

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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HELD AT: Committee Room - City Hall

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Chairperson

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SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: Ladies and gentlemen,
we are about to start. Make sure all the cell phones
are put on silent. Find seats right now. Thank you.

[Pause]

CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: Good morning,
everybody. Welcome. I love that we have an
overflowing crowd here, and we love our parks. Thank
you all for being here. I'm Mark Levine, Chair of
the Committee on Parks and Recreation joined at the
moment by my colleague on the committee Andy Cohen
from the Bronx. I want to welcome you all to our
hearing on the newly launched Community Parks
initiatives or CPI, which Mayor de Blasio announced
on October 7th. This committee has focused intensely
all year on the problem of inequity in our park
system. We've charted the steep decline in the
City's Parks Budget over the decades. And the
particularly negative impact this has on the green
spaces in low-income areas where unlike in tonier
neighborhoods, private funds are not available to
fill in the public funding gap. These gaps have
existed not just in the Operating Budget but in the
Capital Budget as well. The billions of dollars
invested in building the City's major new destination

parks in recent years did not filter down to the smaller community parks, which are so critical to the health of our neighborhoods. There has been almost no capital investment over the past two decades in hundreds of small parks throughout our city in places where a few tourists visit and areas where few, if any, wealthy residents.

This has implications for almost every aspect of life in New York City's neighborhoods. Healthy parks contribute to public safety, to our physical health, to environmental resiliency, and to economic development. They make it possible to build stronger bonds among neighbors. For these reasons, in equity in our park system should rightly be considered a matter of social and economic justice. And that's why I'm thrilled that today. We're examining a plan, which strikes directly at that inequity. As you will hear in detail shortly from the administration, the CPI will invest \$130 million in capital funds in 35 small and neglected parks. Some of which lacking even a single blade of grass barely even deserve to be called parks at all. These locations were selected based on a smart rubric, which focused on dense lower-income high growth

areas. The CPI investment will deliver transformative impact for every one of these parks. And by extension, their surrounding neighborhoods. I'm proud that the City Council is able to contribute \$9.4 million of the capital funds allocated in this core component of the CPI plan.

In a wonderful example of interagency cooperation, I'm also happy that the City's Department of Environmental Protection will invest an additional \$37 million in these parks to fund the kind of green infrastructure, which will help protect us in an age of ever more deadly storms. Thankfully, CPI doesn't make the mistake so common in the past of investing capital funds without additional expense funds to keep parks maintained. This plan smartly includes \$6 million mostly supplied by the City Council for additional gardeners, maintenance workers, and playground staff for the 35 CPI parks. For parks truly to thrive, there is no substitute for strong involvement of neighborhood volunteers. Especially when they form organized friends of groups, which develop a sense of ownership and contribute to ongoing stewardship of their parks. The CPI Plan this as well with approximately \$1.5

million directed to the City Parks Foundation, which through Partnership for Parks will provide training, technical assistance, and small grants to emerging neighborhood parks groups. Approximately have of these critical funds were provided by the City Council.

I look forward to hearing details from the Administration about the timing of CPI's implementation. In particular, my colleagues and I will be looking for assurances that the plan's park renovations will not get stuck in the capital process, which takes an unacceptable long four years or more to complete. I also look forward to hearing from the Administration on the question of what, if any, role the City's well-funded Parks Conservancies will play in this play.

The Administration describes the 35 parks covered by CPI as just the first of what could be several additional rounds of investments. I'm glad to hear that, as the scale of unmet capital needs in parks in our city's low-income neighborhoods is truly vast. And while the \$7.2 million in total additional expense funding in this plan is certainly welcome, it amounts to only a tiny fraction of the shortfall in a

system, which has seen its full-time permanent staffing cut so drastically from the levels of decades past.

Finally, let's never forget that nearly a quarter of New Yorkers have no park at all within a short walk of their home. Regardless, I consider this first stage of CPI to be a truly significant step towards the goal of a more equitable park system in New York City. I want to commend Mayor de Blasio, Commissioner Silver, and the many park staffers who labored for months to bring this project to fruition. And now, I'd like to welcome the Administration to present its testimony on this important and exciting topic. Thank you.

We have a new protocol here that I need to read you an affirmation. So if you could repeat after me, do you-- Not just repeat after me. Just answer I guess. Do you affirm to tell the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth in your testimony before this committee, and to respond honestly to Council Member questions?

COMMISSIONER SILVER: I do.

CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: Wonderful.

Commissioner, take it away. Thank you.

COMMISSIONER SILVER: Thank you, Chair Levine for your remarks, and also I'm glad to be here. Good morning to the Oversight Committee. Good morning, Chair Levine and members of the Committee on Parks and Recreation. I am Mitchell Silver, Commissioner of the New York City Department of Parks and Recreation. Joining me on this panel is our Director, our Project Development Director, Jennifer Sun, our current Chief of Staff, Kate Spellman. It is a pleasure to be here with you this morning to discuss the Community Parks Initiative, which represents an exciting first phase in our new framework for an equitable future.

As was stated, on October 7, 2014, I joined with Mayor de Blasio at Bowne Playground in Flushing, Queens to make the kick of the Community Parks Initiative. The event brought to the forefront the priorities laid out by Mayor de Blasio for increased equity, innovation, and resilience across the park system. That was my commitment to the Mayor when he asked me to be Parks Commissioner, and it's our commitment at Parks and to the people of New York City.

Our charge is to create and maintain vibrant parks and public spaces in all five boroughs for all New Yorkers and for millions who visit our city each year. To accomplish these goals, we have created a framework with a set of nine wide-reaching initiatives that would generate near-term accomplishments. The Community Parks Initiative is the first in a series of initiatives and represents a commitment of over \$178 million in capital and expense funding from the Mayor, City Council, and borough presidents. We thank you and for your steadfast support of this effort that these funds are sparking in immediate investment in neighborhoods that we have identified as both under-resourced from a park's perspective and high need from a demographic one. Each priority community or Community Parks Initiative zone will be the focus of the initiative's full suite of components, capital investment, extended recreational programs, increased maintenance staffing, enhanced community outreach, and physical park repairs.

Clustered at multiple sites within CPI zones improvements will create visible results for neighborhoods creating a cleaner, greener, and more

resilient city. CPI brings together basic building blocks of sustainable park development, capital investment, programming and maintenance, and community engagement. Now this is not just about patching and repairing open spaces and then coming back a few years later to do the same thing. Rather, we are engaging communities in a participatory process to recreate their local parks, increasing green space, adding resilient features, and improving access. We are bringing new recreational opportunities to neighborhoods, enhancing our maintenance efforts, and deploying dedicated outreach staff to engage community stakeholders in their parks, yielding a generation of new park stewards.

The sites selected to be part of this initiative were chosen through an analysis of the entire park system. And I would like to take this opportunity to highlight the steps we took in planning the Community Parks Initiative. To put New York City Parks recent capital work in context, we have more than 400 active capital projects across all five boroughs totaling more than \$740 million. Over the past two decades, Parks spent about \$5.7 billion on capital improvements. But by taking a closer look

at the historical capital investment, we discovered that this investment did not always reach communities that needed it most. In fact, some 215 parks across the city received less than \$250,000 in capital investment during those 20 years. We zoned in on those 215 parks that have been sorely under-resourced, and then used demographic data to screen for the neighborhoods with high need. For this program, we defined high-need communities as geographic areas above-average rates of population growth, density, and percentage of residents living below the federal poverty line.

Using these demographic screens, we are able to narrow the target from 215 to 134 parks that had only received less than \$250,000 in capital funds over the past 20 years. They were also located within a quarter mile of census tracts with two or more of the demographic criteria. Beyond merely crunching numbers, Parks staff deployed to all 134 parks to survey these sites. We honed our priority list by looking at more qualitative data. For example, we focused on sites that were adjacent to highly trafficked community institutions such as schools and NYCHA developments. This proximity

provides an opportunity for the development of strong constituencies to be involved in the programming and care of their local parks.

With these qualitative screens, we narrowed down the Scope to 35 parks that are being targeted for a full capital renovation. These sites are just the first phase in our plan for a more equitable park system. To complement our Capital Reconstruction Projects and deliver more immediate improvements in these neighborhoods, we will bring smaller scale targeted physical improvements 55 additional sites within the CPI zones. Using existing park resources, park staff will complement painting projects, fix fencing and equipment and do landscape improvements and much more.

CPI is not only a program where individual sites will be improved. It is a program that will benefit entire communities. Each capital project is being supported by a community outreach coordinator whose job is to facilitate communications with New York City Parks Design Team, support community engagement, and develop long-term partners and Friends of groups. Our successful Partnership for Parks Program, a joint program of New York City

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2 Parks and the City Park Foundation is offering
3 resources to our CPI community partners thanks to an
4 annual mayoral investment of \$781,000 for outreach
5 and technical assistance including 14 new staff
6 members. In addition, \$750,000 in City Council
7 funding for the City Parks Foundation will be used in
8 part to support grants for local organizations and
9 technical assistance in the CPI zones.

10 With the mayoral commitment of \$1.4
11 million, we are hiring 70 new staffers to provide
12 recreation programs and enhance our maintenance
13 resources within the CPI zones. Ramping up again in
14 the spring, Playground Associates will offer seasonal
15 programming for kids and adults such as Kids in
16 Motion and Shape Up NYC. While expanding our sports
17 and fitness programs we're encouraging local partners
18 to join us in developing new activities that will
19 meet the needs and interests of communities
20 throughout the five boroughs. To encourage all New
21 Yorkers to be instrumental in planning of their local
22 parks, we're inviting all residents to participate in
23 a public scoping meetings. Our first public Scope
24 meeting was held on October 29th, at Bowne Playground
25 in Queens.

The meeting was a wonderful opportunity for members of the community to take a hands-on approach to envisioning a new future for Bowne Playground. And it was just the first step in the CPI Public Scope meetings. Our goal was to have all 35 public Scope meetings completed by the end of January 2015. Rather than wait for ribbon cuttings on these projects to deliver improvements, the CPI zones will receive immediate attention. Outreach coordinators from Partnership for Parks have already been deployed to these areas to begin the process of engaging with local constituencies. In spring, we will have playground associates in the parks actively engaging park patrons, and City Park workers and gardeners will bring enhanced and horticulture programs into these areas.

As Mayor de Blasio stated at the Bowne Playground, this is an all hands on deck dynamic. New York City Parks will bring resources from across the agencies in addition to leveraging investment from elected officials and agency partners to create a wholly new robust approach to planning, building, and stewarding our parks. We have enlisted assistance from our sister agencies to support CPI.

For example, through its Green Infrastructure Initiative with the Department of Environment Protection has committed more than \$36 million in storm water funds to the CPI communities. These funds will create improvements such as bioswales and other storm water drainage methods that follows some of the nations best practices for green infrastructure. This ensures that revitalized park spaces also manage storm water effectively. Thus, reducing the environmental impact of storm water runoff.

Besides agency partners, we're working with our conservancies who we expect to play a vital role in supporting the Community Parks Initiative. New York City Parks has been a beneficiary of a dedicated group of Park non-profit partners who help maintain some of our most high profile open spaces. We value their expertise and applaud the passion with which they support our parks. Throughout the CPI planning stages, our conservancy partners have consistently praised the program and its goals. And some of our partners are already doing significant work in CPI zones. For example, the Central Park Conservancy just last month launched a new five

borough crew, which at our direction will be completed turf improvement, and landscape maintenance projects at seven sites with the CPI zones. Each of the conservancies has been receptive to taking their work a step further, and we look forward to announcing their commitments to the program soon. Community Parks Initiative is just the first step toward a more equitable park system, but it's a first big step. And to give you a sense of the Scope, we estimate that the CPI Initiative will provided improved park amenities and access to 220,000 New Yorkers who live within a ten-minute walk of these parks, and improve more than 65 acres of urban parkland. And reach more than 3.2 million New Yorkers, 36% of whom live below the poverty line, and 41% who are under the age of 18.

As we have said, the framework for an equitable future was released last month. It encompasses more than just the first initiative focusing on community parks. We will take another major capital program in the Community Parks Initiative. I want to be clear that we are keenly aware that we need to be streamline our capital process and deliver projects to the public more

quickly and efficiently. We've heard you loud and clear that our capital process takes too long, and we agree and we are committed to doing better.

Since taking office in May, I've convened an extensive series of meetings designed to improve efficiency in all aspects of the project's timeline from design to procurement, to construction. As an important first step with fostering a culture of increased transparency by releasing a publicly accessible Capital Projects Tracker on our website. The Capital Projects Tracker is an online searchable tool that allows anyone interested in Parks' capital projects to learn more about the active, completed, and proposed projects in their neighborhood. New Yorkers are now able to track the status of their capital projects from start to finish by visiting the New York City Parks website. For each active project, the tracker lists the location of the park, the level of funding, the source of the funding, and the current phase of the project. It also includes an estimated completion date of the current phase of the project as well as the adjusted completion date if the project has been delayed.

The launch of the Capital Tracker was a significant step to increasing transparency and holding our staff accountable to the public that they serve. Beyond the Capital Tracker, we're moving ahead with many steps to improve the capital process. For example, we're standardizing our Scope meeting, we're condensing internal design reviews, and we're limiting design changes once a project is in construction. We standardizing templates so that we don't start from scratch each time a project begins. And we are in the process of hiring 55 staff members in our Capital Division, which will allow us to expedite our projects and tackle the backlog.

While it will take time to implement all of the proposed changes, and for the results to be apparent, but these are the steps in the right direction to more efficiently delivering projects to the public. I hope the first steps I've laid out for you today demonstrate this Administration's commitment to create and maintain vibrant parks and public spaces in all five boroughs. With our framework for an equitable future, we have a clear blueprint to work from in delivering on these commitment in aggressively tackling equity issues in

our communities. A blueprint, which marks a significant shift in the way the Parks Department makes investment decisions and supports our capital investments and maintenance, programming and partnership resources to enliven open spaces in a way that is sustainable in the long term.

I look forward to working with you as we plan to build a brighter, green future for every New Yorker. Thank you for allowing me to testify before you today, and I will be happy to answer any questions that you may have.

CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: Thank you so much, Commissioner, for your remarks. I appreciated your comments in particular about the capital process. You clearly get that change is desperately needed. Your move to publicize all of these details on line in the Park Tracker is so important, and really commendable. In part because you're now exposing the department to scrutiny by the public and the media on just how quickly a capital project is being implemented. And lo and behold not more than a week or two after the site went live, there's been some media reports already that have crunched the numbers and found I guess on one report that 80 projects are

five years or more, and a dozen or so even date back to 2006. We hear you on your understanding of the imperative of fixing that. Obviously, it's going to be very much in our minds as we think about how these 35 parks are going to be renovated. And I wonder if you could lay out for us the timeline as best you understand it. I know you've started Scoping meetings. When do you expect that process to be completed. When will the design be completed? When will shovels be in the ground and, if possible, how long until the parks are reopened as renovated facilities?

COMMISSIONER SILVER: Well, as I stated, we expect to complete scoping for all. That's essentially what starts the process is the scoping. And we expect to complete all scoping by January 2015. We'll try to do this on the three-year and not the four-year. And so our expectation is that all projects will be completed by December of 2017. We hope some will be sooner, but our hope is that all 35 parks should be completed by December of 2015. I'm sorry, 2017. In terms of when design will be completed, that will vary from park to park. So it's very difficult, but these parks will benefit from our

new truncated design process. We're taking a look at procurement and construction, but the one we're able to make the biggest times saving was the design process. So all 35 parks will get to benefit from the new streamline on the design side. And we are constantly looking at what we can do to save time on the procurement side as well.

CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: [off mic]

COMMISSIONER SILVER: Yes.

CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: [off mic]

COMMISSIONER SILVER: If you look at the various parks, construction is construction. On that one, it's very difficult to save some times. Design is the one we made the most headway. Procurement is the one now we're taking a very careful look at, but it's something that's without of our administration. We have to look at other ways to make some time savings in the procurement process. But right now design is where we for the first step will make some of those time savings. Over time, we'll look to see how we can make some more time savings in the procurement and construction phase. So it is going to be an improvement over the process as it was in the past.

CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: So three and a quarter years doesn't amount to your target for where ultimately you'll end up on the capital process.

COMMISSIONER SILVER: I would like to have it shorter than the three years, but for now, again we could make those time savings in the design process. We'll look to see if there could be some more savings in the procurement phase. Construction you want to make sure that it's done properly. Each site varies in terms of what needs to be constructed. So right now, the design is where we feel the most confident we can gain those time savings. And then, we have to have more conversations about how we can save time in the procurement process.

CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: [interposing] Right, yes.

COMMISSIONER SILVER: So it is an improvement, and we're going to keep looking at how we can improve it over time.

CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: I appreciate your efforts. These projects are prone to delays that could pass into 2018, and I think there could be some real frustration with the fact that that could push

us into the fourth year where there is so much excitement now.

COMMISSIONER SILVER: Another innovation is that we're not going to start flagging projects as we now have the tracker. And so, we'll be meeting on a monthly basis, and any projects that start falling behind, there will be immediate intervention to find out what's going on rather than letting the trend continue. So that's another intervention that we're putting into place. So we can better get a handle on what are some of the issues when a project is delayed just for about a month. So we can start doing some intervention immediately. So that's another change to the process that we're putting into place.

CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: Good to hear. We'll be focusing on the Capital Process in a future hearing. It's something that we care a lot about. So we'll be continuing this conversation. You described some of the additional staffing that each of the CPI parks will receive, and we all know that for these parks to remain healthy and vibrant open spaces the staffing is just essential. Could you describe, if you can quantify, the number of

additional staffers or full-time equivalents that any given park would experience an increase over the baseline?

COMMISSIONER SILVER: Yes. As part of the program, the Mayor has baseline funding to support 69 playground associates who will facilitate the children's programming. Then there will be 14 full-time community planners, and also organizers for the stewardship building. So that's what has been baselined. From Council's FY15 allocation, we will be able to get 50 additional City Park workers, 50 additional gardeners, an enhanced recreational program, increase capacity of funds, and the technical assistance. So in total, it will be 69 playground associates, 14 full-time community planners and organizers. And then, for the one-time allocation, we have the 50 additional CPWs or City Park Workers, and 50 additional gardeners.

CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: As you correctly know, the City Council allocation is a one-shot.

COMMISSIONER SILVER: Correct.

CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: These parks won't even be renovated by the time that money is spent. Ideally, this would be an ongoing service that would

support the parks pre-renovation and through, right up through the renovation process. So what is the Administration's level of commitment on long-term funding for the additional gardeners?

COMMISSIONER SILVER: Well, the commitment to CPI this is a first step. And certainly, going forward we're using the whole CPI and the criteria as a way of looking at future investments. So these certainly are going to have-- Conversations we're going to have going forward during the budget process. But we want to ensure that this is a commitment to address this initiative. This is a first step toward a multi-year effort. But we're not able at this time to disclose what that level of commitment would be. But certainly, the Mayor stated that this is an issue that is important, and we will continue to use the criteria and this program going forward.

CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: That's great to hear. Obviously, we would hope that the mayoral side would pick up this ongoing funding so that these parks don't have to suffer a rollback in services. In the timing on the implementation of the additional

staffing, has that happened yet? When will we see more bodies on the ground in these 35 parks?

COMMISSIONER SILVER: Well, we already deployed some into the field this summer, and in spring depending we will start seeing more deployed to these parks. So the impact would be immediate as we bring those staff on board. So the maintenance and outreach staff as already deployed to the CPI zones, but the programming in terms of for those parks will start in spring of 2015. The 55 of capital also is important to this project as we bring on more projects for the 35 CPI parks. We've already started the hiring process for those 55, and so that will also address the backlog, but also make sure we start to expedite not only the CPI, the 35 parks, but also the backlog that has been there for some time.

CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: It's wonderful that the planning includes outreach workers. As I mentioned, it's so important that we engage communities of stakeholders as stewards of these parks. The best parks have really healthy volunteer groups that take ownership over the property. This is going to be the job of the outreach workers, right, to help build these parks. Can you explain

how that works? What if a park has no existing Friends of group? Does the organizer go in and seed that? How does that work if there is not much to start with?

COMMISSIONER SILVER: Well, we're using both existing outreach coordinators, and there will be some new outreach coordinators. They all have very good relationships already in a community. Our hope is you start with a scoping session. We already know that there are nearby schools and NYCHA developments. And so part of their job is to do the work of starting to build that local capacity, bringing them into the design process. So that both the parents and the children and the other stakeholders will start to buy into the whole park. And understand the importance of not just in building a park, but being caretakers as well. So they're all very skilled. We have them throughout the city, but we're hiring more specifically to make sure that we have full coverage. And so, they're very skilled at doing that outreach, that community building. And so, our hope is that they will start with a scoping session, and they'll build on some of their existing

partnerships they already have in many of these communities.

CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: Is the goal that every one of the 35 parks will have a functioning Friends of group?

COMMISSIONER SILVER: That is the goal. That's the expectation, yes.

CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: Okay. You referred to 55 additional sites that are getting a lighter touch, but also I think some quick benefits. That's on top of the 35 right?

COMMISSIONER SILVER: That's correct.

CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: That's not inclusive of those.

COMMISSIONER SILVER: That's correct.

CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: Could you explain in a little more detail the kind of benefits that these 55 will receive. It's not a full capital renovation, right? This is like fresh coats of paint, and fixing benches?

COMMISSIONER SILVER: It could be fixing benches. It could be basketball land, it could be painting. It could be some minor landscaping improvements. The goal is not to wait until December

2017. We now know that there are 215 parks that really hadn't seen a lot of attention, and we want to get in there quickly and show that we're very serious about providing more equity in our park system. So they're going to be minor, but for us I think they're going to be big. Just a fresh coat of paint on a basketball court, showing the community that we're paying attention to their park. And so, they may be small, but to us they're big, and I think the community will appreciate them as well. So again, we're already identifying how we're going to move very quickly on those sites just to show that this is a down payment of really addressing the equity issue in our parks.

CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: That kind of as you say small but important upkeep, is that classified as capital or expense?

COMMISSIONER SILVER: These, well right now it's expense, but we have some requirements. We also have staff that can do these. So I would more characterize it as expense. And so we'll be using our existing staff, and resources to do this work.

CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: And how much is the total investment then in the 55?

COMMISSIONER SILVER: I don't think we have that.

CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: Okay.

COMMISSIONER SILVER: Since it's staff time and some requirements, we haven't quantified it because we haven't determined exactly what improvement we'll make in each and every park. An assessment will be made, and that will determine in what capacity we have to make those improvements.

CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: Right, right. You alluded to the role of conservancies. And so, am I to understand that your vision is that they would provide in-kind services directly to the 35 parks? Is that correct?

COMMISSIONER SILVER: Well, we've said that all options are on the table, and those conversations are ongoing. That is certainly an option, but they are very supportive of the program, and have already shown some good faith by expanding some of the work that they're doing. But all options are on the table. Clearly, providing in-kind support is one of them. And so, we're continuing those conversations. The Mayor is very clear. He wants all hands on deck, and we understand the vital role

they play both in their expertise, but also helping us ensure we have an equitable park system for all New Yorkers. So all ideas are still on the table.

CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: Is the goal that all 35 of the CPI parks will be touched a conservancy for extra support?

COMMISSIONER SILVER: We haven't gone to that level specifically. I think our conversation with the conservancies is ways that they can help the entire program in a number of ways. So it hadn't gotten down to that level of specificity.

CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: Okay. I want to acknowledge we've been joined by Council Members Treyger and Maisel from Brooklyn. And I want to open it up for questions to my colleagues. I believe Council Member Cohen has one or more.

COUNCIL MEMBER COHEN: Good morning, Commissioner. Thank you for your testimony. I do think that the Parks Department really needs to be applauded for CPI. I think that it seems like very thoughtful criteria that really makes sense based on usage and need. And I think that that effort really needs to be applauded. I what I'm concerned about a little is that you mentioned in your testimony that

there are 400 active Parks capital project. I don't know first of all if that means that there are sort of inactive capital. Is there more money than the money you allocated that's not being used at the moment, or are there 400 more or less projects that you are working on and that's the total?

COMMISSIONER SILVER: There are 420 active projects that have funded, and are in various stages of development, design, procurement, or construction. So these are active projects. Deploying-- now to streamline these is a little bit more of a challenge, but we are still looking and working with our Capital Division on what we can do to move these along. These are the ones that are now on the Capital Tracking System. They're already in the pipeline, but we're working to see how we can address and move those along very quickly, more quickly. The 55 that we're now in the process of hiring, that will help address the backlog because we still have a number of projects that hadn't been assigned to staff because of staff capacity. Those will benefit from the new streamlined system. So we're also committed to making sure we move those 420 funded to move them along a lot quicker.

CHAIRPERSON COHEN: So the priority on these 36 you don't think will impact or slow down, that there are going to be adequate resources with these 55 that you can maintain, at least maintain the track that we're on with those projects and do priorities, prioritize these 36.

COMMISSIONER SILVER: That's correct. A lot of thought went into that when we knew we were going to announce CPI. And so we worked with capital as well as bringing on the new 55 to ensure that the 35 would not impact all those 400 that have already been in the pipeline. So the answer is yes.

CHAIRPERSON COHEN: Okay. I appreciate it. I mean obviously I guess our concern is we're not-- We don't want to put out fires, we want to-- You know, it's a new day, a new administration. We want to come up with a systemic approach that's going to really get parks funded, and get capital projects completed, you know, in our lifetime. So that we can all see them and enjoy them. So just like I said, I'm concerned, but I take your word that we're going to come up with a system that's going to get all these projects ultimately completed.

COMMISSIONER SILVER: And I think what will be beneficial, as I stated earlier is that having the monthly meetings to start to analyze what are some of these issues with some of the delays. Some of them really out of our control. But at least we can start to sit down, intervene, and come up with a strategy. And that's something I think that all parties, both the public, staff, and even management will appreciate that we're putting a lot more of a focus on the capital projects system to make sure we do get those efficiencies that we're looking for.

CHAIRPERSON COHEN: What is the status of the hiring of the 55 new staff members?

COMMISSIONER SILVER: I believe we have hired about 16. We promoted about 12 internally, but right now we have about 16 of the 55. Most of these are licensed design professionals. So the recruitment process is underway, and we're trying to get them on board as quickly as we can. But right now we're about a 16 toward that 55 number.

COUNCIL MEMBER COHEN: Do you have a target date for when you would like to see them all heard?

2 COMMISSIONER SILVER: We'd like them as
3 soon as possible. It's just to put out that many
4 licenses on professionals is something we'd like to
5 bring them on as soon as we can. So I would say as
6 soon as possible.

7 COUNCIL MEMBER COHEN: Thank you.

8 CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: Thank you, Council
9 Member Cohen, and next up we have Council Member
10 Treyger.

11 COUNCIL MEMBER TREYGER: Thank you, Chair
12 Levine, and welcome Commissioner, and I do believe
13 that we definitely need to make sure all parks in the
14 City of New York are taken care of, and are given the
15 resources to be wonderful community benefits to the
16 residents. Just a couple questions. Out of the
17 parks that are a part of this initiative, do you have
18 data on how many of them were damaged by Super Storm
19 Sandy?

20 COMMISSIONER SILVER: Of the 35 CPI
21 parks?

22 COUNCIL MEMBER TREYGER: The ones that
23 will be funded under this \$130 million plus
24 initiative, do you have data about how many of them
25 were impacted by the storm?

COMMISSIONER SILVER: We don't have that answer here. We'll have to get back to you on that one.

COUNCIL MEMBER TREYGER: Right, and I would appreciate that information because I-- We still have parks that have dead trees. And so, for example Kaiser Park in Coney Island, which I know in the past has received a level of resources. It was damaged by the storm and all their trees died, and there's an issue of residents needing shading and other environmental concerns. Another particular park that's not physically in my district that's physical in Council Member Vincent Gentile's district, but it's very close to my district. And many of my residents got there is Bensonhurst Park, which is near the Verrazano Promenade where people walk by and they get a view of the bay and of the bridge. Sandy really did a number on this particular park and location. There's a walk path and bike path that is still in very bad shape. Just recently they just kind of fixed up patching of the fencing near Caesar's Bay Bazaar. But I do believe that the parks that were impacted by the storm need just as much attention, and resources to rebuild so residents can

see progress in their neighborhoods from the storm.
And I would appreciate any follow up that you have
for that, and I thank the Chair for the time today.

CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: Thank you, Council
Member Treyger and next up we have Council Member
Maisel.

[Pause]

COUNCIL MEMBER MAISEL: Good morning,
Commissioner. I have two questions. The first one
is really out of your control, but as a former
legislator, I allocated money to the city for some
parks. And I know it's not in the City's control,
but is there anybody in your office who is assigned
to permanently annoy the state so they can release
the money? Their bureaucracy is worse than ours.

COMMISSIONER SILVER: I don't know if I--
I don't know the answer to that--

COUNCIL MEMBER MAISEL: [interposing]
You've got to get somebody to--

COMMISSIONER SILVER: --question. I
think it's a full--

COUNCIL MEMBER MAISEL: Every time
there's a scandal, they make another level of
annoyance to make-- I mean it's the City of New York

for God's sake. I mean, they should trust us. But someone-- For example, I allocated \$50,000 to Marine Park for recreational equipment, and I'd like to see it installed before I retire. And the other question is the policy of the City used to be that when a tree was taken down, the stump would also be removed. A week or two later they'd send a machine and then they would remove the stump. Then the City changed its policy that when a new tree was going to be put in, they would remove the stump. So now, I understand that contracts have been let with Sandy money that as they take down the tree, they're removing the stump. So you have a stump pre-Sandy that's still there, and homeowners trying to get the stump removed. And the new trees are coming down, but the stumps are being removed. Is there any way we can get the existing stumps removed? I can't imagine it being that expensive. I have lots of them in my district.

COMMISSIONER SILVER: The staff member who handles that, from Forestry is not here, but we do have an additional \$750,000 for tree removal. But I'll see if we can get back to you to answer your specific question.

1 COMMITTEE ON PARKS AND RECREATION

40

2 COUNCIL MEMBER MAISEL: Okay, so we need
3 a stump specialist.

4 COMMISSIONER SILVER: Okay.

5 COUNCIL MEMBER MAISEL: Thank you.

6 CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: Thank you, Council
7 Member Maisel and thank you to our panel. Thank you
8 very much.

9 COUNCIL MEMBER SILVER: All right. Thank
10 you.

11 CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: So I'd like to call
12 up now our first panel of advocates, which will
13 include Tupper Thomas from New Yorkers for Parks;
14 Heather Lubov from City Parks Foundation; and Deborah
15 Martin from New York Restoration Project.

16 [Pause]

17 CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: And Tupper, why
18 don't you start us off.

19 TUPPER THOMAS: Perfect. Thanks. Good
20 morning, Chairman Levine and members of the Parks
21 Committee. I'm Tupper Thomas, Executive Director of
22 New Yorkers for Parks. We would really like to
23 recognize and praise the City Council for their
24 commitment to fighting for more meaningful budgets
25 for parks. Your efforts have really raised the level

of discussion about how we fund our public spaces. While details about the next several years in park life remain open for negotiation, we are lucky to be beginning the conversation with a shared conviction that parks matter to everyone. We think that the Community Parks Initiative, CPI is a well thought-through plan. It creates new funding streams for maintenance, and prioritizes community organizations in target communities. This plan recognizes the small neighborhood parks for their key community builders, and are essential to our civic infrastructure. We want to also salute the de Blasio Administration and the Council for building on the capital investments that were made in the earlier administration. We see this capital commitment as a major component of the Community Parks Initiative. We especially welcome the increased funding for essential maintenance and operations positions.

The Parks Department needs to figure out how to make maintenance and operations more substantial-- sustainable for employees and citizens. And we are eager to continue advocating for solutions to this challenge. We are excited that CPI includes over \$36 million from the Department of

Environmental Protection for remediating and improving the sustainability of parks targeted for improvements.

This partnership between Parks and DEP is a natural fit as the City ramps up resiliency efforts post-Sandy. But as you know, the CPI is far from-- is only a start. Many parks that fit the CPI criteria for new support will not be receiving funding. Those who use these parks need to know that their open space will receive investment as well. The mechanisms for community organizing also need clear protocols and metrics. Within the next year, New Yorkers for Parks will begin to conduct an independent review of all CPI zones to assess their impact. We hope that our findings will continue to guide the City in effectively improving parks citywide.

Equity is a concern in the Parks workforce as well. The agency has seen such consisted underfunding over many years that it now struggles to offer upward mobility to its employees. As maintenance workers retire, few candidates come forward to replace them because there are none in the system. The City Park worker and the zone gardener

lines must become full-time positions, not just seasonal so that they attract people to the profession of park management. That can only happen with consistent baseline funding for these crucial positions. We also remain concerned about how important our midsize parks are as well. Many of them are in need of improvement and relief to the people that use them. Overall, we are confident as we see New Yorkers for Parks acknowledge-- New York City Parks acknowledging through CPI that neighborhood parks can build community from a small footprint. It's encouraging to see those beginning to make capital process more streamlined, and transparent through the recent launch of the Capital Projects Tracker. We look forward to monitoring that project as it develops. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: Thank you, Tupper. I'm really glad you brought up the question of impact, and I wonder whether you've thought some about what our measures of success might look like even in broad terms than these 35 parks.

TUPPER THOMAS: What? Which success?

CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: Measures of success.

TUPPER THOMAS: Yes.

2 CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: Yes.

3 TUPPER THOMAS: So, I think that we'd
4 like to see how well the first 55 are going. And
5 what has happened in those communities as their parks
6 are just fixed up and there's an interest shown by
7 the city and their communities and does that help?
8 We would like to see more volunteer groups coming out
9 of those areas, and measure that. We would like to
10 look at the 35 sites now, and how they are, and how
11 they are three years from now. And whether in three
12 years those did get restored and improved. So, I
13 think we need to be looking at all of those things at
14 the same time. And I think also the broader look of
15 the communities that they're in. These zones that
16 the Parks Department has set aside, the really
17 significant areas that have more than just these
18 parks. They have a number of other parks, and that
19 the midsize parks. It's very, very important I think
20 in the overall community improvement. So we are
21 looking forward to doing more, and work with the
22 larger zones as well.

23 CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: And would you care
24 to offer your thoughts on the appropriate role of
25 conservancies in this plan?

TUPPER THOMAS: Well, we feel very strongly that conservancies have done an amazingly fabulous job during very, very difficult times. And have kept some significant parks open and usable by the public for very, very many years. So we are pleased that there are conservancies that have additional funding that can help in other communities. And that they can set an example, but we don't feel there should be a required amount of money that a conservancy would have to raise to do this, that, or the other thing. We feel that, in fact, anything they can do to be helpful will be very much appreciated. But these parks are major regional facilities that serve already huge numbers of low-income communities. And have made it possible for low-income communities to have a great place to recreate, do sports, and do all kinds of things. It's very useful.

CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: Thank you so much, Tupper. Heather.

DEBORAH MARTIN: Good morning, Chair Levine, Committee, and distinguished colleagues. I'm Deborah Martin, Executive Director of New York Restoration Project, and I'm honored to be here today

to testify on two important facets of the Community Parks Initiative where Conservancies like New York Restoration Project can really provide important assistance. One is maintenance, and I'll speak more about that, and the second is the process by which conservancies are engaged to work on under-sourced parks. As you, Council Member Cohen, mentioned what is the systemic approach? How do conservancies bring their resources to bear on under-resourced sites. They know that's not ad hoc. [sic] First, I do want to say thank you to all of you who made CPI a reality, especially Mayor de Blasio, Speaker Mark-Viverito, Chair Levine, and Commissioner Silver and his staff and Commissioner Lloyd.

I applause the Community Parks Initiative for bringing caring attention to parks, which haven't seen significant investment, as you noted, in decades. And for beginning the necessary inevitable process of turning our parks into green infrastructure with the help of DEP. These innovations will require a different mindset about the balance between capital and expense. Historically, we've always invested heavily in capital with less thought towards the expense side.

But with more sustainable technologies, that approach is going to have to change at a very fundamental level. Maintaining parks of any size, location, or use build community over time. That's why. It's the maintenance over time that builds the community, not necessarily the capital work. They build together, but they can't be separate.

Well maintained open spaces have been shown and proven in study after study to reduce crime through increased physical activity, and they lead to better physical and mental health outcomes at the neighborhood and the city scale. Given that New York City's park system consists of over 1,700 parks, playgrounds, and recreation facilities, I hope that the Community Parks Initiative is only the beginning of a larger movement to provide high quality maintenance to the system as a whole. Through NYRP's work in parks and community gardens over the past 19 years, we have witnessed how the sustainability of open space has more to do with holistic maintenance than with ribbon cuttings. That's what really lasts. We found that regular predictable presence of NYRP's field staff in the parks and gardens being maintained and, of course, the state of cleanliness and good

repair that results sends a message to local communities that we care for their neighborhood. But also that we care for the users as human beings. Over the long-term day-to-day conversations between our field staff, and community members increases use building a sense of ownership, and fostering strong communities, and fostering stronger Friends of groups. It's that that builds a constituency around parks. Put simply, a family is more likely to use a playground if that space is clean and safe than if it has a new slide. That's what we have witnessed.

The Community Parks Initiative provides an opportunity to think long term about the balance between capital and maintenance. While capital improvements absolutely need to happen, and this initiative is taking an incredible step toward that goal, it's the day-to-day maintenance that turns parks into community parks. The Community Parks Initiative also provides an opportunity for conservancies like NYRP to help bring much-needed improvements though, as Tupper mentioned, midsize parks.

Today, NYRP provides daily stewardship and capital work to approximately 73 acres of public

parkland including Sherman Creek and Highbridge Parks and over two miles of the Harlem River shoreline. In addition to daily maintenance, NYRP works on design development, capital construction, and environmental restoration while providing youth education programs and free public events to engage the communities that surround the spaces that we work in.

The conservancy model NYRP applies to Sherman Creek and Highbridge Park is replicable in almost every city park. But there must be a mechanism within the Parks Department for conservancy partners to flourish. NYRP is fortunate to have partners of the Park Department like Manhattan Borough Commissioner Bill Castro who is here today, and Northern Manhattan Parks Administrator Jennifer Hoffa, who we've built strong relationships with. And we really couldn't do our work in Lower Manhattan without them. But partnerships like NYRP should not be ad hoc, and largely at this time they are. Rather, they should be embedded in the structure of the Parks Department. More specifically, there needs to be a point person and a streamlined methodology for partnering as a conservancy. So organizations like NYRP can work efficiently to dramatically

improve new spaces for New York City communities not in an ad hoc manner, but in a systemic manner that's sustainable.

I encourage the City Council and the Parks Department to build on the momentum of the Community Parks Initiative by emphasizing maintenance. I also invite you to make effective use of NYRP, and other non-profit conservancies by developing a system for deploying our resources on public land. So that we can more effectively partner with you to make sure that every park in every neighborhood achieves its full potential. Thank you so much.

CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: Thank you so much, Deborah. We really appreciate it.

DEBORAH MARTIN: You're welcome.

CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: Heather.

HEATHER LUBOV: I'm Heather Lubov and I'm thrilled to be here on what is now my third day as Executive Director of City Parks Foundation. I would like to thank Chairman Levine and the Committee for allowing me to testify today, and the entire Council for its support of City Parks Foundation. We are the only non-profit organization whose mission is to

activate New York City's parks in all five boroughs by providing high quality arts, sports, educational and community building programs free of economic barriers to promote healthy and vibrant communities. Working closely the Parks Department, we look to promote public parks as positive spaces of lively community involvement. We applaud the Mayor's and the Council's focus on parks equity and we wholly support the Commissioner's equal emphasis on maintenance and sustainability of parks. We are thrilled to be able to play a significant role in parks equity and CPI effort both by helping to build and facilitate sustainable community support, as well as providing programming that activates those parks.

First and foremost, the Partnership for Parks Program, a nearly 20-year public/private collaborative with the Parks Department successfully supports and champions a growing network of leaders caring and advocating for neighborhood parks and green spaces particularly in neighborhoods where resources are very limited. Partnerships reaches more than 600 community organizations across the city and equips them with the skills and tools they need to transform their local green spaces into dynamic

community assets. The Partnerships Program directly address the Parks Department's desire to engage stakeholders and build stewards for sustainability. The Partnership's Catalyst Program supports the formation and builds the capacity of local community groups to serve as green space stewards particularly in waterfront communities.

Catalyst selects a targeted group of some of the highest need parks in which to focus significant resources. Catalyst starts with building potential partners through neighborhood outreach and organization, connecting communities to human programmatic and financial resources to support their park. And finally, providing the tools they need to sustain that support once the four-year Catalyst period has ended. Catalyst has been in place since 1995, and has worked in 13 park communities and engaged thousands of local residents seeking change in their parks. We're about to begin a fourth round of Catalyst sites each of which is within an establish CPI zone.

But that's all we do. Partnership's outreach coordinator support community involvement in the neighborhood parks across each-- All five

boroughs, as you heard, while staff provides significant technical assistance with an emphasis on the neediest communities. This year with the help of the Council's Park Equity Funding, we will offer free expert training to 425 park group leaders, a 15% increase to build communities for our academy. We will double the number of community groups we serve to 30 in our in-depth six-month intensive fellowship program. And through our annual conference, we will increase participation by 20% recruiting parks volunteers and non-profit and civic leaders to network, meet experts, and share best practices and learn about resources. We will expand our reach through People Make Parks, a joint effort with the Hester Street Collaborative to provide information in New York's lowest income neighborhoods in how to engage in the create and design of meaningful public spaces. And we will provide guidance through local visioning processes. We will organize service projects for thousands of volunteers from corporate and non-profit groups who help contribute annually to nearly 70 neighborhood parks in need. We will provide fiscal sponsorship and design services to over 40 Friends of groups. And we will double our

Capacity Grant Fund to \$150,000 offering small grants to help support events, programming, group development, cleanup, and beautification projects. In addition to our Partnerships Program, we're currently reviewing the list of all CPI zones to determine how we can further activate those communities through our summer arts programs, our sports and recreation programs, and our out-of-school-time educational programs. These programs already serve hundreds of thousands of New Yorkers in all five boroughs. And there is already an existing overlap with those CPI zones. So we look forward to determining the feasibility of expanding our reach.

For more than 25 years, City Parks Foundation has been committed to providing free programs to under-served communities, and to partnering with the Parks Department to serve all neighborhoods. Thank you again for the opportunity to testify.

CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: Thank you, Heather. For your third day on the job, that's pretty impressive.

HEATHER LUBOV: I did it all myself.

[laughter]

2 CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: I believe it.
3 Nicole is shaking her head no. But as I mentioned
4 before, I think your role in this plan is just
5 critical. And I know that Council Member Cohen has a
6 follow-up question or two?

7 COUNCIL MEMBER COHEN: I do for Ms.
8 Martin. I'm wondering if the emphasis on capital if
9 there is any kind of study or anyway to quantify what
10 is a dollar of maintenance in terms of deferral of
11 capital, or maybe making capital unnecessary? I
12 wonder if anybody-- If that's ever been studied. I
13 was at a park the other day and it has soccer fields
14 on it. And there was literally not a blade of grass
15 on the soccer fields, and it has two soccer fields.
16 And I was thinking to myself probably the right thing
17 to do was to not allow them, the soccer players to
18 use both fields at the same time.

19 DEBORAH MARTIN: Yeah.

20 COUNCIL MEMBER COHEN: I don't know if
21 it's a management issue. I don't know if it's, you
22 know, if that would be probably wildly unpopular not
23 to let them use both fields. And there is talk of
24 turfing this area, which I'm not really excited about
25 either. And I wondered maybe if the park was-- if

there was the maintenance to sort of manage the use of this park, that maybe we wouldn't be having that discussion. And I was just curious. I wonder if capital is in some way like a substitute for expense. Well, we can't afford to maintain it. So every couple of years we'll just redo it. I wonder if you have any thoughts on that.

DEBORAH MARTIN: I think that's been the history that because historically as a city we've thought about it. And this is true not just in parks. This is true about streets and bridges and all kinds of capital work. We have as a younger city we though well when it breaks we fix it, we'll build a new one. But particularly with the incoming technologies, for example, the kind of thing that DEP is doing with replacing fields and making them progression [sic] basins, and using reinforced pavement. Those kinds of technologies that we desperately need as a city will not persist over time without a kind of different understanding the balance between capital and maintenance. The topic of capital can't happen or that it should be thought of as like don't do capital, do maintenance instead.

It's just that how we allocate those things has to be thought of as a different balance. And they should be allocated at the same time because we can't design something without knowing what are your resources over time for maintenance. And right now, that's not how that happens. So let's say you'll have a designer that will say okay I want to put in reinforced pavement. But that park manager doesn't have the right equipment to maintain reinforced pavement. So then back and forth. This leads to delay. The design goes back and forth. Sorry, you can't do that. It has to be re-designed. There are delays, and that's because of a systemic problem in the way that capital and maintenance dollars are allocated separately. They need to come together, and we need to understand well let's spend this on capital because we're going to need more over time on the maintenance. It can't be something move in after this.

COUNCIL MEMBER COHEN: Thank you, Chair.

CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: Amen to that. Thank you, Panel, very much for your remarks. We appreciate it. I'm pleased that we've been joined by someone who is a long-time passionate advocate for

parks equity, my colleague in government State Senator Dan Squadron. I would like to invite him to come up and share some remarks with us.

[Pause]

SENATOR SQUADRON: Thank you very much, Chairman. I'm a long-time listener. Fortunately, for all of us maybe not a first-time caller, but I really appreciate the opportunity to testify. I really appreciate the leadership that you've shown on this issue in chairing this committee. I have had the opportunity to testify before this committee before this year. And the reason is because you have been completely focused on remaking and improving the Parks Department and the Parks system. I really appreciate that, and I know we all do in the city, and to all the members of the committee.

I appreciate this next step to talk about the Community Parks Initiative because it really does go to the heart of what it means to talk about equity in the park system. To about neighborhood parks to serve New Yorkers, many of whom really don't have another option. In addition to the chair for his leadership, I really want to thank the Mayor and Commissioner Silver for their work to make it happen,

and to do such rigorous work. You know, it was a quick bit of testimony there by the Commissioner. I think one reason is because it's really very well explained. It makes a great deal of sense, and that's where we owe credit to it including a couple of parks in my district, Saw Lane and Henry Jackson Playground on the Lower East Side in addition Luther Dooley [sic] Park in the Lower East. But, at the end of the day CPI is at this point still jut 35 parks. We know that the Department has identified more than 215 additional parks in desperate need of repair. I'm sure that everyone of us in our own districts knows what they are. And it's critical that CPI and the really important and impressive foundation that it lays is able to expand. Because the goal is to reach even more parks and communities in need over time. To do that, I believe requires keeping the Park's equity push going. It required a continued focus on inequities in the system, and a greater overall investment in the public parks budget, which as we well know, today commands just over one-half of one percent of the City budget. I believe that the way to do that is to continue to change the dynamic around the Park's discussion. This year, the

discussion of Parks funding and equity has been robust, continued. We've seen real leadership from it at the City Council level, the level of this committee, and at the level of the Mayor and City Hall. But what are we going to do to create that dynamic over the long term? Well, first, we know one of the problems. Back in 2001, we had One Percent for Parks Campaign, but it went away. And we haven't since until last year. I believe one reason for that is an inadvertent consequence of the success of some of the largest conservancies. And the conclusion on that I know has been somewhat controversial, but I think it's pretty simple and not controversial at all. It's hard to dispute that wealthy donor's interest in fighting for an increase in the City Parks budget is reduced when their local park is doing better than ever. And we know that in some of the most powerful and wealthiest parts of the city the local parks are, thank goodness, due to the great credit of generosity and effectiveness of the conservancies, doing better than ever. But as a result, the disinvestment in the park system, the equity crisis that has been highlighted is invisible. It's hard to get excited about a campaign to nearly

double the Park's budget to one percent when your local park is doing so well.

Currently, continuing to work with the Chair and the Mayor and the conservancies to expand the impact of the Community Parks Initiative by ensuring that conservancies play a meaningful role into the future. And to their credit, they have stepped up and expressed a real openness to that. Whatever final form it takes, that participation by the conservancies must fundamentally link them, and their patrons to the overall system. This year we had the Parks Equity push. In 2001, we had the One Percent for Parks Campaign. What can we do together and what can this committee do to ensure that the Parks' equity push is not something that comes up every 12 years. But is something that comes up every year until the crisis is solved. I believe that the conversation this year that has included conservancies has helped to change the dynamic. And I am hopeful that at the end of this year, we will have a fundamentally different structure that ensures that dynamic is changed going forward. Thank you, Chair.

CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: Thank you so much,
Senator Squadron. Thank you.

COUNCIL MEMBER: [off mic]

[Pause]

SENATOR SQUADRON: That is either a
unanimous ascent or a dissent.

COUNCIL MEMBER MAISEL: I definitely
thank you Senator for your-- You've been very
consistent and persistent on this issue, and I think
that should be applauded. I would like to highlight
one other thing that under the past administration, I
learned that, for example companies like AT&T would
approach the City Administration and say we want to
install free Wifi in some of the parks. And not one,
not one was put into Southern Brooklyn. And I
represent a neighborhood that many would argue it's
very low-income, a majority of the families. And
they don't have access to free Wifi, but some parts
of the city, which again, I applaud. I embrace all
parts of our city where the average median income is
probably much higher than in Coney Island have access
to free Wifi in their local park. So I think even
when it comes to decisions and partnerships with
private institutions when AT&T and Google offer free

Wifi in their parks, there needs to be a regional balance. And there needs to be making sure that we reach all of our areas, and not just pockets of the city. I just wanted to get your thoughts and comments on that as well.

SENATOR SQUADRON: Look, I think that that highlights some of the problem that we've seen. And, you know, the truth is there's no blame, no individual blame for this. But it's often harder as I'm sure you've experienced in your time this year in office to get real focus on what's happening in Coney Island than what's happening in the middle of Manhattan or parts of Brooklyn. And I think that that's one of the challenges. The yawning need has been there, and certainly members of the community have known it. But the overall political dynamic hasn't necessarily been forced to deal with that before this year. And again, I think that the Mayor and the Commissioner and the Chair's leadership have helped to change that dynamic this year. I also do believe that we need to make sure that every one who is really invested in the park system including advocates, including potential donors, including

conservancies has a commitment and a structural connection to the overall system.

Because the truth is that those folks at AT&T may have closer relationships or existing relationships with someone at one park in Manhattan, and maybe not with the friends group or the grassroots group in Coney Island. And that linkage and that shared sense of responsibility to the system is by no means a silver bullet. We have an insufficient Parks budget, and that's a large part of what we've seen. And that is not the responsibility of any person in this room or in this building right now. But that linkage I do believe would change the dynamics so that Coney Island wasn't forgotten when AT&T or whoever it is that stepped up to the plate and said, We've got something for the system. Where should we put it?

COUNCIL MEMBER MAISEL: And I'll argue that it wasn't even-- AT&T went to the Parks Department the last couple of years and said you tell us where to put it, and we'll put it. So it wasn't like it was AT&T's decision. They went, but not one location in an entire region that has a significant population, including some of our lowest income

neighborhoods. And so, when we talk about equity even when it comes to these types of decisions, when it comes to partnerships with public and private, there needs to be a regional balance struck in that city. And be sensitive to the needs of some of our most vulnerable communities.

SENATOR SQUADRON: I got you. Look, one of the great things about the Community Parks Initiative, as already conceived, is it helps to identify what regional balance in needs. It's such a complicated question, and you could have imagined the Commissioner coming here and talking about this proposal, and it being really problematic. And I think that the real credit between the Community Parks Initiative for creating a structure that has credibility when it comes to that regional balance. We need to make sure that private and public dollars are both going to address that problem.

CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: Thank you so much, Senator. Thank you.

SENATOR SQUADRON: Thank you very much, and I want to also just thank Council Member Cohen who represents my old local park at Van Cortland for being there.

2 CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: Oh, yeah, he's doing
3 a bang up job there.

4 SENATOR SQUADRON: I had a number of
5 sports circumstances there growing there. I will not
6 speak about whether they were positive or negative,
7 but thank you.

8 CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: Thank you. I'd like
9 to call up our next panel, which is Johanna
10 Clearfield from the Urban Wildlife Coalition; Sandra
11 De Jesus from Hunts Point Park; and Elba Santiago
12 from the Woodside Neighborhood Association. And
13 Sergeant, if you could put two minutes on the clock.
14 We're running behind, and I want to hear from all the
15 wonderful advocates who have--

16 JOHANNA CLEARFIELD: [off mic]

17 CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: [laughs] I also
18 want to thank Commissioner Silver for being here. I
19 know he has a very busy day, but he stayed to hear
20 the wonderful insights of our advocates, and I know
21 that means a lot to them. So thank you, sir, for
22 being around.

23 JOHANNA CLEARFIELD: [off mic]

24 CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: I think you need to
25 turn it on just so the recording is clear.

JOHANNA CLEARFIELD: Sure. First of all, thank you so much for having this hearing. I'm in a long-term relationship right now with Prospect Park. And so it's a very committed relationship that I have, and it hurts me personally when things happen that I feel are hurting the parks. So that's why I'm here. I have a grassroots group in Brooklyn. It's called the Urban Wildlife Coalition, and it's a network of rehabilitators and nature enthusiasts. Some of them are wildlife rehabilitators like myself. I'm licensed by the DEC. I also was trained by Rita McMahon who runs the only wildlife rehabilitation center in New York City. She was New Yorker of the Week on New York One. And extensively trained in rehabilitating wildlife. So I'm here speaking for the wildlife. I don't hear in any of the testimony so far-- I haven't heard the W word uttered. All of these parks are different and diverse. Obviously, this is a huge program, the CPI program. And I'm sure that what I know none of them are the same in terms of what the wildlife landscape might be.

So what I'm here to ask for and to request is if it's not already in place that there be some sort of who speaks for the wildlife in any and

all of these parks. I work very closely with the wildlife rescuer who is actually assigned to Prospect Park, Martin Gross. He's a Prospect Park Alliance staff, full-time staff. He is rescuing and rehabilitating water birds who are constantly getting stuck with fishing wire and fishing tackle. I was at the participatory budget meeting--say that ten times fast--for Brad Lander. I'm a delegate for that initiative. And it was overwhelming at both meetings that they had for the community to participate, every table that had a group together to save. This is what we proposed. All of them said we need wildlife protection especially in Prospect Park, but there are other parks also that have squirrels, and they wrens, and they have finches. We are blessed. New York City is blessed with a diverse and amazing array of wildlife, and I believe that it should be part of the discussion here. I really believe that if no one wants to step up to the plate, I'm happy to take on that as a project. So I just wanted to bring that to the table today.

CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: It's a really important perspective, and I'm glad you spoke up on

it, and we would like to talk to you further about that for sure. Sandra.

SANDRA DE JESUS: Hi, I'm just a resident of the Bronx. I'm with Hunts Point Playground. I've been a resident for 45 years. I am currently the P.A. President of P.S. 48, which has the Hunts Point Playground directly, 50 feet away from the school. Having the CPI would be an asset because our children would be able to come up from the school at lunch time and be able to participate to play in the park. Our school has 22% of kids who are homeless, and living in shelters. Coming out to the park would be such an asset and having the CPI brought in-- Excuse me. I'm a little nervous. I'm not used to this public speaking.

CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: You're doing better than most elected officials I know. Just keep it up.

SANDRA DE JESUS: [laughs] Basically, I've been dealing with this park for 45 years since I've lived there. As a child I used to go to the park. We used to have a pool. It was an above ground pool that was at this same park. Once that was taken away, there is basically nothing to do at the park. We don't have any recreational staff.

People come and clean the park. That's about it. We need this CPI because I'm a Partner for Parks not only that park, but a few other ones in the neighborhood, and this would be such an asset to have this done for the kids. So they can enjoy the park and they can-- That's just about being homeless because I deal with a lot of kids and speak with them all day long about their situation. And the only happiness they get is when they come out to the park. So thank you so much for having me here and speaking. And on behalf of my community, family, and kids, I want to thank you.

CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: Well, we thank you for coming. You're exactly the kind of New Yorker that the park system needs to thrive. So thank you for all your service to your local park, and we want to support you in anyway we can.

SANDRA DE JESUS: Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: Thank you. Elba.

ELBA SANTIAGO: And the first thing I would like to do is apologize for Chairman David Rosasco. He had an emergency and couldn't be here. Firstly, it is an honor yet again to represent the Woodside Neighborhood Association, which has been

invited for the third time in the past year to testify on issues concerning parks. We take this opportunity with the honor of deserving of the critical issues of urban development and creating public spaces that reflect positively on our local society. The Woodside Neighborhood Association has had the pleasure of uniting our diverse community through programs developed in partnership, particularly with the Partnership of Parks under the Greening Western Queens project, which is coming to completion by the 31st December of this year.

The essential progression of communication has emerged through neighbor after neighbor after neighbor simply rolling up their sleeves and enjoying a morning together in the gardens. Through our partnerships, we have created an environment where citizens turn to us to assist with everything from tutoring, to family court to our Second Chance Program. With the guidance and the materials supplied from Partnerships for Parks we have managed to evolve from small projects to sweeping changes encompassing the entire neighborhood of Woodside in good order.

The question being posed by this committee is one that represents the results, not necessarily the causes of initiatives taken by the city agencies as well as volunteer and other entity organizations. Continuing the long-term effort without the funding or political support that might realized more of the goals of all initiatives in a more immediate timeframe. Nevertheless, the purpose of any new expenditures on parks and recreational facilities based on our group's efforts in this area indicate the criticality of maintaining what has already been achieved through the tireless efforts just as much as new capital expenditures on operating facilities or for re-designs. This is based squarely on not simply the cost of exotic and hard to maintain plantings, but often result from renovations where simpler, more cost-effective plants and tree species would have served the same beautification purposes. But it also reduces [bell] the opportunities for groups such as our as well as the many youth and school groups that have been involved in the work we have performed. I'm going down to the last paragraph.

Our group for example in just this past year has seen more student volunteers from many schools such as P.S. 11 Saint Sebastian, I.S. 125, the High School of Women's Leadership and others all in proving that with simple requests for mulch, soil, and shovels everyone comes away with a sense of accomplishment. Because real work was performed that they and the community at large can hold in high esteem.

Now, I'm going to tell you basically what's not in these papers. The difference that the parks--

CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: [interposing] It--
it--

ELBA SANTIAGO: --relationship is having on the community. How do I put into words what when we help a child who is grieving his father work through that? Simply by coming out and being in the parks with, or how we help and 8th grader who can't read get through that all starting with the relationship at the parks. There are so many one-to-one relationships that are being built coming together in these facilities. Their importance is

insurmountable. I hope you keep that in mind, and I thank you.

CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: Thank you Elba.

ELBA SANTIAGO: Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: Thank you for your work. Thank you to the whole panel. We appreciate it. Okay, next up we have Scott Kearney with the Technical Guild Workers; Dylan House with the Hester Street Collaborative; Jan Lando and Lynn Kennedy with Friends of Astoria Heights Park. Thank you.

[Pause]

CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: Good morning. Do you want to start us off, Scott?

SCOTT KEARNEY: Yep. I was just doing a little math here, and I've been with Parks for 30 years, and if you count back the senior people I worked with back 30 years. And you went back a bunch of years, I'm actually directly connected to the WPN [sic] I think. But I've been with Parks for 30 years, and I left my copy of the Daily News and New York Times back here. But we all know what the President has done recently, which we don't like. But my question is how did we get here? What's the difference when I started building parks in 1985 to

where we are now? The approval process has gone from A, B, C to A, B, C, D, E, F, G, H, I, J. Also, now decisions have been decentralized away from the professional staff. Then the professional landscape architects, engineers with whom had this actual and functional knowledge that comes from experience. We're not superseded by new overpaid managers without our experience. Then parks were built by contractors that were knowledgeable about parks. We had more timely, better work for less money. The problems that are shown in the newspapers and the Times didn't happen just now. Giuliani's didn't understand what we did, but much worse, the Bloomberg Administration imposed a private model on public service. What this administration, Commissioner Silver, has inherited can be corrected, and we are your factual resource to do it.

By returning the decision making on capital projects to professionals, we can make a promises that capital projects will become more cost-efficient, and reduce the waste [bell] by anticipating the problems. We recommend reducing outside approvals; return of the seniority system recognized as an invaluable resource; and attracting

reliable experience contractors by ensuring they get paid.

CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: If you can wrap up, please.

SCOTT KEARNEY: Today, Commissioner Silver discussed that his staff has an outreach office. I think that right away that he should use his outreach to go directly to communities and assure them that the problems that are shown in these newspaper articles have been dealt with, and will not repeat again. He also can, with the support of the Mayor's Office, call PDC. I've brought this audit here several times, and spoken with your staff about. Basically, under Bloomberg the advisory capacity move to authority to reject multi-million dollar projects without any formalized procedures. We don't need a tracker to tell us that PDC is doing the job.

CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: Thank you very much, Mr. Kearney for your remarks. I appreciate it. Mr. House.

DYLAN HOUSE: Good morning. Thank you for having us here, and thank you for holding this hearing. My name is Dylan House and I'm the Director of Community Design at Hester Street Collaborative.

We're an organization that creates resources and tools for under-served New York communities to be involved in shaping their public spaces. And we've developed a track record on the Lower East Side, and we've worked for many years with Partnerships for Parks and the City Parks Foundation around issues of community engagement in the New York City Parks Capital Process. Specifically, tackling the issue of how you can build capacity for community members and volunteer stewardship groups to effectively gather input, and advocate for a community vision with their own parks. Together, we've developed an online toolkit called People Make Parks that breaks down the capital process and makes it understandable for residents. And provides resources and activities for public engagement, and ultimately helps New Yorkers to participate in the design of their parks.

While I applaud the Community Parks Initiative and the tremendous thought that's gone into it, my concern is that around the issue of community engagement that there is a missing piece. That along with this capital investment that there needs to be just as much investment in social infrastructure in the form of community engagement

within each neighborhood. The timeline of the Community Parks Initiative through a single scope meeting in each of the 35 parks is really just surface engagement around getting input about design and planning. You might not be getting everybody who could come to a meeting if it's just held during the day one time.

So I think when the city engages the residents and community leader [bell] we can build better parks that have the capacity for longer term community ownership of them and stewardship. So I would just look forward to the Parks Department spending more time to engage community leaders as partners. Which I think would ultimately help ensure a more streamlined process in the long term with community board review and people's process with local support. So I hope to look forward to continue working with Parks on this issue.

CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: Thank you. Could you just say a word about what your ideal process for community engagement might look like?

DYLAN HOUSE: Well, I think it needs to be deep like where a scope meeting, you need to have really robust outreach process to get people out to a

scope meeting. There might need to be multiple meetings and listening sessions, and really actively engaging people of all ages. Youth in particular and seniors who might not be able to get to the park at a particular time of day. So on and so forth. So really like a broad people of all ages working families so on and so forth.

CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: A really good perspective to keep in mind. Thank you for bringing it up. Thank you for your remarks. Okay, Ms. Kennedy and Ms. Lando.

LYNN KENNEDY: Yes, good morning and thank you for having us here. On behalf of the Friends of Astoria Heights Park, I would like to thank Mayor de Blasio and New York City Recreation for advocating on behalf of 35 community parks including ours to tackle equity issues, and decrease the disparity that has existed in the parks. The investment in our park will complement the \$1.6 million in capital money that was advocated for by our group and Council Member Constantinides. It will make a tremendous impact upon the condition of our park, which has been overlooked for many years.

Our group has acted as a catalyst for change. We originally petitioned the local Community Board 1 jut in Queens over a year ago in September 2013 for erosion control, safety measures, and age appropriate playground upgrades. We continue to act as stewards for our park with our group of members, and working with other community groups to bring forth positive change to our community. Our group feels strongly about how the park will develop, and we look forward to working with CPI specifically in regards to good park development. CPI will reinforce that our group has done by creating an environment in which to work even more effectively. We would like to see capital dollars used efficiently. Our park is not only in need of upgrades to ensure safety such as erosion control measures, gates, and equipment. But also maintenance and staffing to ensure that what is building lasts. The park also lacks adequate programming for children and teens with its high utilization rates. Expansion of such programming, which have already been advocating for, is a priority for you, families, and communities to excel. We are excited to hear as well that there will be more opportunities for capacity building grants and

support to further strengthen our group and the work we do. We feel honored and appreciative of being part of a larger parks movement. All communities deserve to have parks that are amazing [bell], public spaces that are beautiful, green, and meet needs make for a healthier community. I hear that. [laughs] Parks are vital for quality of life. I will never forget what one member of our group said to me. She described since leaving her own country of Morocco that the park and the people in the park she has since met since moving here have become family.

Personally, I began my advocacy effort because I wasn't happy to my local park, which depressed me with its grayness, rundown equipment, flooding and broken glass. My son and I would seek out other parks often in Long Island City or Manhattan that were brighter, more engaging, cleaner, safer, and better staffed. So I began to ask for a change to happen in our own neighborhood demanding more. Since then, we have been unstoppable and hopefully inspiring other park groups to do the same.

CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: If you would wrap up.

2 LYNN KENNEDY: CPI is an asset to the
3 city. We need accountability with capital funding.
4 We need change that reflects the needs of the
5 targeted communities, large scale and small scale
6 improvements will be beneficial on every level of
7 community development. The initiative empowers
8 people to take ownership of their communities and
9 creates hope, something that is necessary for all
10 communities to thrive.

11 CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: Thank you very much.

12 LYNN KENNEDY: Thank you.

13 CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: And thank you to our
14 panel. Thank you.

15 LYNN KENNEDY: I've never read so fast in
16 my life. [laughs]

17 CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: We understood every
18 word. Next up, we'll be hearing from Geoffrey Croft
19 from New City Park Advocates; Marlana Giga from Local
20 983, and Joe Puleo also from Local 903

21 [Pause]

22 CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: It's just you? Did
23 Geoffrey leave?

24 MARLENA GIGA: He's floating around
25 somewhere.

CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: Okay. Well, the floor is your Marlana.

MARLENA GIGA: Okay. Thank you for having me. My name is Marlana Giga and I am on a leave of absence as a Park Enforcement Sergeant. I worked in every borough except for Staten Island. The Parks Department is in dire need for funding for the Park Enforcement Officers. I didn't hear anything about funding for these officer today. You can build the most beautiful parks, but without the PEP officers to patrol these parks, we will continue to see the crime in the parks rise. We have seen an uptick in all crime in the parks across the board. The PEP Officer patrol on foot, in vehicle, and on horseback in New York City Parks, in all New York City Parks. The PEP officer especially the mounted unit are able to patrol wooded areas where vehicles were not able to patrol, and where many illegal activities take place. We are in desperate need for more PEP officers and funding for the mounted unit. They rely now on the auxiliary unit for funding. When I started, there was a mounted unit in every borough. Right now, we have a mounted unit in Bronx, Manhattan, and State Island. Also, the PEP salary is

\$32,000. This is well below any other law enforcement salary. The PEP officer do address any situation that they come across, emotionally disturbed people, trespassing, and illegal vendors, and they do motor vehicle stops unarmed. They are not eyes and ears. We hear park management constantly saying they are eyes and ears. They are not. They do everything that police officers do. I would ask that you restore funding to hire more PEP officers. There is also still a great disparity in the amount of officers depending on your zip code. Battery Park City and the Hudson River Park here along the water side have three times the amount of officers as opposed to the Bronx, which has 6,000 acres. So there's a severe disparity. I would also ask that you restore funding for the maintenance personnel as well. The parks have never been dirtier, and we can't rely on the JTP Welfare to Work Program because they are only at work two to three days a week. So please help us hire more PEP officers and maintenance employees. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: Well, thank you for your testimony, and you're going to find a lot of support in the City Council for increasing the ranks

of the PEP officers. In fact, we were able to put \$5 million the budget this year to hire 80 additional officers. The fact that \$5 million gets you 80 indicates that the salaries are not high enough. But, nonetheless, we're happy to have more money for this important service.

Do you know the status of the placement of these new officers on duty? Are they in the Academy currently?

MARLENA GIGA: Right now they're in the Academy. We're having a hard time hiring these guys because the standards are so high. They require 60 college credits, and for the salary that they get, they're here-- Sometimes in the Academy they're dropping out and going to NYPD, and going to Corrections. There are about 60 people in the Academy now. I know that they have to backfill for Hudson River Park and HRP because they're contracted with the City, and they have to have a set amount of officers. So they will get the first round of officers, and then the remaining will go to the Outer Boroughs. But, right now we have 23 officers in the Borough of the Bronx for upwards of 6,000 acres. In

2 Northern Manhattan, we have four officers to patrol
3 from 110th Street to Inward Park.

4 CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: Just to understand
5 something, we have not been able to fill all the
6 positions that we've recently funded because of lack
7 of applicants?

8 MARLENA GIGA: The problem is that the
9 standards are so high, and the salary is so low. And
10 the individual that's doing the hiring is way too
11 selective. He wants to hand-- Commissioner Bratton
12 does not hand select every police officer. So we're
13 trying to-- The union is trying to put a policy in
14 place that would make the applicant process a lot
15 smoother. These are the standards that you have to
16 go by. If you meet the criteria, you're hired.
17 Right now, they require a college degree. You don't
18 need a college degree to write summons and arrest
19 people.

20 CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: I really appreciate
21 your testimony. I want to work with you on this
22 issue, and I believe Council Member Treyger had a
23 question.

24 COUNCIL MEMBER TREYGER: Yes, Sergeant, I
25 want to first of all thank you for your service and

to tell you that actually the Borough President of Brooklyn Eric Adams and myself we wrote a letter to the Parks Commissioner insisting on more security, PEP, to cover the Coney Island Beach and Boardwalk and Brighton Beach as well.

MARLENA GIGA: I remember.

COUNCIL MEMBER TREYGER: Because it's over 2-1/2 miles of beach and boardwalk, and the local police precinct, which is responsible for that plus the amusement district, plus the residential areas of the neighborhoods are being stretched too thin.

MARLENA GIGA: Right.

COUNCIL MEMBER TREYGER: So if the Parks Department really give us their fair shares of PEP officers that would alleviate the burden of the local police precinct to protect more of the residential areas. And we actually had a tragic drowning this past summer of a girl that was swimming after the beach officially closed. But if we had adequate security personnel, they would patrol the waters and say it's time to get out of the water now.. It's time to go home. So I agree with you. There is an inequity. There's a shortage and that must be

addressed, and I thank the chair. He's been very vocal on this. And we will be aggressively following up on this issue, and I thank you for your advocacy on this very important matter.

MARLENA GIGA: Thank you. And I would just like to say this. We need full-time officers because what happens is the Parks Department will put seasonal personnel, and they're not equipped to handle the issues that they come across. So you do want full-time shielded officers.

CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: Thank you very much, and Mr. Croft.

GEOFFREY CROFT: Good afternoon. I just want to just before I start my testimony. Obviously it's very important to be extremely selective in the new recruits so it's not an issue of that. It's the fact that basically one person is making that decision. And as Marlina said, you know, the Police Commissioner isn't hand picking officers. And that's obviously not the way it should go, and it has been going on like that. And also promotions, too, are being done basically on the side, and that's not the way. This is New York City, and we're not supposed to be doing like that, and it does have a huge impact

as well as the salary. I mean some of these guys are leaving actually out of the Academy. They're not even finishing the Academy. So we can't hire and recruit qualified people. So that's an issue. I know you guys have been very vocal and supportive about the need to secure our park system, but we have a long way to go. Anyway, that diatribe.

Good afternoon. My name is Geoffrey Croft, President of New York City Park Advocates. We are delighted that the new administration has adopted the principles of New York City Park Advocates' more than a decade long campaign to bring equity to the park system. However, what is missing from the conversation is a true commitment to achieving these very important goals. As most people are acutely aware, the park system is vastly under-funded. And although these are citywide problems that affect virtually every segment of the population, it's not secret that the poorest, most underserved communities count a disproportionate number of the most severe issues. Quote, "These efforts will focus on protecting the extraordinary investment in parks and public spaces that we have already made while taking steps towards increasing the accessibility and equity

of those parks that serve all of New York City's diverse neighborhoods throughout the five boroughs." That's from the Parks Department's Framework for an Equitable Future. [bell]

Unfortunately, what was lacking as usual is any real commitment to fixing the long-term problem that only a fraction of the funds are being allocated, and that our elected officials have refused to fund parks as an essential city service. Each year our elected officials allocate approximately one-third of the funds required to properly operate our public parks. One-third. This year was no different, unfortunately. The City must commitment to adequately investing in our parks system and hire the employees that are so desperately needed to maintain program and secure a vast park system. It is the government's job to care for its parks and provide these services, not park stewards and not local stakeholders.

Addressing specifically the park needs assessment the conversation about park equity cannot begin the City performs an honest assessment of the condition of every single one of its park properties. And this should include its greenscapes for culture

and for forestry. Something that prior administration have simply refused to go. You have to go through the inventory, every single one of them. On then will the City be able to try and get to the--

CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: [interposing] Try and get to the--

GEOFFREY CROFT: Sure.

CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: --point you want to make.

GEOFFREY CROFT: Only then will the City be able to develop and implement a citywide parks needs assessment strategy and be able to talk about the equitable distribution of resources. Conservancies, the policy of allowing public parks in more affluent areas to be funded by private donations while most other languish through lack of public funds has further compounded the equity problem. It has created a widely disparate park system marked by separate and sadly unequal facilities. The City has also allowed certain so-called public/private partnerships to illegally divert concession money from the City's general fund. We are talking about hundreds of millions of dollars. It is also the job

of elected officials to protect our public spaces and not give away them to private developers. These issues are certainly equity.

CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: [interposing] Thank you.

GEOFFREY CROFT: In closing, while the Parks Department partnered with New Yorkers for Parks it embarrasses itself year after year by trumpeting this irresponsible expense budget. This only hurt the city and the people who rely so desperately on our public spaces.

CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: Thank you/

GEOFFREY CROFT: The administration should take responsibility by dramatically increasing the Parks' budget and by ensuring the funds are distributed according not on public--

CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: [interposing] Thank you.

GEOFFREY CROFT: --or private issues.

CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: We really appreciate it. Thank you very much for your remarks.

MARLENA GIGA: Thank you all.

CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: Thanks to both of you. Thank you. Okay, our final panel. I'd like

to call up Leroy McCarthy, Nancy Bruning, noted park exercise expert, and Aiowa Aponte, Parent Coordinator at P.S. 369.

[Pause]

CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: You have it. [sic]
Go ahead.

LEROY MC CARTHY: Well, good morning. My name is Leroy McCarthy. I've been working towards having hip hop receive recognition in New York City with street names and just recognition from the BE` Council, officially the Mayor's Office. And this has been going on, and I have received a lot of positive response from residents, businesses in these neighborhoods. However, regarding the Community Parks Initiative, I think it's going to be helpful as well. Whereas the street signs for these hip hop artists, Randy MC [sic], Beasty Boys they can be sold to raise funds for the park initiative, and this can be generating funds in these communities in which I grew up in. At least Flatbush and the Bronx and in Queens they don't have conservancies has been pointed out. But this is a way for the fans of these artists to contribute the parks, Community Parks Initiative.

It turns out that 13 of the 35 parks, which are being recommending rehabilitation are in the districts of the signs of which I would like to be presenting. And these council members can approve these street signs with their generosity. And it could spread throughout the City Council and other districts as well. I know that there is a budget crunch. You know, where will the future funds come from? this is our opportunity to build on that, raise funds through not the taxpayers. And this would also be tax revenue created from these parks. So I do hope that the City Council would take this into consideration. I have shared this information with Speaker MMV and also with Mayor de Blasio's Office [bell]. And I definitely appreciate your time and consideration on this matter.

CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: Thank you so much, Leroy. We really appreciate it. Okay, Nancy.

NANCY BRUNING: [off mic] Okay, I would like everyone to understand that it feels good. You don't have to. It's an invitation. It's not an ought to. It's an invitation. You'll fee a lot better. Just move a little. I always start my talk with that. If you've never heard me speak before

it's nothing new. Okay, so no big deal. Okay, let me sit. [laughs] Doesn't that feel a little better? Okay, so this is on, right? My talk is about a very focused issue, which is fitness in the parks. First of all, Chris thank you for inviting me to present my testimony. I'm a public health professional, and I have a specialty in physical fitness. And, of course, I was delighted to learnt that CPI is including measures to increase recreation, fitness classes and to promote healthy living and active lifestyles. And, as well, to encourage community members to be involved in the formation of whatever is going to go on in these parks.

As we probably all know, one of the greatest inequities in our city in the world has to do with health. And parks are a wonderful place to slowly start to even out that inequity. Many people do not have access to health clubs, and we've been sold. As a nation we've been sold that the solution to our sedentary lives is the health club. Not necessarily unless you think of say the park as a health club, which is what I've been doing for ten years. As Mark Levine knows, I've been designing and leading outdoor exercise classes in Northern

Manhattan and elsewhere for over ten years. And some of these programs have been sponsored by the Health Department. They've been sponsored by the Parks Department, the City Parks Foundation, and various neighborhood organizations. So let me get into what we're talking about here today. I just want to remind everyone that we don't actually need a lot of fancy equipment in order to turn parks into a gym. What we need is a sort of almost invisible design overlay that takes into consideration using normal standard park features such as park benches as exercise equipment. You can use them as exercise, as a base for exercises without compromising their original use, which is for sitting and reading, and I don't know. Maybe a little smooching. You know, whatever goes on, on park benches. So we don't need a dedicated place necessarily for exercise [bell] for adults. Playgrounds are a whole other story. Obviously, kids are going to be on the radar screen for this. But I just wanted to encourage you do not forget the adults, and to not wait too long to employ local people as fitness instructors. You don't really have to do a lot of capital improvements right way. We were talking about let's get moving on some

of this stuff as quickly as possible. Maybe we don't even need to do much capital improvement to get moving, to get people into the parks. And also someone was... We were talking about what's the best way to engage the community in become involved in their park design. And the best way is to bring them to the parks, and have walking meetings in the parks. We all sit around and we talk about stuff, but we're not in the place that we're talking about. So I strongly urge whoever is determining how these things to run as to--

CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: [interposing] Thank you.

NANCY BRUNING: --do a lot of outdoor work.

CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: Thank you and thank you for your work on this important initiative. We really appreciate it.

NANCY BRUNING: Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: And thank you for the little exercise break there.

NANCY BRUNING: [laughs] It doesn't take much.

CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: And our left, but definitely not least speaker is Ms. Aponte.

AIOWA APONTE: Hello. Thank you for pronouncing my name correctly, by the way.

CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: Thank you.

AIOWA APONTE: My name is Aiowa Aponte.

I'm a Coordinator at P.S. 369, Young Leaders Elementary School. We share the building with other schools, P.S. 179 and P.S. 352 District 75 School. Our playground is not a representation of the diverse needs of our community as well as our neighborhood. And as a member of the community, I should not have to go to a different such as Central Park to have children play in a respectable playground. My families cannot really a train ride or a bus ride for a family of five into the city. So we should be able to walk down the block and enjoy a colorful inviting and safe playground just as any other community. Our families with children with special needs should and deserve not to have to think about what it's like to take their children to the park because there are no structures fitting to their needs. Our children deserve a park that engages all of their family. They should make parents want to join them going down

the slide. Play basketball in a colorful court,
handball in a shaded area. Our communities deserve
the water fountains so when we get thirsty from
playing in the park. This capital improvement
project is the start of a new turn in our community.
This is the start of showing our children to take
charge in their community and they do matter. Thank
you all. From our family thank you so much because
Saw Mill Playground was selected and it is in dire
need of this.

CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: It's a wonderful
note to end on, an affirmation of why this work is so
important. Thank you very much. Thanks to everyone.
This concludes our hearing. [gavel]

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 November 6, 2014