



**Hearing before the New York City Council  
Committee on Parks & Recreation  
Oversight: Fiscal Year 2016 Preliminary Budget  
March 9, 2015**

**Testimony By: Mitchell J. Silver, FAICP Commissioner**

Good morning, Chair Levine and members of the Parks Committee. I am Mitchell Silver, Commissioner of the New York City Department of Parks and Recreation. I am joined here today by a number of our senior staff. Thank you for allowing me the opportunity to discuss the Preliminary Budget for Fiscal Year 2016.

As you may be aware, this is my first preliminary budget hearing, since I began my term as Parks Commissioner right before last year's executive budget hearing. I spent that last year observing our parks and operations. I have also spent time listening to elected officials, community board members and park advocates. As a result, we have already started addressing many of the key concerns that I have observed or issues that were brought to my attention. For that reason, I'm excited to be here today to report on all of the positive strides that we have made at the agency and to report on our plans for next year. The Parks Department's Fiscal Year 2016 Preliminary Budget is \$428 million, which is an increase of 3.6% from the Fiscal Year 2015 Adopted Budget.

Thanks to the leadership of Mayor de Blasio and a strong partnership with the City Council, NYC Parks has been able to make real progress towards a more equitable, resilient and innovative park system. My priority as Commissioner has been to bring a new energy and focus to NYC Parks, and make sure we are responsive and responsible stewards of city tax dollars.

Our parks are a point of pride for New Yorkers, and our challenge is to ensure that we strive for **equity**- distributing park resources in a way that is fair. So, to tackle this challenge head-on, we developed and released the **Framework for an Equitable Future**, which gives us a clear blueprint to work from in creating thriving public spaces for all New Yorkers. The initiatives outlined in that framework will help us allocate resources more strategically, make our parks cleaner, greener and more resilient, incorporate sustainable community engagement into everything that we do and develop innovative and data-driven approaches to planning, developing and delivering services in our parks.

Early in my tenure at NYC Parks, it became clear to me that some parks in our system hadn't seen capital investment in decades, many in our city's most densely populated, fastest growing and highest-need communities. So, in October, we joined Mayor de Blasio, Speaker Mark-Viverito, Public Advocate James and Council Members Levine and Koo to launch the **Community Parks Initiative**, which marked a radical change in our approach to park development, delivering an immediate infusion of capital dollars, enhanced programming, maintenance and community partnership building in neighborhood parks that need it the most. These 35 capital projects will bring better parks and playgrounds to 24 different Community Districts throughout the city, serving a total population of over 3.2 million residents, in areas where 36% live below the poverty line and 41% are under the age of 18.



I'm pleased to report that the Community Parks Initiative is ahead of schedule and off to a fantastic start. All of our public scope meetings for these neighborhood parks have been completed, and thanks to the hard work of Partnerships for Parks outreach staff, the level of participation was remarkable. Over 1,000 local residents came out to attend these scope meetings, along with several hundred additional online survey respondents, to express their thoughts on the priority needs for their local park. We want to maintain this strong level of participation, so as the year continues, we're engaging in a long-term community-building strategy.

The next step will be to hold partnership training sessions in neighborhoods near CPI projects, to connect stakeholder groups to technical assistance and grants programs. All of the schematic designs for our CPI projects will be presented to community boards by June and we plan to begin the procurement process by December. In addition, we are on track to complete 60 smaller-scale targeted improvements that can be completed on a faster schedule and bring immediate results to other parks in high-need communities. These repaired benches, repainted courts and multi-purpose play areas and refurbished lawns can literally transform a park and deliver an improved experience for our park users, providing great value for a relatively limited investment.

NYC Parks oversees hundreds of capital projects at any given time, and we know the capital process can be complicated and difficult to track, making it a challenge to keep the public and elected officials informed of the status of projects. So, we launched the new **Capital Projects Tracker** on our website, to increase transparency and accountability in our capital process. The Tracker is emblematic of our focused effort to significantly improve our capital process, so that we can deliver park improvements to your constituents more quickly and efficiently. I'm happy to report the Capital Projects Tracker has been a tremendous success, receiving more than 56,000 hits since going live in October 2014. We're dedicated to this spirit of transparency and openness and we're glad that the public has been shown tremendous interest in the progress of their neighborhood parks.

As many of you know, we've completed a comprehensive review of our internal **capital process**, and instituted a series of changes that will streamline the process and reduce the time required to see a capital project through the design, procurement and construction phases. For example, we've been able to establish a standardized scope meeting process, reduce our internal design review from five meetings to two, and set limits on design changes during construction. We are also working with other agencies and entities involved in the capital contracting process to identify areas of improvement. And we're already seeing results. For example, in the past calendar year, the Public Design Commission approval rate for projects submitted for review has gone from a low of approximately 20% to an average of 80% approval. These and other changes will shave months off of the capital process, and we're already seeing tangible results.

I am making it a priority to identify and assess projects that have stalled in the process and meet with our Capital division regularly to monitor these projects and see that they move forward in a timely manner. Thanks to the 55 new Capital positions funded by the administration last year, we have already reduced the number of backlogged projects. And with this expanded capacity, we are committed



to moving all of the fully funded projects in our backlog into design by Fall 2015, ensuring that we can begin work on newly funded Fiscal Year 2016 projects more quickly.

As we assess and examine our parks system, we know it needs to be designed with a focus on **resiliency and sustainability**. Hurricane Sandy was a brutal reminder to us all that when it comes to our city services, including our parks, we can no longer ignore the looming global threat of climate change. So, in partnership with the Office of Resiliency & Recovery, we furthered our efforts to ensure that our city's most vulnerable communities are protected from future weather events, as we continued our work to rebuild from Hurricane Sandy. For example, in the Rockaways, which saw some of the most severe damage from the storm, we continue our reconstruction of the Rockaway Boardwalk, which is making great progress. The entire boardwalk will be open for use in time for the summer beach season in 2016, and we anticipate the completion of boardwalk construction by Memorial Day 2017. To make sure our internal operations are sustainable, our 5 Boro Citywide Services team helps our agency operate in the most environmentally responsible manner possible- from installing "green roofs" on our office buildings and garages, to transitioning our vehicle fleet to incorporate more alternative fuel and electric vehicles, to creating a Preventive Maintenance team to repair our existing boilers and extend their lifespan, creating \$4.9 million in savings for Fiscal Year 2015..

In a landmark example of our efforts to "think green," later this year we will mark an historic milestone for NYC Parks, planting the millionth tree of the MillionTreesNYC initiative, two years ahead of schedule. This remarkable success has demonstrated the importance of strengthening our efforts to care for our city's urban forest. Trees provide a vast array of social, economic and environmental benefits for all New Yorkers: ranging from increased property values and improved air quality to reducing storm water runoff and reducing home energy costs by providing valuable shade for buildings—millions of dollars in annual economic benefits.

We recognize that we have a responsibility to constantly improve the way we care for and maintain the trees we plant. Thanks to the Mayor and City Council's leadership, Fiscal Year 2015 saw the highest level of block-pruning funding in 13 years, and will allow us to prune over 70,000 trees this year. This increased investment means our pruning cycle will surpass the industry-standard of 7 years, and result in a pruning cycle of 5 years. The funding provided in Fiscal Year 2015 will allow us to remove 6,700 stumps and continue to remove 99% of reported dead trees within 30 days—which is a monumental undertaking. Starting in May, we will launch **Trees Count 2015**, our street tree census, which provides crucial information to improve our planting program and to quantify the benefits of our street trees. This citywide initiative aims to map every street tree on every block in New York City. The data collected will further our understanding of the existing Urban Forest and support our future planning efforts while also providing a publicly accessible citywide map - a digital hub for tree stewards to track their efforts and connect with like-minded neighbors.

In addition to ensure we do what we can to protect the environment, city agencies have another responsibility -- to be thoughtful stewards of public dollars, eliminating waste and inefficiency wherever possible. So, earlier this year, we launched a new



division dedicated to **Innovation and Performance Management** and work is underway to significantly improve our oversight of the park system and our service delivery to the public. To that end, we have accelerated the roll-out of our Ops21 program, which increases the efficiency of our mobile work crews tasked with the daily litter and cleaning of parks. By establishing clear guidelines and optimizing the travel routes of our cleaning crews, we have been able to save an average of 30 minutes per crew per day - the productivity equivalent of adding 63 full-time maintenance staff. This effort will result in cleaner parks and smarter use of our resources.

Where suitable facilities were available, maintenance and operations hubs were created as part of Ops21 at Mill Pond in the Bronx, Kosciuszko Pool in Brooklyn, and Forest Park and Flushing Meadows-Corona Park in Queens. These hubs allow the pooling of staff, vehicles and equipment -- reducing the amount of time spent traveling, reducing downtime for vehicle and equipment repair and increasing the number of staff available for mobile crews and special projects. We are currently assessing whether additional hubs can be created through the modification of existing facilities or construction of new facilities. We are also developing new outward facing performance measures and metrics that can offer insight into the impact of the NYC Parks system, the health and condition of the system on an individual park basis, as well as internal operational efficiency and effectiveness measures.

I would be remiss if I didn't take a moment to recognize the excellent work done by our uniformed officers who serve the public and enforce our park rules: our 27 Urban Park Rangers, who connect New Yorkers to the natural world through environmental education and programming, our Park Security Service staff, many of whom are seasonal hires who provide an important presence and enhance the experience of our park users, and especially our 280 Parks Enforcement Patrol (PEP) officers. In addition to proactively patrolling busy parks and hot spots, and issuing summonses for quality-of-life violations, many of our officers go above and beyond the call of duty.

We recognize that community residents form strong emotional attachments to their neighborhood parks, and public input is a vital and valuable source of feedback. So, we have placed a renewed emphasis on **community engagement** as a catalyst for creative **planning and placemaking**, so we can make our parks special destinations. We need to design parks that address New York's changing demographics, since different generations and people from varying cultural backgrounds have different values, needs and aspirations, and seek different experiences from their parks. We plan to modernize the way we interact with the public, incorporating innovative techniques and strategies, which is reflected in our grassroots and community outreach efforts.

In 2015, Partnerships for Parks, a joint program of NYC Parks and the City Parks Foundation, was able to double its grassroots outreach capacity and increased the resources it makes available to growing park groups by 30%, including trainings, grants, staff support, and tools and supplies. Our GreenThumb division, which supports the city's community gardens, launched its Farmer's Market grant program, which will support up to 18 community garden-led projects, created 23 new community gardens with active residents, and started Youth Leadership Councils to



build the next generation of gardeners. Our Forestry, Horticulture and Natural Resources division expanded our community engagement efforts to include the full breadth of the city's natural landscape – street trees and forests, coastal areas and freshwater wetlands, green infrastructure sites and dunes. Through these and other efforts, last year we engaged over 60,000 volunteers in supporting their local parks, creating stronger communities and bringing New Yorkers closer together.

I'd like to highlight a few other key statistics, to give you a sense of the full range of the work we do. In 2014, we restored 33 acres of natural areas and formalized 2,500 linear feet of trails in Alley Pond Park to protect wetlands and maintain safe public access. We planted over 722,000 bulbs in parks, pruned over 53,000 trees, and planted 49,000 new park trees. We brought 490 public art exhibits into our parks, welcomed thousands of New Yorkers to our free citywide event festivals and gave over \$160,000 in small grants to community groups interested in programming their public spaces. Since January 2014, we have broken ground on 70 improved parks and park facilities and completed construction on 122 projects.

We're proud of all of these achievements. But we want to go even further, and our plans for 2016 are even more ambitious. Mayor de Blasio's Preliminary Budget reflects this, including almost \$16 million in new funding for NYC Parks.

With initial funding for a citywide **Capital Needs Assessment** in Fiscal Year 2016, we will be able to develop a more comprehensive understanding of our capital needs throughout the park system, so we can allocate resources to the parks that really need it and provide timely information about a park's condition. This funding will allow NYC Parks to hire a team of experts to develop clear metrics and a consistent methodology to assess specific capital improvements for park facilities throughout the city. We will then implement this plan in the months and years to come, creating a new division to go out in the field and evaluate our assets annually. This capital needs assessment will give us the tools to keep our parks in a state of good repair on an ongoing basis, implement a preventative maintenance program and make the best decisions about spending city dollars.

Every New Yorker has a unique and individual relationship with their local park, and one person might experience their park in a very different way than another person. With funding to develop a **Park Usership Survey**, NYC Parks will be able to better understand how many people use our parks, what they do there, and where they come from. We have a rich anecdotal understanding of who uses our parks, but have never measured usership in a systematic and consistent way. Comprehensive usership information will allow us to better target our efforts to make the most of everything we do, from capital investments to maintenance to programming. This leads to smarter investment of resources, and build better ballfields, playgrounds and pools for our children and families.

Thanks to \$1.8 million that the Mayor has provided in annual funding for **pre-design site testing and analysis**, we'll take an important step forward in our work to improve the capital process. This funding will allow us to better understand site conditions before we begin work on a capital project so we can provide more accurate estimates to stakeholders and elected officials, design our projects more thoughtfully to take significant subsurface environmental conditions into account and reduce the number of surprises we encounter in construction, such as contaminated



or hazardous material. We estimate the \$1.8 million will cover more thorough investigations for 40 sites in a given year, which will dramatically improve our ability to deliver projects on time and within budget.

Our recreation centers continued to be a vital source of recreational opportunities for New Yorkers. Our membership rolls increased by 11%, close to 16,000 new users, over the past year. To date, we've trained over 32,000 kids in swim safety at NYC Parks' indoor and outdoor pools. Shape Up NYC expanded, providing 333 free classes per week at 183 sites. We expanded the Kids in Motion to 30 additional sites, welcoming over 575,000 young participants to 123 parks and playgrounds and continued to serve more than 3,000 children participating in citywide fall/winter sports leagues such as Flag Football, Basketball and Street Hockey. Thanks to previous mayoral funding, we've started design work for comprehensive renovation projects at six recreation centers. Furthermore, we plan on bringing improvements to an additional 11 recreation centers across the city through dedicated requirement contracts, with construction expected to start early next year. Also we're pleased to add that this year's Preliminary budget provides an increase of over \$500,000 in funding will allow all of our NYC Parks recreation centers to be open at least 6 days a week, and hire additional dedicated maintenance staff.

NYC Parks shares the Mayor's commitment to confront the epidemic of traffic fatalities and injuries on our streets. In this Preliminary budget, the Mayor has provided new funding which will allow agency staff to be retrained in compliance with the Mayor's "**Vision Zero**" traffic safety initiative. Death and injury on city streets is not inevitable or acceptable, and we're proud to join this effort to help save lives.

The Mayor's Preliminary Budget also recognized the important role community gardens can play in the neighborhoods they serve by providing almost \$500,000 in new annual funding for the **GreenThumb program**. Our community gardens provide much-needed green space to neighborhoods and school, to promote environmental education, encourage local food production, nurture intergenerational and intercultural relationships and activate otherwise unused open space. The GreenThumb program has traditionally relied primarily on federal block grant funding, but this brand-new funding commitment from the Mayor will allow GreenThumb to increase its staffing level by close to 40%.

Along with strong support from the Mayor and City Council for these initiatives and other efforts, we have tremendous partners in our non-profits, committed park stewards and grassroots volunteers, who help us create vibrant parks and public spaces in all five boroughs. We know that the best parks are those where citizens participate in the lives of their parks, and to that end we have over 1,800 partnerships across the five boroughs with the public, private and nonprofit sectors.

Our most critical partnership, though, is our partnership with the tens of thousands of individual New Yorkers who dedicate their time and skills to improve our parks. I'm inspired by the passion that New Yorkers have for their parks, and I share that passion. Our parks are a haven of tranquility and recreation for millions of our city residents, as well as tourist attractions that draw millions of visitors from around the world. We have a tremendous opportunity to build a 21<sup>st</sup> Century park system that all New Yorkers can be proud of. My goal as Commissioner is to make sure our



agency's culture shifts from one of simply "maintaining" our parks, to truly "caring for" our parks- which will reflect an even greater degree of emotional attachment and dedication to the work we do.

Thank you for allowing me to testify before you today and for your dedication to creating thriving parks and open spaces for all New Yorkers. We look forward to working with the Mayor and the City Council to **create a bright, green future with a more inclusive and innovative park system.** We value your partnership and thank you for your support of our agency. Now, I would be happy to answer any questions that you may have. Joining me will be First Deputy Commissioner, Liam Kavanagh and Chief of Community Outreach and Partnership Development, Kate Spellman.



**New York City Council  
Committee on Parks & Recreation  
Preliminary Budget Hearing  
March 9, 2015**

**New York Restoration Project Testimony  
by Deborah Marton  
Executive Director**

Good morning, Chairman Levine, Committee members, and distinguished colleagues. I am Deborah Marton, Executive Director of New York Restoration Project (NYRP). With budget season in full swing, I am here to highlight four initiatives that are well-deserving of continued and expanded funding in fiscal year 2016.

As you know, early this year the Department of Parks & Recreation (DPR) and this Committee established staff positions within DPR to develop and manage partnerships with conservancy groups like NYRP. I commend this decision and am confident this new structure will maximize efficiencies between DPR and conservancies or “friends of” groups. We at NYRP have already experienced the benefits. For four years, NYRP has been operating Sherman Creek Park in Manhattan’s Inwood neighborhood without a current license agreement. While renewing extensions of the expired agreement rendered our activities there legal, obviously the situation was not ideal, especially given the fact that NYRP invests approximately \$1.2M annually in operations and maintenance there, not including any capital work. Thanks to this new structure at DPR, we have been notified that we are about to receive a new license agreement.

To facilitate the work of established conservancies like NYRP, clear communication channels and systems for approvals are essential. Younger groups have different needs, initially focused on capacity building activities like establishing 501(c)(3) status and applying for funding. Partnerships for Parks has been supporting emerging park groups for years, and the addition of senior level partnership staff within



DPR strengthens DPR's commitment to building capacity in parks across the city. Increasing DPR's internal systems to manage established conservancies goes hand in hand with building capacity in emerging groups, and it is therefore imperative to maintain or increase funding for DPR's partnership staff and for Partnerships for Parks.

We also commend and support the Community Parks Initiative (CPI). As you know, CPI aligns with the work NYRP has been doing for 20 years, restoring and improving open spaces in high-need communities citywide. As CPI moves forward, I direct this committee's attention to our city's mid-size parks, like St. Mary's in Mott Haven, Kissena Park in Kew Gardens, or Kaiser Park in Coney Island. Too large to be CPI parks, these parks need and deserve investment, and the communities surrounding them don't currently have the resources to develop or operate a traditional conservancy. Yet these parks are integral to the well-being and social capital of the neighborhoods they serve and of our city as a whole, for a number of reasons.

Mid-size parks provide ecosystem services for the city, providing habitat and managing stormwater, and in many cases are historically important works of landscape architecture. They also provide health benefits that may not be available in smaller parks. For example, research conducted by Columbia University's Mailman School of Public Health shows a correlation between body mass index and access to a park of six acres or more. These parks strengthen bodies and they also strengthen communities. I personally have witnessed how NYRP's capital improvements and public programming at Sherman Creek Park and upper Highbridge Park have reconnected the Inwood neighborhood to its waterfront. Many neighbors didn't know Sherman Creek Park existed; today it's a neighborhood amenity with a stewardship group of over 100 members who logged 720 hours in 2014. These volunteers still need NYRP to manage park operations and capital work, but their contributions become more meaningful and effective every year.

I urge strong consideration of mid-size parks as the budget is finalized. These parks would benefit from capital investment, and I recommend and advise simultaneous or advance allocation of expense funding for master planning. Mid-size parks often suffer from a lack of cohesion, as ad-hoc improvements are made over the course of many years. Master planning in advance of a capital allocation increases efficiency, results in better designs and management plans, and also increases opportunities for attracting private donors. DPR could conduct the planning in-house or work through groups like NYRP,

who could look at the site with fresh eyes and bring years of experience engaging communities around design.

Finally, I respectfully request City Council's continued support of NYRP. Previous support from City Council has allowed NYRP to provide public programs in our parks and community gardens, such as yoga classes, outdoor concerts, and urban ecology lessons for public schools students. I am very grateful for your belief in our work. This year, I request your continued support of public programs in the open spaces we manage. We have also made a capital request for trucks to replace the dilapidated and unsafe vehicles we've had for about 10 years and would be grateful for your assistance there as well.

City Council, and especially this Committee, has been a great ally to NYRP over the years, and we deeply appreciate your support.

Thank you.



**Testimony of Heather Lubov**  
**Executive Director, City Parks Foundation**  
**Monday, March 9, 2015**  
**NYC Council Parks Committee FY2016 Preliminary Budget Hearing**

Good afternoon. Thank you Chairman Levine and members of the committee for the opportunity to testify today. I'm Heather Lubov, Executive Director of City Parks Foundation.

City Parks Foundation is a non-profit organization committed to supporting a sustainable and equitable park system. Our ethos is simple: *we believe thriving parks reflect thriving communities*. We are unique in offering free programs in parks in all five boroughs, providing 425,000 people each year with high quality programming including arts through SummerStage and the PuppetMobile; tennis, golf, track and field, and seniors fitness programs; environmental educational for public school students in 13 neighborhoods; and community building programs citywide. All of our programs are free of economic barriers and serve to promote healthy and vibrant communities. For the coming fiscal year, we will work in more than 350 parks in every council district with a distinct focus on serving parks with the greatest needs.

This year, thanks to the Council's support, we have offered track and field programs to 1,900 youngsters in 11 parks, bringing high-quality instruction and equipment into neighborhoods where few organized athletic opportunities exist. Leadership Expense Funds have also allowed us to connect more than 2,700 students, their teachers and families to experiential learning and leadership development opportunities in urban forests, coastal areas, community gardens, and recreation centers. Our program makes a deep, sustained impact on science learning while nurturing a positive, lifelong relationship between these young people and the natural world.

The Council's ground-breaking **Parks Equity Initiative** allowed us to revitalize and empower *Partnership for Parks*, the public-private partnership with NYC Parks that facilitates community engagement as a catalyst for creative planning and placemaking. Parks Equity Initiative funding allowed us to hire necessary staff, and to double the amounts awarded in small capacity fund grants, increasing the average grant amount by 42%. Our technical assistance program, which serves as a free, expert consulting team to help local friends groups who obtain the skills they need to support their community visions, will reach 15% more park leaders this year and the number of intensively supported groups will increase by 25%. Finally, Catalyst, our most intensive outreach effort, is a 4-year intensive community-building program, will be closing out its successful work in Soundview Park in the Bronx and East River Park in Manhattan, leaving those two parks with very active, collaborative partners who are highly effective park stewards. We will launch in two new waterfront locations, Faber Park in Staten Island and East River Esplanade (from East 96 to 135 Streets) in Manhattan, and continue in Kaiser Park in Brooklyn. Renewed funding for the Parks Equity Initiative will not only allow us to continue growing all of these community engagement tools, but it will also enable us to bring more residents into their parks through our highly-regarded arts, education and sports programs.

On behalf of City Parks Foundation, I want to thank the Council for its generous support last year, including Leadership funding and the groundbreaking Parks Equity Initiative. We request that you renew this funding in FY16, allowing our successful programs to continue, grow and expand. We are also requesting capital support for our flagship program, SummerStage, the

largest free performing arts festival in the City, with more than 200 free events around the city. Capital funds would allow us to replace an outdated stage and roof structure in Central Park's Rumsey Playfield and will significantly improve the concert-going experience for audiences from around the city who, for the last 30 years, have enjoyed more than 1,000 free performances in this cherished location. We look forward to working with the City on this project.

City Parks Foundation's free programs are synchronized with the City's open space plans and the Parks Department's work, but we are an a non-profit organization and need the Council's assistance to continue supporting the vision for an equitable park system. Attached to this testimony is a detailed description of our programs and a list of the parks, schools, and recreation centers where our programs will be located in 2015 with the corresponding City Council Member. Thank you again for hearing my testimony today. I look forward to working with you to continue to offer free programming to all New Yorkers.

Summary of City Parks Foundation FY16 Citywide Funding Requests		
Type of Request	Program / Project to be Funded	Amount Requested
City Council Speaker / Citywide Expense	Sports and Education Programs	\$100K
City Council Initiative	Parks Equity Initiative	\$750K
Capital	SummerStage Stage Replacement	\$1.015M - City Council \$1.015M - Dept of Cultural Affairs <u>\$1M - Manhattan Borough President</u> \$3.03M - Total

## ABOUT CITY PARKS FOUNDATION

**City Parks Foundation** (CPF) is the only independent, nonprofit organization whose mission is to offer programs in parks throughout the five boroughs of New York City. We work in more than 350 parks citywide, presenting a broad range of programs in an effort to promote healthy and vibrant communities. Our programs and community building initiatives reach 425,000 people annually. We create holistic programming that attracts communities to their local green spaces; provides artistic, athletic, and educational enrichment, targeting high needs neighborhoods in particular; and cultivates community leaders. Our ethos is simple: *we believe thriving parks reflect thriving communities*. CPF helps turn New York City's parks into centers of community development. The majority of our programming is provided at no cost, and we offer our programs in neighborhoods that would not otherwise have access to such resources.

## ARTS

**SummerStage** is the **largest free performing arts festival in New York City** representing multiple disciplines and genres including music, dance, theater, kids, and contemporary circus arts. Exciting, emerging performers as well as more iconic artists fan out to every borough presenting 850 arts and cultural performances annually to a record attendance of 360,000. The Festival is programmed by our team of talented curators to speak to the unique interests of New York's diverse communities and includes Family Days and programs suited for young and old alike. SummerStage also includes the popular ***Charlie Parker Jazz Festival***, a music-filled weekend that takes place each August, with free performances in Tompkins Square Park in the East Village and in Marcus Garvey Park in Harlem, the neighborhoods where Parker lived and worked. The festival assembles some of the finest musicians in the world who reflect on Parker's musical individuality and genius, to promote appreciation for this highly influential and world-renowned artist. Six million New Yorkers have been entertained and enlightened over the last 30 years through this storied festival, which has featured such iconic talent as Curtis Mayfield, David Byrne, Max Roach, Patti Smith, Gil Scott Heron, James Brown, Pete Seeger, Jimmy Cliff, and Hugh Masekela. SummerStage has been an incredible springboard for emerging talent who have enjoyed great success in recent years such as Vampire Weekend, Alabama Shakes, The Black Keys, and Sharon Jones & the Dap Kings. CPF also runs the Swedish Cottage Marionette Theatre in Central Park and a traveling PuppetMobile, together reaching 76,000 audience members around the City.

## SPORTS

More than 12,000 youngsters and 1,000 seniors enjoy our free **golf, tennis, track & field**, and **fitness** programs every year in 60 park locations citywide. Our sports programming brings high-quality instruction and equipment into neighborhoods where few organized athletic opportunities exist. We encourage youngsters to engage in a sport for life, teaching them both the hard skills required of the game, and also the life-skills that come along with each sport -- integrity, sportsmanship, confidence, and perseverance.

**CityParks Tennis** provides free equipment and instruction to youth ages 5-16, twice a week, for six weeks every summer. This free program lets young people learn the sport and progress

through three levels of instruction, with additional opportunities to build their knowledge and skills through tournaments, clinics, and an advanced training academy. Hundreds of graduates have won college scholarships, achieved regional and national rankings, and a talented handful has even played at the US Open.

**CityParks Golf** brings free instruction to over 1,200 children ages 5-16 each year. In addition to beginner and intermediate lessons, we offer an advanced training program for 25 talented youth under the direction of PGA professionals, supplemented by instructional clinics with professional players and advanced tournament play. By offering free instruction and access to equipment in communities across the five boroughs, CPF has been able to introduce thousands of kids to the game, who would not otherwise have the opportunity. The **CityParks Junior Golf Center** is a state-of-the-art facility in Bay Ridge, Brooklyn that provides free golf instruction to more than 2,500 kids each year, ages 7-17. Completely free of cost and only open to juniors, The **Junior Golf Center** is first comprehensive facility of its kind in the nation, and features a six-hole golf course, practice putting green, chipping green with sand trap, covered driving range, and a clubhouse with classroom space for learning.

**CityParks Track & Field** offers free instruction and use of equipment in a variety of track and field events, including short distance running with hurdles, the javelin, and long jump, to more than 2,000 children ages 5-16 each summer. The program culminates with a citywide track meet held at Icahn Stadium, the world class sports complex on Randall's Island, where our young athletes compete individually and in teams representing their home park in six track and field events.

**CityParks Seniors Fitness** presents two sessions of classes (spring and fall) that introduce seniors to athletic activities in a supportive and social environment to over 1,100 people 60 years of age and over. The program consists of free tennis instruction, yoga, or fitness walking. In addition to promoting fitness and well-being, the program also encourages seniors to enjoy and utilize the community resource of their local park.

New

Working in collaboration with the NY Football Club (NYFC), which is growing its presence in NYC, we will pilot **CityParks Soccer** program in 5 sites in low income neighborhoods for children ages 8-12 to test our model and to test demand before growing it on a citywide scale if it is found to be successful. We will offer a 2-hour "pick-up game" style instructional sessions twice per week, allowing approximately 200 kids to join a team and play throughout the summer and an end-of-season clinic.

New

In response to the Community Parks Initiative, CPF will create a fun and educational fitness program for kids ages 6-12, that is specifically designed for 16 of the CPI parks. (The sites will require us to scale-down our typical programming because they are smaller parks and playgrounds.) **Get Up and Go** will take place on ballfields and playgrounds and incorporate basic exercise, sports skills, and teamwork. Six weekly sessions will take place, concluding with a fun, parent/child obstacle course, complete with medals and prizes.

## EDUCATION

Our **education** programs enable more than 2,700 students to meet NYS learning standards and connect teachers, students, and families to experiential learning and leadership development opportunities in public spaces, including urban forests, coastal areas, community gardens, and recreation centers. Our goal is to make a deep, sustained impact on science learning while nurturing a positive, lifelong relationship between the natural world and the youth we serve.

***Learning Gardens*** rehabilitates abandoned or underused community gardens in low-income neighborhoods and turns them into vibrant learning centers for the entire community. The program engages participants and community members through hands-on educational lessons, community celebrations, and gardening workshops. During the school year, students from local schools receive a series of in-class and garden-based lessons that are linked to the core mandated curriculum and support hands-on, active learning. Learning Gardens annually reaches more than 750 youth—from elementary school to high school—fostering knowledge and skills in urban ecology through sustained interaction with CPF’s four community gardens, all located in neighborhoods identified as food deserts.

***CityParks Youth Made Media*** combines video and sound production, media literacy, and creative writing activities with academic support and life skills for middle and high school students. By providing free access to training in a variety of technological applications, ***CityParks Youth Made Media*** gives teens tools for academic success, as well as transferable skills for the workplace. Activities include: video production training (documentary and narrative); creative writing, storytelling, scriptwriting and poetry projects; photography and animation training; leadership development and internship training; and cultural field trips and workplace site visits.

***Coastal Classroom*** offers in school and out of school time water based lessons to students, teachers, and community members along the Queens and Brooklyn waterfronts. These lessons cover water ecology and quality, urban waterfront restoration, and preservation, sparking a love of learning and a commitment to conservation of our coasts and waterways. In August 2014, we piloted our first Coastal Classroom Summer Institute, a three week intensive focused on coastal ecology. We are also now piloting Coastal Classroom as an afterschool program. Throughout the year, youngsters will take to the waterways across New York City to explore marine wildlife, test water quality variables, and engage in service learning projects. In 2014, City Parks Education served a total of 181 students through Coastal Classroom, 136 at Hallet’s Cove and 45 at Kaiser Park (Coney Island).

***Seeds to Trees*** introduces New York City elementary and middle school children to nature in the urban environment, and provides public school teachers with professional development workshops, empowering them to use city parks as an extension of the classroom. CPF asks partnering middle schools to implement projects linked to the themes of the in-class lessons and coastal ecology.

**Green Girls** Summer Institute is an intensive three-week summer camp that promotes academic success, social-emotional development, and interest in science-related careers through hands-on lessons and educational excursions to city parks and forests. Green Girls study the biodiversity in plant and wildlife promoted by our urban forests, human and environmental health benefits provided by urban forests, and human impact on urban forests. They also engage in service-learning activities to help protect and conserve our urban parklands. Throughout the year, Green Girls interact with park rangers, foresters, ornithologists, and wildlife experts—with an emphasis on connecting Green Girls with female scientists in order to demonstrate to participants the broad range of opportunities available to women in the sciences. In September 2013, CPF introduced Green Girls as a new after-school program. In the after-school program, Green Girls explore water health in their community, with a focus on Newtown Creek, the East River, and fresh water management.

New

**CityParks After School** is a comprehensive afterschool program for youngsters in three Recreation Centers. The afterschool program focuses on the four program areas of CPF: environmental education, arts, sports/healthy living and parks stewardship—along with recreation and homework help. Within the program, science and media arts “clubs” will explore the natural world from as scientists and artists and youth will participate in art and healthy living tracks (ie. physical education, healthy cooking, etc.). Weekly field experiences engage participants in service learning, physical activities, and more.

## **PARKS ADVOCACY & COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT**

**Partnerships for Parks** is a joint program of CPF and NYC Parks. Every year *Partnerships* supports and empowers a growing network of 4,000 community groups and 50,000 volunteers dedicated to promoting their local parks and improving the surrounding communities. This award-winning program is inspired by the belief that active, involved communities are essential to vibrant parks, thriving neighborhoods, and a healthy city. Through direct engagement, intensive training and technical assistance, *Partnerships* enables citizens to play an active and effective role in decisions regarding their local green spaces.

**Catalyst** is a four-year, multi-million dollar initiative to revive three significant waterfront parks across New York City and build sustainable community development. Each Catalyst site has a full-time coordinator dedicated to working in the communities surrounding these parks, bringing them together as a group, to become stewards of the park. Over the four year period, the dedicated full-time staff will work with individuals or the “Friends of” group to bring CPF and Parks Department programs and resources to the park. At the end of the four years, these “Friends of” groups have the skills and resources to continue to advocate for their local park on their own. While *Catalyst* moves on to other sites at the end of the four year period, the newly established group will still be able utilize the resources of *Partnerships for Parks*.

**Partnerships Academy Workshops** are a series of free workshops provided to groups that are working in parks and open spaces. These workshops teach groups how to work with their local elected officials, promote their groups on social media, advocate for capital funding for their parks, obtain 501c3 status, navigate the Parks Department, and assist in network, event planning



and organizational development. The *Partnerships Academy Fellowship* is an six-month long leadership development program that supports park community group leaders to bring their organizations to the next level of their development. Community group leaders apply to either be a Participant Group or Mentor in the program. Participant groups create and implement challenging new projects, such as increasing membership, incorporating as a 501c3, or reaching higher fundraising goals. They are supported in their expansion by attending five in-person workshops lead by Partnerships for Parks staff, six hours of one-on-one support from their Mentor, and an online discussion group with the Fellowship community. The program wraps up with a graduation event hosted by the Parks Commissioner and the Executive Director of CPF where they celebrate their accomplishments and growth.

*Capacity Fund Grants* provides funding to community groups dedicated to parks with funding for projects to build their capacity. Grants focus on funding projects in any of the following five areas to help groups: events & programming, outreach and communications, group development, resources, and forming partnerships. It is our hope that the grant will serve as a springboard for groups to learn about fundraising. We expect that grantees will eventually outgrow Partnerships after receiving a Capacity Fund grant.

## 2015 PROPOSED PROGRAMMING BY COUNCIL DISTRICT

<b>BRONX</b>	<b>CPF Program</b>	<b>Council Member</b>
Crotona Park	SummerStage, SummerStage Kids	Arroyo
Martin Van Buren Playground	Get Up and Go	Arroyo
St. James Park	Tennis	Cabrera
Van Cortlandt (Classic Playground)	SummerStage Kids	Cohen
Van Cortlandt (Sachkerah)	SummerStage Kids	Cohen
Van Cortlandt (SW Playground)	SummerStage Kids	Cohen
Van Cortlandt Park	Seniors Fitness, Tennis	Cohen
Williamsbridge Oval	Tennis	Cohen
Woodlawn Park	Tennis	Cohen
Claremont Park	Get Up and Go	Gibson
West Bronx Synthetic Field	CityParks Soccer	Gibson
Haffen Park	Tennis, Golf, SummerStage Kids	King
Macombs Dam Park	Track & Field	Mark-Viverito
Mill Pond Park	Tennis	Mark-Viverito
People's Park	Get Up and Go	Mark-Viverito
St. Mary's Park	SummerStage, Tennis, Get Up and Go	Mark-Viverito
Soundview Park	Seniors Fitness	Palma
Poe Park	SummerStage Kids	Torres
Tremont Park	SummerStage Kids	Torres
Pelham Bay Park	Tennis, Golf, Track & Field, Seniors Fitness, SummerStage Kids	Vacca
<b>BROOKLYN</b>		
Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.	SummerStage Kids	Barron

Newport Playground	Get Up and Go	Barron
Brooklyn Bridge Park	Circus	Chin
Brower Park	SummerStage Kids	Cornegy
Herbert Von King Park	SummerStage, Golf	Cornegy
Jackie Robinson Playground	Tennis	Cornegy
Fort Greene Park	Tennis	Cumbo
South Oxford Park	Seniors Fitness	Cumbo
Underwood Park	SummerStage Kids	Cumbo
Kelly Playground	Tennis	Deutsch
Highland Park	Tennis	Espinal
Prospect Park	Tennis	Eugene
Bensonhurst Park	Tennis	Gentile
Calvert Vaux Park	Catalyst, Get Up and Go	Gentile
Dyker Beach Park	Junior Golf Center	Gentile
Leif Ericson Park	Tennis	Gentile
McKinley Park	Tennis	Gentile
Seth Low Playground	Get Up and Go	Greenfield
McCarren Park	Tennis	Levin
Vincent Abate Playground	Get Up and Go	Levin
Marine Park	Tennis, Golf, Seniors Fitness	Maisel
Betsy Head Playground	SummerStage, Track & Field	Mealy
Lincoln Terrace Park	Tennis	Mealy
Red Hook Park	SummerStage	Menchaca
Sunset Park	SummerStage Kids	Menchaca
Maria Hernandez Park	SummerStage Kids	Reynoso

Sternberg Park	Get Up and Go	Reynoso
Kaiser Park	Track & Field, Coastal Classroom, Tennis, Catalyst	Treyger
<b>MANHATTAN</b>		
Alfred E. Smith Playground	SummerStage Kids	Chin
Columbus Park	SummerStage Kids, Get Up and Go	Chin
Seward Park	SummerStage Kids, Get Up and Go	Chin
Courtney Callender Playground	SummerStage Kids	Dickens
Frederick Johnson Playground	Tennis	Dickens
Marcus Garvey Park	SummerStage, Circus, Charlie Parker Jazz Festival	Dickens
Carl Schurz Park	Seniors Fitness	Kallos
Morningside Park	SummerStage Kids	Levine
Riverside Park	Tennis	Levine
Thomas Jefferson Park	Track & Field, Golf, CityParks Soccer, Seniors Fitness, Catalyst	Mark-Viverito
East River Park	Tennis, Track & Field, SummerStage	Mendez
Tompkins Square Park	Charlie Parker Jazz Festival, Get Up and Go	Mendez
Highbridge Park	SummerStage	Rodriguez
Inwood Hill Park	Tennis, Seniors Fitness	Rodriguez
J. Hood Wright Park	SummerStage Kids	Rodriguez
Central Park	Seniors Fitness, Tennis, Mainstage	Rosenthal
<b>QUEENS</b>		
Astoria Park	Tennis, Track & Field, Seniors Fitness, Get Up and Go	Costantinides
Forest Park	Tennis, Track & Field	Crowley

Juniper Valley Park	Tennis, Track & Field	Crowley
Flushing Meadows Corona Park	Golf, Tennis, Seniors Fitness	Ferreras
Playground for All Children	Get Up and Go	Ferreras
Kissena Park	Tennis	Koo
Mario Fajardo	Golf	Koo
Rufus King Park	SummerStage Kids	Lancman
Det. Keith L. Williams Park	Track & Field	Miller
Roy Wilkins Park	Soccer, Seniors Fitness	Miller
Bayswater Park	Get Up and Go	Richards
Brookville Park	Tennis	Richards
Flushing Memorial Fields	Tennis	Vallone
Queensbridge Park	SummerStage, SummerStage Kids	Van Bramer
Alley Pond Park	Tennis, Golf	Weprin
Cunningham Park	Tennis, Seniors Fitness	Weprin
Baisley Pond Park	Tennis, Golf	Wills
Rochdale Park	SummerStage Kids	Wills
<b>STATEN ISLAND</b>		
Bloomingdale Park	SummerStage Kids	Ignizio
Clove Lakes Park	SummerStage	Rose/Matteo
Conference House Park	Adventure Race	Ignizio
Corporal Thompson Park	Track & Field, Golf, CityParks Soccer	Rose
Faber Park	SummerStage Kids, Seniors Fitness, Catalyst	Rose
Grandview Playground	Get Up and Go	Rose
Greenbelt Park	Seniors Fitness	Matteo

Ocean Breeze Park	Track & Field	Matteo
Silver Lake Park	Tennis, Golf	Rose
Walker Park	Tennis	Rose
Willowbrook Park	SummerStage Kids	Matteo
Wolfes Pond Park	Tennis	Ignizio

#### EDUCATION PROGRAM PARTNERS

Partner	Program	Council Member
Grove Hill Playground (158th & Eagle Ave)	Learning Gardens	Arroyo
MS424	Learning Gardens	Arroyo
Good Shepard	Seeds to Trees	Arroyo
University Heights HS	Learning Gardens	Arroyo
Kappa V/IS518	Learning Gardens, Youth Made Media	Barron
PS184	Learning Gardens	Barron
Abib Garden (495 Osborn Street)	Youth Made Media	Barron
Brooklyn Democracy Academy	Youth Made Media	Barron
Brownsville Recreation Center	Youth Made Media	Barron
K678	Seeds to Trees	Barron
PS386	Seeds to Trees	Cabrera
The Young Women's Leadership School	Seeds to Trees	Cabrera
New Settlement Community Campus	Learning Gardens	Cabrera
MS534	Seeds to Trees	Cornegy
Herbert Von King Rec Center	After School	Cornegy

PS/MS161	Seeds to Trees	Dickens
PS106	Seeds to Trees	Espinal
MS 301	Seeds to Trees	Gibson
Bronx International HS	Learning Gardens	Gibson
Bronx International HS	Youth Made Media	Gibson
HS for Environmental Studies	Learning Gardens	Johnson
Queens Community House	Youth Made Media	Koslowitz
Lost Battalion Hall Rec Center	Youth Made Media, After School	Koslowitz
YMCA at MS 200	Youth Made Media	Lancman
Queens Collegiate HS	Learning Gardens	Lancman
MS514	Seeds to Trees	Levine
Thomas Jefferson Rec Center	Youth Made Media, After School	Mark-Vivierito
IS51	Seeds to Trees	Matteo
Eagle Academy	Seeds to Trees	Mealy
Brooklyn Law and Tech HS	Learning Gardens	Mealy
Umoja Garden (Broadway & Putnam)	Learning Gardens	Mealy
PS24	Seeds to Trees	Menchaca
Red Hook Recreation Center	Youth Made Media	Menchaca
MS 8	Learning Gardens	Miller
Det. Keith L. Williams Park	Learning Gardens	Miller
PS274	Learning Gardens	Reynoso
Bushwick Leaders	Learning Gardens	Reynoso
PS21	Seeds to Trees	Rose
Faber Park Field House	Youth Made Media	Rose

MS250/Westside Collaborative	After School	Rosenthal
Urban Assembly for Green Careers	Learning Gardens	Rosenthal
IS 204	Seeds to Trees	Van Bramer
Hallet's Cove	Coastal Classroom	Van Bramer
HANAC Beacon	Green Girls	Van Bramer
MS 72	Learning Gardens	Wills
PS 160	Learning Gardens	Wills
PS 354	Learning Gardens	Wills





**New York City Council Committees on Finance  
Hearing on the FY16 Preliminary Budget  
March 9, 2015  
Submitted testimony of New Yorkers for Parks**

Good morning. I'm Tupper Thomas, Executive Director of New Yorkers for Parks, and it's my pleasure to testify on the Preliminary Budget as it relates to parks. We see many bright signs in this budget, but we also see some holes.

Use of our city's parks has gone way up in the past several years, and so has our city's population. Last year's announcement of the Community Parks Initiative raised our hopes that baseline funding for park staff would keep pace. This budget season, we see that we have to fight for that baseline funding again. To really express the administration's stated commitment to equity, and to create security and stability in park funding, the Administration needs to restore funding for some essential services that have fallen out of the budget.

We're excited that Parks will receive funding to study its usership and capital needs, but we have to address what's lacking now in order to make proper investments down the road. Mainly, \$8.75 million that went to fund essential maintenance and operations staff lines last year needs to be restored to the budget. Roughly half of that amount made it possible to hire operating staff for Community Parks Initiative locations. We strongly supported CPI explicitly for its provision of maintenance and operations money, and its community outreach. CPI can only succeed with this funding assured. Without that money in the baseline, we will lose playground associates, city park workers, PEP lines and gardeners, both citywide and in targeted CPI zones. CPI, and parks more broadly, need appropriate baseline funding for staffing. When the Council funds these positions on a one-shot basis, the city cannot attract quality applicants who are looking to build careers. Parks Enforcement Patrol officers, gardeners and playground associates, when properly supported, can send the message that the city cares about a community. This sense of community encourages neighbors to become more active in supporting their own parks.

For similar reasons, we need to restore money for City Parks Foundation, which supports community development work through the Partnerships for Parks program. Last year's Council addition of \$434,500 provided key staff and resources to provide technical assistance and capacity-building tools for community groups. For CPI to serve as an entry point for long-term care by local residents, we need these staff in place. We also see huge benefit in providing \$3.5 million to the Natural Resources Group, which would provide for field crews in each borough. The city has committed millions in capital to sensitive ecosystems, and good management requires maintenance to match.

Funding for these crews could go with funding enhancements park rangers, which can help the department expand Rangers' science and nature programming to more parks in low-income communities. Bringing nature into communities is crucial to solving the equity puzzle, so we urge the council to provide \$3.5 million for GreenThumb. This would fund 15 new staff positions, including increased staffing for the school garden program Grow to Learn, the Land Restoration Program, and GreenThumb Outreach Coordinators. Having an increased outreach presence would allow GreenThumb to provide more oversight and enforcement of garden rules, which would ensure that existing gardens are meeting their obligations to the communities they serve. It would also allow for more support to be provided for gardens that are currently struggling with membership or maintenance issues. Both of these

considerations would help existing community gardens serve their mission as neighborhood resources and open spaces. This would also pay for lumber, compost, and soil for gardens citywide.

And we should show that the city is also a good steward, so we need adequate funding for street and park tree care. We're asking for \$3 million for pruning, and for clearing tree stumps, many of which still remain in our parks post-Sandy. This amount would exceed the Council's \$1.75 million addition to last year's budget, and would allow for a more robust pruning and stump removal schedule citywide.

Thinking bigger, we urge the Council to provide \$500,000 for basic masterplanning of four to five mid-sized parks. The city needs to develop more inclusive, community-led practices for designing and maintaining them to meet changing needs. A masterplan creates a roadmap for the Council, borough presidents and communities to set priorities. It can also set a precedent for ongoing funding over several years of operation.

We believe a \$100 million addition to the budget for discretionary capital funding would provide a tremendous benefit for capital projects that have stalled due to funding shortages. Letting the Parks Department decide which projects need extra funding to push them to the finish line would pay off visibly citywide. We also echo the Parks Department's request to provide capital improvements in mid-sized parks.

More capital staff and more capital discretion add up to more resources in more places. With more realistic funding for staff and maintenance, and an eye toward long-term upgrades in parks of all sizes, the Council can make park equity much more than a discussion topic. Thank you.

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*For over 100 years, New Yorkers for Parks has built, protected and promoted parks and open spaces in New York City. Today, NY4P is the citywide independent organization championing quality parks and open spaces for all New Yorkers in all neighborhoods. More information: [www.ny4p.org](http://www.ny4p.org)*

## **Re: Testimony for the NYC City Council Parks Committee Preliminary FY16 Budget Hearing**

Good afternoon. Thank you for allowing me to testify. My name is Christina Taylor and I am the Executive Director of the Friends of Van Cortlandt Park. First of all, I want to thank our Councilman Andrew Cohen for his help in securing funding for the Van Cortlandt Park Forest Restoration Crew for the upcoming year. We are hopeful that with your continued support this crew will continue for many years to come.

The Friends is an independent community based organization which actively promotes the conservation and improvement of Van Cortlandt Park through environmental education and restoration and enhancement of the Park. We were founded in 1992 in response to a *New York Times* article describing the impact of declining budgets for parks like Van Cortlandt that lacked wealthy benefactors. It is unfortunate, that over 20 years later, the Parks Department is still not adequately funded.

With the largest NYC park, Pelham Bay and the 3<sup>rd</sup> largest park, Van Cortlandt, the Bronx has more parkland than any other borough. But we often wonder if we are getting our fair share of the budget to maintain these parks and keep them at the level that Bronxites deserve. While we are thankful that there was an increase in last year's budget of the Parks Department we still believe much more is needed. The Friends of Van Cortlandt Park would happily join you to urge Mayor de Blasio to increase funding for NYC Parks, especially those in the Bronx. The City also needs to become more creative in raising revenue for parks and the Friends have begun a comprehensive process to do just that. Now that NYC Parks has approved a comprehensive Master Plan for the first time in the park's history, the opportunity to solve the inequitable funding situation in Bronx parks has never been greater.

For the upcoming fiscal year, the Friends would like to request funding for the following:

1.) A Pedestrian Bridge over the Major Deegan to connect Van Cortlandt Park's eastern and western halves and connect the broken Old Croton Aqueduct Trail. In 1999, the City Council determined that the Department of Environmental Protection should build a Pedestrian Bridge if it was "feasible". A feasibility study found it is feasible but the DEP still has refused to pay for it. With the Pedestrian Bridge now part of Van Cortlandt Park's newly approved Master Plan, the time for action is now! We are once again asking the Mayor, the NYC Council and the Borough President to please press the DEP to keep its promise to fund this bridge.

2.) The Friends recently hired consultants to create a Trails Plan for the Park. This plan has been incorporated into the Park's Master Plan. The implementation of our plan will allow the 20 plus miles of hiking trails in the Park to become a hiking destination in New York City. We ask for city budget appropriations to finish the remaining work in the Trail Plan.

3.) Maintenance funding! We strongly believe that NYC Parks is not funded at a level needed for the agency to properly maintain and care for all of its parks. Each year, we see funding allocated for Capital Projects which vastly improve our parks through the building of new playgrounds, repairing of sports fields, installing bathrooms, etc.. But we don't see an increase in maintenance funding to keep the new facilities in good shape. Instead, after a few years, they fall into disrepair and need new capital funding to restore them. This can be avoided with ongoing maintenance. The budget should allocate more money to dedicated maintenance staff, PEP officers and other staff for the park.

The Friends of Van Cortlandt Park fully support the New York City Department of Parks and Recreation and its efforts to maintain and improve all parks in NYC. It is important to the future of our borough that we fund our Parks.



[www.CVHaction.org](http://www.CVHaction.org)

## **Parks Department Preliminary Budget Hearing 2015 Testimony**

Good afternoon. My name is Mia Bell, I am a leader and Board member at Community Voices Heard. I am here to talk about the importance of the Parks Opportunity Program as an alternative to the Work Experience Program in the Parks Department. Mayor DeBlasio committed to ending WEP during his campaign and HRA Commissioner Banks announced on October 1, 2014 that the city would phase out WEP.

We are glad that the Parks Department has already stopped receiving new WEP workers. Also, for 15 years the Parks Department has been a model alternative to WEP providing paid transitional jobs with training opportunities for thousands of people. Community Voices Heard is interested in maintaining POP, but also in improving it.

While there may be times when a person needs a short term position that is subsidized in order to earn points toward social security or to prove yourself able to hold a job. Most people need the positions to lead more often to permanent employment whether in the Parks or not.

We are glad that the Department is interested in this. There are sometimes CPW and CSA openings and the current JTP does not have a direct entry into those positions. We would like to create that pathway. There are also a large number of NYC Department of Environmental Protection positions which will be opening up in the preparation for climate change and to make the city more environmentally friendly. Certain training during the JTP position could prepare people for those positions.

Overall, we would like the training provided during the JTP position to lead to a credential that would help the person obtain permanent employment.

CVH is glad to know that Parks Department would like to extend the length of time for the JTP position to 9 months which may allow for better training as well. We would like to extend to 1 year, but we do not want there to be a reduction in CSAs as a result. There is a need for people to take care of the Parks which are such an amazing asset in our great city. Thank you.

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<b>New York City (main office)</b>	<b>Westchester County</b>	<b>Orange County</b>	<b>Dutchess County</b>
115 East 106th St., 3rd Floor New York, NY 10029 Tel: 212-860-6001 Fax: 212-996-9481	28 N Broadway, 2nd Floor Yonkers, NY 10701 Tel: 914-751-2641 Fax: 914-751-2642	98 Grand Street Basement Level Newburgh, NY 12550 Tel: 845-562-2020 Fax: 845-562-2030	29 North Hamilton St., Suite L03 Poughkeepsie, NY 12601 Tel: 845-790-5945 Fax: 845-790-5946

Testimony of Sirra Crippen, President of Local 1507., District Council 37 AFL-CIO  
Before the City Council Committee on Parks  
FY 2016 Preliminary Budget

Good afternoon Chairman Levine and fellow Parks committee members. My name is Sirra Crippen and I am the President of Local 1507 representing Gardeners in the NYC Parks & Recreation Department. My members work in all five boroughs weeding, planting, cultivating and caring for annuals, perennials, bulbs, plants, trees and shrubs.

I want to first start out by thanking the Council for the additional funding in FY 2015 for the Parks Department. This funding was used to increase our numbers by 39 additional Gardeners bringing our total to approximately 153 Gardeners. Parks has over 39000 acres of land, meaning that (1) one Gardener is responsible for maintaining an average of 254 acres of parkland. Councilmember's, the Department of Parks and Recreation is woefully underfunded and we request your support in making our communities and those underserved parks in our community beautiful.

Since the 2015 additional funding has not been baselined for FY 16, I am urging the Council to restore and increase the funding. If this funding is not restored, there will not be enough workers in the gardener line and other related titles to perform the duties I stated above. Furthermore, the maintenance and upkeep of the plants and shrubs will suffer, leading to blight and neighborhood decay.

The funding was supposed to hire 50 additional gardeners, but the Parks Department actually has so far hired only 39. There is still a need for more Gardeners in the Parks Department since we are trying to keep up with the day to day maintenance of the parks.

As we approach the start of the spring season in the next several weeks, there is a lot of work to be done to prepare the parks for the thousands of New Yorkers who will be taking strolls and enjoying the warmer weather in the parks. The beautification of parks is important to New Yorkers, as well as to the thousands of tourists, who visit these areas.

Once again, I am urging the Council to restore the additional funding in FY 16 for the gardener line and related parks department titles. Thank you for the opportunity to testify before you today and I will be happy to take any questions you may have.

**THE COUNCIL  
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. \_\_\_\_\_ Res. No. \_\_\_\_\_

☐ in favor ☐ in opposition

Date: 3/9/15

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Christina Taylor

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

I represent: Friends of Van Cortlandt Pk

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

**THE COUNCIL  
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. \_\_\_\_\_ Res. No. \_\_\_\_\_

☐ in favor ☐ in opposition

Date: 3/9/15

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Norberto Ferrer

Address: 125 Barclay Street NY NY 10007

I represent: Member, Local 508, DC37

Address: (Lifeguard Supervisors)

**THE COUNCIL  
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. \_\_\_\_\_ Res. No. \_\_\_\_\_

☐ in favor ☐ in opposition

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Mat + Prury St John

Address: Park St Silver

I represent: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

Please complete this card and return to the Sergeant-at-Arms



**THE COUNCIL  
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

**Appearance Card**

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. \_\_\_\_\_ Res. No. \_\_\_\_\_

☐ in favor ☐ in opposition

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Mitchell Silver

Address: Parks 3/11/15

I represent: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

**THE COUNCIL  
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

**Appearance Card**

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. \_\_\_\_\_ Res. No. \_\_\_\_\_

☐ in favor ☐ in opposition

Date: 3/9/15

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Kate Spellman

Address: NYC Parks

I represent: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

**THE COUNCIL  
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

**Appearance Card**

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☐ in favor ☐ in opposition

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Geoffrey Graft

Address: NYC Parks Advocates

I represent: NYC Parks Advocates

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

Please complete this card and return to the Sergeant-at-Arms

**THE COUNCIL  
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. \_\_\_\_\_ Res. No. \_\_\_\_\_

☐ in favor ☐ in opposition

Date: 3/9/15

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Deborah Marton

Address: 254 W 31 St, 10 Fl, NY, NY 10001

I represent: New York Restoration Project (NYRP)

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

**THE COUNCIL  
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. \_\_\_\_\_ Res. No. \_\_\_\_\_

☐ in favor ☐ in opposition

Date: 3/9/15

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Deborah Marton

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

I represent: New York Restoration Project

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

**THE COUNCIL  
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. \_\_\_\_\_ Res. No. \_\_\_\_\_

☐ in favor ☒ in opposition

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Mia Bell

Address: 115 E 106<sup>th</sup> St.

I represent: Community Voices Heard

Address: 115 E. 106<sup>th</sup> St.

Please complete this card and return to the Sergeant-at-Arms



**THE COUNCIL  
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. \_\_\_\_\_ Res. No. \_\_\_\_\_

☐ in favor ☐ in opposition

Date: 3/9/2015

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name:

Joseph M. Mpa

Address:

3920 Broadway

I represent:

Community Voices Heard

Address:

115 East 106 St.

**THE COUNCIL  
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. \_\_\_\_\_ Res. No. \_\_\_\_\_

☐ in favor ☐ in opposition

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name:

Ann Valdez

Address:

3178 Bayview Ave

I represent:

Self, Surtside Multiculture Garden

Address:

and C/H 115 E. 106th St.

**THE COUNCIL  
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. \_\_\_\_\_ Res. No. \_\_\_\_\_

☐ in favor ☐ in opposition

Date: 3/9/15

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name:

DAVID VIGIL

Address:

613 New Lots Ave Bklyn 11207

I represent:

East New York Fans!

Address:

Please complete this card and return to the Sergeant-at-Arms

**THE COUNCIL  
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. \_\_\_\_\_ Res. No. \_\_\_\_\_

☐ in favor ☐ in opposition

Date: 3/9/15

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Peter Stein

Address: 125 Barclay Street NY NY 10007

I represent: President, L. 508, DC37 (Lifeguard Supervisors)

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

**THE COUNCIL  
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. \_\_\_\_\_ Res. No. \_\_\_\_\_

☐ in favor ☐ in opposition

Date: 3/9/15

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Sirra Crippen

Address: 125 Barclay Street NY NY 10007

I represent: President, L. 1507 (NYC Dept of Parks Gardeners)

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

**THE COUNCIL  
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. \_\_\_\_\_ Res. No. \_\_\_\_\_

☐ in favor ☐ in opposition

Date: 3/9/15

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Keith Cavaliere

Address: 125 Barclay Street NY NY 10007

I represent: APSW, Pks Dept L. 983, DC37

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

Please complete this card and return to the Sergeant-at-Arms

**THE COUNCIL  
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

*Appearance Card*

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. \_\_\_\_\_ Res. No. \_\_\_\_\_

☐ in favor ☐ in opposition

Date: 3/9/15

**(PLEASE PRINT)**

Name: Marlene Giga

Address: 125 Barclay Street NY NY 10007

I represent: Treasurer, L. 983, DC37

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

**Please complete this card and return to the Sergeant-at-Arms**

**THE COUNCIL  
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

*Appearance Card*

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. \_\_\_\_\_ Res. No. \_\_\_\_\_

☐ in favor ☐ in opposition

Date: 3/9/15

**(PLEASE PRINT)**

Name: Joe Puleo

Address: 125 Barclay Street NY NY 10007

I represent: President, L. 983, DC37

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

**Please complete this card and return to the Sergeant-at-Arms**

**THE COUNCIL  
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

*Appearance Card*

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. \_\_\_\_\_ Res. No. \_\_\_\_\_

☐ in favor ☐ in opposition

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

**(PLEASE PRINT)**

Name: Heather Lubov

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

I represent: City Parks Foundation

Address: 830 Fifth Ave NYC 10065

◆ Please complete this card and return to the Sergeant-at-Arms ◆

**THE COUNCIL  
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

*Appearance Card*

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. \_\_\_\_\_ Res. No. \_\_\_\_\_

☐ in favor ☐ in opposition

Date: 3.9.15

**(PLEASE PRINT)**

Name: Tupper Thomas

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

I represent: New Yorkers for Parks

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

◆ Please complete this card and return to the Sergeant-at-Arms ◆