on May, It's My Park Day that will include a parks play mobile, a table tennis tournament, a basketball clinic, and the usual cleanup and planting. In partnership with Henry Street Settlement, we will launch Urban Drive-In in July, and we will be showing family films in the park. We are particularly interested in having a park associate to organize activities for kids during the summer months. In conclusion, Friends of Gulick Park stepped in to fulfill an obvious community need and desire for a safe and lively green space.

All that we have achieved has taken constant effort over the course of five years by a handful of volunteers, an overwhelmingly responsive and engaged community, other neighborhood non-profit organizations, and the support of Community Board 3, Parks Department, Partnership for Parks, and elected officials. I pledge to you today that Friends of Gulick Park will continue our efforts to make our park a wonderful resource for the community. We

clearly cannot accomplish this alone, and respectfully request that you increase funding for essential parks programs and Partnerships for Park.

ANNA MARIA MOORE: Good afternoon. My name is Anna Maria Moore. I'm here to testify on behalf of the good work that I've witnessed by the Park Department and Partnership for Parks and the parks in my neighborhood, specifically Stuyvesant Square Park between 15th and 17th Streets bisected by 2nd Avenue in Manhattan. My family and neighbors established Stuyvesant Park Neighborhood Association or SPNA about 50 years.

My involvement with the Parks Department and Partnership for Parks began by attending monthly meetings with the District Manager of Parks, the manager for our area for Leadership for Parks, PEP officers in our area, and other neighbors interested in improving our area. In the monthly exchanges, I have learned how hard the agencies work with the resources that they have available, and often it is not much. We have had troubles with watering systems, at times no gardeners in a heavily trafficked of four areas.

Without due care the park gets overgrown and attracts vagrants and teenagers who vandalize, smoke drugs, and litter. Without vigilance, it would belong to them rather than the community of children, the elderly, and everyday New Yorkers who seek to use the beautiful space. I've seen the Park Department clean up an unbelievable amount of daily litter. They worked diligently with SPNA when rats were running out of the park and down the street. Thank goodness a very bad problem has been substantially contained.

I think this is a direct result of consistency by the Parks Department rat poison, frequent removal of food and open containers. SPNA provided containers that were harder for rats to climb into, and Parks provided covers to help keep vermin out. About three years ago, I started a volunteer maintenance effort when the gardener left. However, the effort went nowhere until the Parks Department hired a gardener and I started attending Partnership for Parks meetings. I learned how funding was, and without volunteer effort, most parks would not look the way they do.

I went back to SPNA and related what I had learned in the way that Partnership taught me. And the group got behind Member Outreach, not only for contributions of money, but time as well. This volunteer effort drew support from the neighborhood, but it was still slow. However, when Partnership for Parks directed volunteers from neighboring institutions and SPNA supplied promotions for the event with flyers and there was donuts and coffee, the results have been wonderful.

Last fall we planted 6,000 bulbs. Just last month our efforts resulted in clearing and mulching and area of land not being grown much in three years. The neighbors were so encouraged that one coop sent a thousand dollars to SPNA. In fact, each month we go into a day in conjunction with the Parks Department sending mulch, providing gardeners, the crew chief and staff has resulted in more local residents volunteering their time and money.

Working together we are definitely more than some of our parks. Clearly, if we continue to receive this support, many more important contributions can be made possible for this vital part of New York City. Thank you Council Members for

2 giving me this opportunity to speak on behalf of all  
3 those who charge the resource of Stuyvesant Square  
4 Park.

5 CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: Thank you, Ms. Moore  
6 and last but definitely not least.

7 KATHY ROMANELLI: Well, my name is Kathy  
8 Romanelli [phonetic], and I'm a resident of the  
9 forgotten borough, Staten Island. We often get the  
10 short end of the stick, but when it comes to  
11 horticulture, we are blessed to be the greenest among  
12 the five boroughs. I am here today to testify for  
13 the Department of Parks. It has done a tremendous  
14 job with limited funding to enhance the quality of  
15 life on Staten Island through the development of a  
16 volunteer system to help maintain the greenest of the  
17 five boroughs.

18 I'm President of the Friends of the  
19 Granite Brook Quarry, and the Mariner's Harbor Civic  
20 Association on Staten Island. I became actively  
21 involved in the Parks Department after 9/11. I  
22 survived the attack running through Battery Park to  
23 the last Staten Island ferry on that eventful day. I  
24 decided then I would give back to my community, join  
25 my local civic association and eventually became



1 president. While on the Board of the Civic  
2 Association, I fought to have a vacant garbage strewn  
3 six-acre tract of land that was run down and  
4 neglected made into a New York City Park. This took  
5 over nine years of letter writing, phone calls,  
6 emails to state and local officials, to the New York  
7 City Department of Parks Commission, local newspapers  
8 and television stations to finally happen. This six-  
9 acre tract of land contains a 200 million year-old  
10 rock formation that was buried under 15 tons of  
11 garbage. This is a national geological gem.  
12 Scientists come from all over the world to Staten  
13 Island to view this rock formation that's only in two  
14 places in the world, Staten Island and South Africa.

15  
16           Soon after the park was born, I started  
17 working with the Partnership for Parks and our Staten  
18 Island Commissioner Adena Long to get things rolling.  
19 What a great organization. The Partnership for Parks  
20 has so many programs that helped us advanced. We  
21 organized cleanups twice a year since 2011. We  
22 removed over 15 tons of garbage from the quarry,  
23 enlisted the participation from over ten schools.  
24 The children loved to help, and they wished they  
25 could do it on a monthly basis. The Partnership for

2 Parks has become extremely helpful with organizing to  
3 distribution, having machinery and programs around  
4 the year to keep attention on our park.

5 Without Partnership for Parks, that six-  
6 acre vacant tract of land will be a garbage-  
7 collecting eyesore. I urge you to keep funding the  
8 Partnership for Parks, and help keep Staten Island  
9 beautiful.

10 CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: It was definitely  
11 worth the wait. [laughter] That's all I can say.

12 KATHY ROMANELLI: Thank you.

13 CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: [applause] Applause  
14 to all of you.

15 KATHY ROMANELLI: Thank you.

16 CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: And I believe I get  
17 to do this now. [gavel] Thank you.

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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 May 1, 2014