

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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Chairperson

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

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Geoffrey Croft  
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Mia Bell  
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Joseph Mpa  
Community Voices Heard  
Welfare to Work Campaign

Ann Valdez  
Community Voices Heard  
Surfside Multicultural Community Garden

CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: Good morning everybody. I'm Mark Levine Chair of the City Council Committee on Parks and Recreation. Welcome to our Fiscal 2016 Preliminary Budget hearing, and the Fiscal 2015 Preliminary Mayor's Management Report for the Department of Parks and Recreation. Perhaps because none of my colleagues set their clocks ahead for Daylight Savings, you're going to be stuck with me for a little bit. Or, maybe they're enjoying the first taste of spring, but I know they'll be joining us soon. But we're going to begin. In line with the budget process mandated by the City Charter that ultimately will lead to the adoption of the Fiscal 2016 Budget, today we will hear testimony from the Department of Parks and Recreation on its expense and capital budget for Fiscal 2016.

New York City's park system has improved dramatically in almost every way in recent years. With better upkeep, greater safety, and dazzling new renovations. And the most recent Mayor's Management Report shows that the upward trend has continued over the past year. The Parks Department accomplished this feat despite a tight operating budget thanks to the creativity and hard work of its staff, the

efforts of thousands of volunteers, and the increasing generosity of private donors. But improvements in our park system have not been felt equally throughout the city. That fact is inseparable from the decades long decline in what we spend on our park system relative to the City's total budget. Increased public spending is vital to the wellbeing of our precious green spaces, especially in low and moderate income neighborhoods that lack access to the private dollars that have flowed into parks in wealthier areas of our city.

A few statistics illustrate some of the countless ways in which inadequate public funding impacts our parks and the millions of New Yorkers who rely on them. Today, there are a total of only 28 parks rangers for all of New York City down dramatically from nearly 200 in years past. Rangers serve as ambassadors to the natural world supporting environmental education, outdoor recreation, wildlife management, and active conservation. But today, the number is so paltry that many New Yorkers will simply never come into contact with them, and might not ever be aware of their existence. Our city's sprawling network of natural areas, which totals more than

10,000 acres is today supported by a total staff of only 75. Far less than what we need to adequately maintain these natural resources, which plays such an important role in our city's environmental resilience, among other benefits.

The budget for supporting our city's 600 vitally important community gardens is so small that we can only purchase a total of 150 new tools for them annually. That's just one tool for every four gardens. Despite the fact that better parks enforcement consistently ranks at the top of the priority list for residents in every one of our districts, our city's 1,700 parks are patrolled by only 240 PEP officers, 98 of whom are privately funded, and thus serve only a select few parks. The entire borough of the Bronx with its 7,000 acres of parkland has only 26 PEP officers, and on any given shift there may be as few as four or five on duty.

At a time when New Yorkers increasingly demand digital connectivity for professional and personal purposes, only 56 of our 1,700 parks have Wifi access, and only 20 of these have completely free access. The Parks Department's Preliminary Fiscal Year 2016 budget does not address these

pressing needs. In fact, while there is a nominal increase in the Department's budget from \$413 million in Fiscal Year '15 to \$428 million for Fiscal Year '16, this actually represents a slight drop in the portion of the total city budget we're devoting to our parks. From 0.56% this year to 0.55% next year. At a time when usage of our parks is soaring with only 3--with over 3.3 million visitors annually to our 35 recreation centers, this proposed budget may actually amount to a decrease in funding per user. And on the critical measure of headcount, the 6,936 full-time equivalent positions that would be funded under the proposed fiscal year '15 Budget would actually represent a drop of 90 employees. Nor does the department's Preliminary Budget include baselining of any of the enhanced measures, which the City Council put in place last year. This includes \$5 million for Park Enforcement Officers; \$8.7 million for Park maintenance workers; \$1 million for tree pruning; \$750,000 for stump removal; and \$750,000 for our Parks Equity Initiative, which helps support volunteer stewardship groups in Parks in low and moderate income areas.

The lack of base-lining in any of this funding is particularly puzzling because much of it was used to support the Mayor's excellent Community Parks Initiative. I'm hopeful that in its Executive Budget the Administration will find the funds to sustain CPI, and all of the other vital initiatives the Council supported last year. But I hope that the Mayor's Executive Budget Proposal will go further than just restoring last year's funding. Among the additional funds that I hope we see are \$3.5 million for Green Thumb, an amount which would fund 15 new staff positions, including increased staffing for the School Garden Program, the Land Restoration Program, and Green Thumb Outreach Coordinators. This would also provide funding to procure resources such as lumber, compost, and soil for gardens citywide. I would also like to see \$3 million for three additional urban park rangers to supplement these dwindling programs for the important reasons I described earlier. I would like to see additional funding to ensure beaches and pools are open past Labor Day through to the end of September, at least on weekends.



I would like to see \$3.5 million in additional funding for the Natural Resources Group, which will allow it to deploy a full crew for each of the five boroughs. I would like to see \$500,000 added to the budget to support a master planning process for the City's midsize parks especially those which are regional draws with high usership. I would like to see \$3 million in additional funds for the Trees and Sidewalks Program, which helps repair severe sidewalk damage caused by tree and root growth. This program has experienced some significant cuts in recent years, creating a huge backlog in repair orders. I would like to see \$5 million added for the hiring of an additional 200 playground associates to build the peak season staffing level for all playgrounds. These important staffers provide both programmatic playground support and maintenance of comfort stations. And currently, we have far too few to serve all 680 playgrounds, which also have comfort stations. Lest this all sound like an extravagant shopping list, I'll point out that every one of these enhancements combined would only push the Parks Department Budget from 0.55% to 0.57% of the City's total budget.

There are increases in the Parks' Capital Budget, which I would like to see as well, including items, which relate directly to two expense measures I've just mentioned. One, would be \$5 million in capital budget increase to the Green Thumb program to provide for infrastructure needs such as fencing, irrigation systems, and other equipment for our city's 600 community gardens. And I'd also like to see a substantial allocation of capital money, perhaps \$200 million for the midsize or regional parks, which serve so many New Yorkers, but have urgent unmet large-scale investment needs. I look forward to hearing the Administration's testimony on these many issues, and on the Parks budget as a whole. And I would now like to pass it off to Commission Mitchell Silver, Commissioner of the Parks Department.

[background comments]

CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: I'm going to ask Chris Sartori to do the perfunctory affirmation.

COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Chris Sartori, Committee. Do you affirm to tell the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth, and to

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2 respond to council member questions honestly in your  
3 testimony today?

4 COMMISSIONER SILVER: I do.

5 CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: Forgive me,  
6 Commissioner. I just want to acknowledge that we've  
7 been joined by the one member of this committee who  
8 set his clock correctly this weekend, Council Member  
9 Alan Maisel of Brooklyn. Thank you.

10 COMMISSIONER SILVER: Well, good morning  
11 Chair Levine and members of the Parks Committee. I  
12 am Mitchell Silver, Parks Commissioner here in New  
13 York City. I am joined here today by a number of our  
14 senior staff. Thank you for allowing me the  
15 opportunity to discuss the Preliminary Budget for  
16 fiscal year 2016. As you may be aware, this may--  
17 this was my first preliminary hearing since I began  
18 my term as Parks Commissioner right before last  
19 year's Executive Budget hearing. I spent the last  
20 year observing our parks and operations. I've also  
21 spent time listening to elected officials, community  
22 board members, and parks advocates. As a result, we  
23 have already started addressing many of the key  
24 concerns that I have observed or issues that were  
25 brought to my attention. For that reason, I'm

excited to be here today to report on all the positive strides that we have made at the agency, and to report on our plans for next year. The Fiscal Year 2016 Preliminary Budget for NYC Parks is \$428 million, which is an increase of 3.6% from Fiscal Year 2015 Adopted Budget. Thanks to the leadership of Mayor de Blasio and a strong partnership with the New York City Council, NYC Parks has been able to make real progress toward 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 to make sure that 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 Parks' resources in a way that is fair. And so, to tackle this challenge head on, we've 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 outline 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 innovate 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 of our parks in our system hadn't seen capital investment in decades. Many in our city's most densely populated, fast growing and highest need communities. So in October, we joined Mayor de Blasio, Speaker Mark-Viverito, Public Advocate James, Council Member Levine and Koo to launch the Community Parks Initiative. We have marked a radical change in our approach to park development, delivering on immediate infusion of capital dollars enhancing program, maintenance, and community partnership building in neighborhood parks that are in most need. These 35 capital projects will bring better parks and playgrounds to 24 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 the neighborhood parks have been completed, and thanks to the hard work of Partnership for Parks' outreach staff, the level of participation was remarkable. Over 1,000 local residents came out to attend the 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 the 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 these CPI projects to connect stakeholder groups to technical assistance and grant programs. All of the schematic designs for our CPI projects will be presented to the community boards by June, and we plan to begin the procurement process by December. In addition, we're on track to complete 60 smaller scale target improvements that have been completed on a faster schedule to bring immediate results to other parks in high need communities. These repaired benches, repainted courts in multi-purpose play areas, and refurbish lawns can literally transform a park and deliver an improved experience for park users. Providing great

value for a relatively limited investments. NYC Parks oversees hundreds of capital projects at any given time. And we know that 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 improvement to your constituents more quickly and efficiently.

I'm happy to report that the Capital Projects Tracker has been a tremendous success receiving more than 56,000 hits since going live in October of 2014. We're dedicated to this spirit of transparency and openness, and we're glad that the public has been--has 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 the capital project through the design,

procurement, and construction phases. For example, we've been able to standardize the SCOPE meeting process; reduce our internal design review from five meetings to two; and set limits on design changes during construction. We're also working with other agencies and entities involved in the capital tracking process--contracting process to identify areas of improvement, and we are already seeing results. For example, this 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 80% approval. These and other changes will shave months off of the capital process, and we are already seeing tangible results. I'm making it a priority to identify and assess projects that have been 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've already reduced the number of backlogged projects. And with this expanded capacity, we are committed to moving all fully funded projects in our backlog into design by fall of 2015 this year,



ensuring that we can begin work on the newly funded 2016 projects more quickly.

As we assess and examine our park system, we know that that it needs to be designed with a focus on resiliency and sustainability. Hurricane Sandy was a brutal reminder to all of us that when it comes to our city's services, including parks, we could no longer ignore the looming global threat of climate change. So in partnership with the Office of Resiliency and 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 reconstruction of the Rockaway boardwalk, which is making great progress. The entire boardwalk will open up for its use in time for the summer beach season in 2016. And, we anticipate the complete-- completion of the boardwalk construction by Memorial Day 2017. To make sure our internal operations are sustainable, our five borough 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 alternate fuels and electric vehicles. To creating a preventive maintenance team to prepare our existing boilers and extend the life span. And creating a \$4.9 million in savings for Fiscal Year 2015.

In a landmark example of our efforts to think green, later this year we were marked with a stark milestone for NYC Parks planting the millionth three of the Million Tree NYC Initiative, two years ahead of schedule. This remarkable success has demonstrated the importance of strengthening our efforts to care for 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 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 it will allow us to prune over 70,000 trees this

year. This increased investment means our pruning

cycle will surpass the industry standard of seven

years, and result in a pruning cycle of much less.

The funding provided in Fiscal Year 2015 will allow

us to remove 6,700 stumps, and continue to remove 99%

of reported dead tress within 30 days, which is a

monumental undertaking.

Starting in May, we will launch Tress

Count 2015, our street tress census, which provides

crucial information to improve our planting program

and to quantify the benefits of our street trees.

This citywide aims to--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 forests, and support our future

planting efforts while also providing a publicly

accessible citywide map. A digital hub for true

stewards to track their efforts, and connect with

like-minded neighbors.

In addition, to ensure that 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 the 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 rollout of our Ops 21 Program, which increases the efficiency of our mobile crew, tasked with the daily litter and cleaning of our parks. By establishing clear guidelines, and optimizing travel routes, our cleaning crews--for our cleaning crews, we have been able to save an average of 30 minutes per crew per day. The productivity of adding 63 full-time maintenance staff. This effort will result in cleaner parks and a smarter use of our resources. Where facilities were available, maintenance and operation hubs created as part of Ops 21 at Mill Pond in the Bronx; Kosciusko Pool in Brooklyn, and Forest Park in Flushing Meadows Corona Park in Queens. These hubs allow us the pooling of staff, vehicles and equipment reducing the amount of time of traveling; reducing downtime for vehicles; and equipment repair, and increasing the number of staff

available for mobile crews and special projects. We are currently assessing where 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 NYC Parks system. The health and condition of the system on individual park basis, as well as internal efficiency and effectiveness measures.

I would be remiss if I didn't take a moment to recognize the excellent 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 programming. Our Parks security service staff, many of whom are seasonal hires who provide an important presence. And enhance the experience of park users, and especially our 280 Parks Enforcement Patrol or PEP Officers. In addition to proactively controlling--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 a strong emotional

attachment to their neighborhood parks, and the public input is a vital valuable source of feedback. So we have placed an emphasis on renewed engage-- community engagement as a catalyst for creative planning and place making. 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, Partnership for Parks, a joint program of NYC Parks and the City Parks Foundation was able to double its grassroots outreach capacity and increased resources to make--to make available to our growing park group by 30% including training, grants, staff support and stools and supplies. Our Green Thumb division, which supports the community's--the city's community gardens, launched the Farm Market's Grant Program will support up to 18 community led projects. Created 23 new community

gardens with an active residence, and started the 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 landscapes, streets, 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 work that 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 broke ground on 70 improved parks and park facilities, and completed construction on 122 projects. We are proud of these achievements. 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 the 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 consistent methodology to assess specific capital improvements for park facilities throughout the city. We will then implement this plan and 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 preventive 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 their 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 system or 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 a smarter investment of resources, and build better ball fields, playgrounds, and pools for our children and families.

Thanks to the \$1.8 million that the Mayor has provided in the annual funding for pre-design, 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 capital projects. 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 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 any given year. Which will dramatically improve our ability to deliver projects on time and within budget.

Our recreation centers continue to be a vital source of recreational opportunities for New Yorkers. Our membership rolls have increased by 11% and close to 16,000 new users over the past year. To date, we have trained over 32,000 kids in a Swim Safety at NYC indoor--NYC Parks indoor and outdoor pools. Shape Up NYC expanded, providing 333 free classes per week at 183 sites. We've expanded the Kids in Motion to 30 additional sites welcoming over 575,000 young participants to 123 parks and playgrounds, and continue to serve more than 3,000 children participating in citywide fall and winter sports leagues such as flag football, basketball, and street hockey.

Thanks to previous mayor funding, we have 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 to this year's Preliminary Budget it provides an increase of over \$500,000 in funding to allow all of us of our New York--NYC parks and recreation centers to be open at last six 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 the Preliminary Budget, the Mayor has provided new funding, which will allow the agency to be retrained in compliance with the Mayor's Vision Zero Traffic Safety Initiative. Death and injury on city streets is not an inevitable or acceptable. And we're proud to join this effort to help save lives.

The Mayor's Preliminary Budget also recognizes the important role community gardens play in neighborhoods that they serve by providing almost \$500,000 in new annual funding for the Green Thumb 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 Green Thumb Program has traditionally relied primarily on federal block grant funding, but this brand new funding committed from the Mayor will allow Green Thumb 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 in 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 non-profit sectors.

One of our most critical partnerships, though, is our partnership with the tens and 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 21st 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 just maintaining our parks to truly caring for our parks. Which will reflect and even greater degree of emotional attachment and dedication to the work that we do.

Thank you for allowing me to be 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 system. We value your partnership, and we thank you for your support, the support of our agency. And now I'd be happy to answer your questions that you may have. And joining me will be First Deputy Commissioner Liam Kavanagh and the Chief of Community Outreach and Partnership Development, Kate Spellman.

CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: Thank you so much, Commissioner. Lots of good news in there for sure.

I want to acknowledge we've been joined by three of our colleagues from Brooklyn Council Member-- Oh, well, one from the Bronx, Council Member Cohen plus Council Members Cumbo and Lander from Brooklyn. Thank you all.

Commissioner, could you clarify for us what is the funding from the Community Parks Initiative in this current fiscal year? I think it's about \$7.5 million, but help me there. What is it in the Preliminary Budget for next year.

[pause, background comments]

COMMISSIONER SILVER: All right. Yeah, I'm going to defer to--pass this one to Kate Spellman.

KATE SPELLMAN: Thank you. Hi, I'm Kate Spellman. I'm Chief of Community Outreach and Partnership Development. The Mayor baseline funding for the Community Parks Initiative includes funding for PAs who facility the Kids in Motion Programs in 55 CPI zones. It also includes funding for full-time outreach coordinators who facilitate all of the partnership development in the CPI zones. That's 14 outreach coordinators. The Council's one-time funding obviously supported the maintenance and

horticulture components of the program. And that is not included in the FY16 Preliminary Budget.

CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: So the baseline portion is it about \$2.5 million or \$2.3 million, something in that range.

COMMISSIONER SILVER: Right.

KATE SPELLMAN: Yes, exactly.

CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: And the part that will be expiring, if that's the right word is about \$5 million?

KATE SPELLMAN: That's right.

CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: So does this represent the reduced commitment to the program going forward? You're cutting the operating support by two-thirds essentially.

COMMISSIONER SILVER: Well, first, we believe this is a very successful program. As you know, we have a number of the 35 parks as well as the targeted improvements that are now being realized. As you know, this is the beginning of the budget process. We look forward for those continued conversations, but this is a very important initiative. And we're already seeing through the fruits of the labor through the time improvements,

and a new focus throughout the city on all of these CPI zones. So we look forward to ongoing conversations between the City Council and the Mayor's Office of OMB. But this continues to be a major, major priority for the Mayor, and also for me as Parks Commissioner as we start to see how we can improve the parks in these various communities throughout the city.

CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: I'll just make the point that even the best capital investments can deteriorate very quickly without adequate upkeep. And I think part of what so many of us celebrated in CPI is that it paired great capital investment with great operating support. And I think it would be a shame if that didn't continue. Can you say anything about room for a second CPI based on this budget proposal? Is there money in the Capital Budget that would allow for investment in a new round of parks? And you've been very good in pointing out that there are many, many more than 35 parks in round one that certainly need this kind of investment.

COMMISSIONER SILVER: Well, as I stated, right now there is currently not a second round of phase 2 at this point. This is something that we



also welcome in the conversation about phase 2. Just to be clear, when we started the 35 parks, we weren't going to start them all at one time. We wanted to phase them, and so we now have 35 that are moving through the system at one time. Our initial intent is to see how we can stagger those, but because we understood the urgency of moving those projects forward, we do have 35. And as I stated earlier, all of those are actually ahead of schedule, and we expect the community board to see all of those designs in June. And then they'll move forward to design by the fall. So we're very pleased at how the project is moving forward, but we're still very open to conversations about that phase 2. But again, the Administration is very committed to the CPI program, and we would like to see this definitely stay on track and evolve into the future.

CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: And as you so powerfully pointed out when you tallied up all the needs in small parks, it was over a billion dollars. So the \$130 or so million we put in last year was a fabulous first step, and so we'll be hoping there's more steps to come. The Council's enhancements to the Parks budget last year also allowed you to hire

more maintenance workers and gardeners and PEP Officers. I believe the numbers are about 80 PEP Officers additional, and I think about 150 combined maintenance workers and gardeners. So, does your budget mean that those folks will have to be laid off come the end of June?

COMMISSIONER SILVER: Yes, if those funds are not restored, those positions will terminate by the end of this fiscal year. This is again something we look forward to having conversations with the City Council. Regardless, we're very pleased with the budget increase in terms of \$16 million, and if you-- if I--when I started earlier about our new division on Innovation and Performance Management, we're constantly looking to how to deploy our staff in a much better way from PEP Officers to maintenance. Looking at new hot spot approaches where we can make sure we really watch those areas where they need the most focus. But to answer your direct question, yes, those positions would end by the end of this fiscal year.

CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: From my opinion that would be really unfortunate to say that folks in my district really felt in a positive way the increased

staffing in all of those areas. It's something that New Yorkers can see and touch, and I think they would notice the absence. Not to mention the impact on I guess 200 or more New Yorkers whose jobs would be in jeopardy. So, what is the total picture on maintenance workers year to year? What's the headcount on that this year, and what would it be next year?

COMMISSIONER SILVER: The headcount would be approximately the same. Roughly of maintenance workers, again it's-- And again, this does not include JTP's job training participants. It's roughly about 1,977, and that would be about the same headcount for FY16.

CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: And for gardeners?

COMMISSIONER SILVER: For gardeners. Okay.

LIAM KAVANAGH: [off mic] It's 125 citywide.

COMMISSIONER SILVER: 125 citywide for gardeners, and then the job training participants it fluctuates an average of 1,750, but it can go as low as 900 and as high as 2,600. That is a number that fluctuates depending on the time of year.

CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: Right, but assuming that you're not able to baseline the Council's enhancements, there would be a drop in both number of gardeners and maintenance workers, correct?

COMMISSIONER SILVER: There would be a drop in the--the gardeners, not the maintenance workers.

LIAM KAVANAGH: [off mic] I think the numbers you cited don't include these results. [sic]

COMMISSIONER SILVER: These are full time?

LIAM KAVANAGH: Yes.

COMMISSIONER SILVER: Right. I'm sorry. Repeat your question again. I apologize.

CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: I just want to clarify that your budget, as currently proposed, the Preliminary Budget does deliver a drop in the number of maintenance workers and the number of gardeners. In part, it may be entirely because the Council's enhancements are not baselined.

COMMISSIONER SILVER: They're baselined. Correct.

CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: Exactly.

COMMISSIONER SILVER: Yes.

CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: And on PEP Officers, I guess the Council's money put in 80 more. So that got us to 280. I think that's the correct number.

COMMISSIONER SILVER: Correct.

CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: So your budget shows 200 for the following fiscal year?

COMMISSIONER SILVER: Correct.

CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: So what would be the borough breakdown there excluding the privately funded parks dedicated--PEP Officers dedicated to conservancy parks?

COMMISSIONER SILVER: The borough breakdown and our number when you remove out just the tax levy would be roughly about 24 for Bronx; 23 for Brooklyn-- I'm sorry. I'm looking at the total number here. It's 26 for Bronx; 32 for Brooklyn; 52 Manhattan; 30 Queens; 21 Staten Island. And then we have some citywide positions of 21. And then we have some in the Academy to bring us to that number of about 280.

CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: And am I right that on any given shift in one of the outer boroughs, you could have as few as half a dozen PEP Officers considering--

2 COMMISSIONER SILVER: [interposing] The  
3 answer is correct, right.

4 CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: I mean that--that I  
5 think is pretty clearly a paltry number considering  
6 each borough has, I don'[t know, 5 to 8,000 acres of  
7 parks for five or six people to patrol. It's  
8 virtually impossible. I think you can count on this  
9 being a priority for the Council again in the coming  
10 year.

11 COMMISSIONER SILVER: Yes, and you  
12 understand also that we want to make sure that we  
13 also will have over 400 depending on the time of year  
14 from our Parks Security Service. We are always  
15 looking at how we can redeploy them to make sure we  
16 identify some of the hot spots. So with our existing  
17 PEP Officers we want to make sure that we use our  
18 entire uniformed personnel. There's a lot of focus  
19 on the PEP, and they are definitely very important.  
20 We also have our Park Security Service, and we're  
21 trying to see how we could maximize all of our  
22 uniformed personnel to provide the best quality of  
23 life experience for all of our park users.

24 CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: What's the headcount  
25 on the Park Security Service?

2 COMMISSIONER SILVER: At its height,  
3 about 463.

4 CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: And that's heavily  
5 focused on beaches, correct?

6 COMMISSIONER SILVER: Correct. Yeah,  
7 beaches and pools.

8 CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: Right. The crime  
9 data on parks, which is now publicly available thanks  
10 --to great legislative work by council members in the  
11 previous term--that Data shows mixed trends. Total  
12 crime in the 30 biggest parks is down significantly,  
13 which we celebrate. It appears that the category of  
14 property theft at least in the largest parks the  
15 trend is up. And then for a broader view of parks,  
16 you've just begun reporting data on I think as many  
17 as a thousand parks.

18 COMMISSIONER SILVER: Correct.

19 CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: We don't really have  
20 the prior year to discern a trend, but can you say a  
21 word or two on what you see happening with public  
22 safety in parks? Particularly the issue of property  
23 theft, and its connection the number of PEP Officers  
24 and other enforcement personnel?

COMMISSIONER SILVER: Well, what I can say is we're certainly pleased that NYPD is now reporting on crime data in its 1,144 parks. And so for us it is a great step forward as we continue to work with NYPD. And I had mentioned earlier we want to focus on certain hot spots. We don't have all the numbers that you are mentioning because of the historical data. But certainly from our PEP Officers we want to make sure that we can work with NYPD to start to identify some of those hot spots. So I can't say we have numbers that correlate where there's a presence of PEP Officers and related to crime. Certainly, that's something we will constantly work with NYPD to provide the best park experience as possible. So we'll continue to look at those strategies to see what we can do certainly going forward.

CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: To state the obvious, we believe there's a connection between the amount of enforcement personnel and the direction in which crime moves. So, we'll be advocating in accord with that. I'm correct that there are only 27 park rangers in the whole system? Is that right?

COMMISSIONER SILVER: That's correct.



CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: What was the peak in years or decades past?

COMMISSIONER SILVER: I'll defer to Deputy--

LIAM KAVANAGH: [off mic] I don't know.

COMMISSIONER SILVER: You don't know?

CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: Am I right that it was close to 200? I heard 190 something, but I don't have the exact figure.

COMMISSIONER SILVER: All right, we will get that information. It seems like you've been staffed or stumped on this historical high, but we will get you that.

CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: [interposing] Tarat [sic] you wore the brown hat, how many colleagues did you have.

TARAT: [off mic] I had 300 at one time [sic]

CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: Okay. Great. You know, I think that the experience of young people is so dramatically enhanced by interaction with the park rangers. They're incredible guides to the natural world. I don't think many young people or adults even experience an interaction with a park ranger

today. There are just 27 in a city of this scale. It's getting pretty close to zero, and I for one would love to see that trend reverse. We've got 10,000 acres of natural land. I guess you'd call it natural areas. Must of it needs to be restored with the presence of invasive plants and other challenges. This is really tough work. It's really important work. Its impacts, among other things, the environmental resiliency in a city, which faces super storms and hurricanes. About how many acres of that 10,000 acreage can we afford to restore based on the current budget allocation? We're steadily moving through a certain number every year, correct?

COMMISSIONER SILVER: We are yes.

CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: And what would that number be?

COMMISSIONER SILVER: I don't have the number of how much of the--dealing with some of the invasives because we have--it's something we could certainly get you that number. We've relied on a number of volunteers to do this work. As you know, it's not just staff. For example, in Van Cortlandt, they have a Green Team that they work with a lot of young people to help deal with some of the invasives.

Working with both our natural resources group, and also the Natural Area Conservancy, there are a lot of efforts to help deal with the Invasives. But, we could certainly get you that number about how much of that acreage--with this ongoing process. Even though you have invasives, and you start to deal with the forests, it's something you have to constantly watch. But unless we have the number, we can certainly get that number for you.

CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: I seem to remember from our hearing on natural areas that at the current pace it would take hundreds of years or some very, very long time period to touch the whole system. And I recall perhaps a number of a million dollars per acre to restore-- Again I might not have the number right, but--

COMMISSIONER SILVER: [interposing]  
Right.

CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: --I know this is expensive and I know we couldn't do it all immediately. But I just wanted to emphasize how important I see that work.

COMMISSIONER SILVER: Okay.

CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: I have many more questions, but I'm going to pause for a moment because I know some of my colleagues have questions. And then I'll come back for some additional. Colleagues, we're going to put a five-minute clock on this, but we'll be happy to do a second round for anyone who is interested. And our first council member will be Council Member Maisel followed by Andy Cohen and then Brad Lander.

COUNCIL MEMBER MAISEL: Hey. Good morning, Commissioner.

COMMISSIONER SILVER: Good morning.

CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: [interposing] Excuse me. Forgive me, Council Member.

COUNCIL MEMBER MAISEL: I forgive you.

CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: I need to acknowledge the presence of our colleague Ydanis Rodriguez. Thank you. And Council Member Greenfield and Council Member Treyger.

COUNCIL MEMBER MAISEL: And by the way, it wasn't because I set my clock incorrectly. I slept in my car over the weekend to make sure I was going to get here on time. [laughter]

COUNCIL MEMBER LEVINE: You get extra money for the extra effort.

COUNCIL MEMBER MAISEL: All things considered. At any rate, good morning, Commissioner.

COMMISSIONER SILVER: Good morning.

COUNCIL MEMBER MAISEL: The one million trees planted is really an impressive amount, but I'm curious are there any studies actually of the survivability of these trees? When I ride around in my district and elsewhere, I see a lot of saplings that are dead either because of the harsh winter, or the fact that the trees weren't watered over the summer. Or, in fact, they were in accidents with cars and trucks. So I'm wondering do we know how many actually survived. And are we doing anything to replace the ones-- I know some are under certain warranties, but a million is somewhat misleading if there are tens of thousands of trees that have died.

COMMISSIONER SILVER: Well, on average we always lose a percentage of our urban forest. But in terms of the Million Trees Campaign, it does have a very successful survival rate. But on average I believe citywide of all of our trees we lose about

10%. But that is an ongoing effort where we want to replenish those.

COUNCIL MEMBER MAISEL: [interposing] But excuse me, but the--but the young trees, the survivability for the young trees has got to be much less. I mean by virtue of the fact that they're young and their roots haven't, you know, sunk in correctly. So what have we lost in terms of the young--of the young sapling. I'm talking about the old trees that are problematic.

COMMISSIONER SILVER: We can get you the exact number. I can tell you that the program is very successful, and we're not losing a very high percentage of the young trees.

COUNCIL MEMBER MAISEL: Well, what about replacing them, the ones that are--that have died?

COMMISSIONER SILVER: Well, our intent is to replace them. It's a major--

COUNCIL MEMBER MAISEL: [interposing] I mean they're not part of PlaNYC I would assume, but they should be replaced.

COMMISSIONER SILVER: But again, this is why the tree census is important. We have a very aggressive team that is constantly monitoring our

urban forests, and when we see a tree that is down, our goal is to go out there as quickly as possible, assess the condition to see whether it can be saved. In some cases you'll see some of the green bags that are surrounding those trees to make sure that they're getting the proper water and nutrients to make those trees survive. But it is our goal to make sure that we have a very strong urban forest because of all of the benefits I've mentioned during my testimony.

COUNCIL MEMBER MAISEL: Thank you.

DEPUTY COMMISSIONER KAVANAGH: Good morning, I'm Liam Kavanagh, Deputy Commissioner. I just want to add to what Commissioner Silver said. We do track very carefully the survival rate of trees planted in the Million Trees Program. There are two components. There's the street trees and the reforestation elements. And reforestation we have scientifically defined spots that we monitor on a regular basis. On street trees we look at every single tree that's planted. At the conclusion of the guarantee period, if the tree has died, or disappeared, the contractor is obligated to replace it. But we're seeing very good survival rates in both categories. With street trees, however, one of

the key indicators of success is some sign of stewardship by the local, you know, homeowner of neighborhood association. And trees survive at a much higher rate. It's almost like a 95% rate when you see a sign of stewardship. And that's why as we transition out of planting trees, our next campaign is to get more people involved in stewarding their trees. Because it makes a huge difference in survivability. But we do have very careful numbers, and we'll be happy to share them with you after the hearing.

COUNCIL MEMBER MAISEL: I appreciate that.

CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: Thank you, Council Member Maisel. Now, we're going to hear from Council Member Cohen followed by Council Member Lander.

COUNCIL MEMBER COHEN: Thank you, Chair Levine. Thank you Commissioner for your testimony. I just want to quickly acknowledge how personally accessible you have been to me. I've seen you in my district in the last week. Commissioner Kavanagh had me at the arsenal maybe two weeks ago. And the Bronx capital people were in my office also last week. So your agency has been accessible, and I appreciate



that. Because time is limited, I just want to talk a little bit about the progress we've made on capital projects, and the way that works. Could you tell us a little bit what is the current staff level of the Capital Unit? How many people are in it?

COMMISSIONER SILVER: The Capital Division itself has over 400, but they all have various functions. Because it is capital, we have designed procurement construction. There is a lot of the administrative work that is needed from resident engineers to architects to landscape architects. But then the administrative staff to make that all work. But there is a little over 400 capital staff itself.

COUNCIL MEMBER COHEN: The 55 people that we were looking to hire, what were the natures of-- what kind of work would they specifically be doing?

COMMISSIONER SILVER: Well, there was mostly focused on the design procurement construction side from designers to we had some project managers. So it was to make sure that we had those capital projects move quicker through the system. So some of those were licensed design professionals. There were project managers that understand the capital process itself. So it was a variety of different positions.

COUNCIL MEMBER COHEN: Of those 55 how many have we actually hired?

COMMISSIONER SILVER: Forty-nine.

COUNCIL MEMBER COHEN: Has there been any attrition. Like are we net up, or are significantly net up in the Capital Division or is the staff level--was it in 2014 similar to what it is in 2015?

COMMISSIONER SILVER: We've increased some of the numbers. Some of those had been upgraded positions, but it is net up. And we're already seeing the improvements of how we're able to assign projects. There was a backlog. We were able to assign a number of those backlogged projects. And now looking forward now since, we didn't hire them all at one time. We hired them over a period of time once the funds became available in July. And so looking at the next fiscal year, we're very confident we can now not only deal with the backlog, but now get all the new projects coming in. And have those assigned within the first six months. I can't recall talking to staff talking to staff when that had happened before. So, we're very appreciative of those 55 positions, and now we're establishing a new

approach to make sure we can get those projects assigned quicker.

COUNCIL MEMBER COHEN: That would be great. Could you just talk a little bit about what you think are still the remaining obstacles. It's sort of if we had a clean slate what you would like to see in terms of trying to speed up capital projects?

COMMISSIONER SILVER: Well, certainly the good news is the administration is looking at this issue as well. It's not just parks. I would say the focus should be on the design process and procurement in terms of construction. We're actually hitting our target 90% of the time. So the focus should be on design and procurement. That's something that we're looking at internally on the design side. That's where we've made most of the improvements. In terms of procurement, we understand that there are many entities within the city looking at trying to expedite that process. And it could be in violation of state and city laws, but all those things should be on the table. And we're trying to make those changes where we can where it's a policy call from the Parks Department. But we're very pleased that

2 other agencies are looking at making those  
3 improvements as well but it would be primarily design  
4 as well as construction--procurement.

5 COUNCIL MEMBER COHEN: Thank you very  
6 much.

7 CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: Thank you Council  
8 Member Cohen. Next up, we'll hear from Council  
9 Member Lander followed by Council Members Greenfield  
10 and Treyger.

11 COUNCIL MEMBER LANDER: Thank you, Mr.  
12 Chair and thank you Commissioner for being here this  
13 morning, and for your leadership so far over the last  
14 year on Parks equity. I was encouraged about the  
15 innovation and performance management, and some of  
16 those efforts to include the capital process. I  
17 would be remiss if I didn't shout-out to my borough  
18 Commissioner Kevin Jeffrey, and his good work with us  
19 day in and day out. And I want to flag that we had  
20 the chance to talk just a couple of weeks ago about  
21 the legislation that I'm working with the Chair on to  
22 bring more transparency in Parks spending. Part of  
23 that is it's just so difficult for us at this exact  
24 hearing to really understand where the resources are  
25 throughout this system. How that compares with

what's up, what's down. So I appreciate your work. My hope is that by next year at this time not only will we have the legislation in the rear view mirror, but we will be able to be looking at least our first cut on some spending. Both expense and capital, you know, geographically in a way that helps us. So we share that goal yes?

COMMISSIONER SILVER: [interposing] Yes.

COUNCIL MEMBER LANDER: Excellent.

COMMISSIONER SILVER: We do.

COUNCIL MEMBER LANDER: Thank you. I'm just going to pick up on a couple of the questions that Council Member Cohen asked about the capital process. You know, I feel alternately optimistic and pessimistic. On the one hand I know that you're working on it. I see that. At the same time, you know, it's a long--we've got a lot way to go. And on the one hand I know you have to drive progress on those CPI projects. On the other hand I worry that all our Council projects are going to wind up sitting behind those. So I just want you to hear our continued urgency. And I guess one question I have is I know you and the Chair talked about doing a hearing on these matters. Is there some point before

too long when you'll be able to give the Council and the public a sort of here's what we think? Here's what we can do in the Parks Department to expedite the process and how much time that will take up. And here's what we need from the agencies or levels of government. Is there a point in time when we can get that report so we really see where we are, and what we can--what we can do?

COMMISSIONER SILVER: Well, in terms of a report, we can certainly I would say within the next couple of months, we're certainly willing to have that conversation. We can put together a report, but we have now marked progress. I had mentioned the improvements of PDC from going from 20% approval to 80%. We reduced a number of internal meetings from five to two. So there is already shaving off of months off the process, and then we can share with you some of our recommendations. Again, the Administration is looking at other parts of the process. So we would certainly be ready to have that conversation. We could probably wait until the budget is adopted, and then we could sit down and start talking about what we can--how much information we could share. The public can take a look at it,

and it's a full year of some of these changes. And so we could start seeing some of the improvements. The good news is, for example, CPI and those projects that started in the fall are now benefitting from the new expedited process. And as I stated, those projects are either ahead of schedule or on time. So the new process is now working, and we would be certainly willing to share more information with you in a few months.

COUNCIL MEMBER LANDER: Thank you, and then I was encouraged to see in your testimony ways that are related to this a few things that I think can help push us forward at a more systemic scale the Parks Capital Needs Assessments. So it's not all on individual council members to figure out what the needs are in the parks in their districts. New models of community engagement. And I was intrigued as well by this Pre-Design Site Testing and Analysis, which has often been a real frustration of mine trying to design. You know, put the money forward on parks with no idea what the actual needs are. So let me just ask in particular about the parks needs assessment. Well, let me ask there first. Is that something you have a contractor for, a timeline?

COMMISSIONER SILVER: We do not have a contractor on board at this time, but the intent of this is to actually hire a consultant to help us map out how do we now do this program that we can update it annually. So we always know how the--what is the state of repair for our Parks system itself? So if a consultant had been hired, our goal is in the Mayor's Adopted Budget we'll move forward to putting out that RFP to make sure we bring someone on board. But for us it is a huge priority, and that will give us the direction on how we build a whole division to make sure we monitor those capital needs on an annual basis. So no consultant has been hired at this point or even an RFP has been developed.

COUNCIL MEMBER LANDER: Okay. And then on the Pre-Design Site Testing Analysis this \$1.8 million that's in the budget.

COMMISSIONER SILVER: [interposing]  
Right.

COUNCIL MEMBER LANDER: How many projects is that for? What kinds of projects? You know, this comes from my frustration, which is the challenge we currently have. If you want to improve a park, you can't get a designer on board until you've allocated



all the money you needed for the project. But we have in so many cases no idea what the project even is. And we get stuck in this very frustrating Catch22. So maybe this is the beginning of a way forward.

COMMISSIONER SILVER: This one point A for us is huge. It allows us to do pre-site investigation, which was not capitally eligible. It allows us to do borings, do telescopes. It allows us to look at the site conditions before we start work So we can do a better assessment on how much it would cost us to actually develop the site. [bell] Very often we are going into a site during construction. We start digging, and we find something that was unforeseen. That halts the entire process and causes delay. It's very difficult for us to communicate to the elected officials and the public. So we can hit about 40 sites we estimate per year. Our capital staff will make a determination when they suspect we need to do some subsurface investigation. And so, for us this huge to have this--these funds in place. And so, we're excited to have even some sites identified that we can start by doing that work.

2 COUNCIL MEMBER LANDER: And how do you  
3 determine which 40 sites would be?

4 COMMISSIONER SILVER: Well, capital staff  
5 pretty much from survey information and historical  
6 information surrounding the property. Some of this  
7 it's a hunch, but because that money is available,  
8 you can start exploring some of those sites. But a  
9 lot of it is just some trends that they're used to  
10 doing work in the area, historical information and  
11 survey work. And some of it is just a hunch  
12 believing that we want to take a look just depending  
13 on what may have happened at similar sites in the  
14 area.

15 COUNCIL MEMBER LANDER: Thank you.

16 CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: Thank you, Council  
17 Member Lander. We'll be hearing next from Council  
18 Member Greenfield followed by council members Treyger  
19 and Miller.

20 COUNCIL MEMBER GREENFIELD: Thank you,  
21 Mr. Chairman. Thank you, Commissioner, for your  
22 testimony, and thank you for the work that you're  
23 doing in the Parks Department. I also want to give a  
24 shout-out to once again our great Brooklyn Borough  
25 Commissioner Kevin Jeffrey and his loyal assistant

Marty Miller. We appreciate their leadership, and they are both incredibly responsive and receptive on the issues that we have. I want to drill down a little bit more on the capital process. As you know, it is my favorite topic. I said a year ago that your success will be judged on how you deal with the capital process. And I think we've made some improvements, but I really want to try to understand a little bit more in detail. The first thing is I want to jump off a question that my colleague and deputy leader Brad Lander asked. Specifically about the relationship to the CPI versus the projects that are already in the pipeline. Can you assure us that we will have first in, first out, which means that projects that have already been on the-- Being projected and funded will be the projects that are prioritized, as opposed to the new pet CPI projects?

COMMISSIONER SILVER: Let me repeat again that we are now on tract to have all of our backlogged projects, those projects that have existed prior to previous fiscal years, all those will be assigned and start work by fall of this year. And that is a very clear statement. We've already met internally. There will be a combination of in-house

assignments, but also using consultants. That now will put us in a good position going forward. But any new projects we get for Fiscal Year '16 we will no longer have a backlog, and we will be able to assign all projects between six and nine months. So that's in part by those 65 hires, and the strategy of how we're dealing with those backlogs.

COUNCIL MEMBER GREENFIELD: I appreciate that, and I give you credit for that, and I actually do appreciate the reforms that have been made, and I thank you for that. I just want to get into some of the weeds, but my specific question is the projects that have already been funded-- Like council members like us have been funded for the last two, there, four, or five years. Will we have precedence over the new projects, the Community Parks Initiative? That's my questions. But I--we don't want a situation where we've been working on projects now for five years, and now you come up with a new initiative, which is great and it's terrific, but that bumps our projects aside. Because that's a priority for the Administration.

COMMISSIONER SILVER: As I stated last year, we'll be doing both, and that's exactly what

we're doing. The CPI funds were part of the FY14 reprogrammed. So, from our perspective, all backlogged projects will be in motion as the fall of 2015. So the issue of prioritization will no longer be a problem. We'll be back on track. And so that's something we worked very hard with the Capital Division to make sure that we deal with the entire backlog.

COUNCIL MEMBER GREENFIELD: Okay. We're going to watch that closely. Thank you Commissioner. How much time has been saved now based on the new changes that you've made? So in the past, for example, where a project on average took X months, how many months would you now say it takes? And how much time have you shaved off of that process based on the changes you've made? So can you tell us what it used to take, and what you think it will take in going forward?

COMMISSIONER SILVER: We believe at this point the design process is what we're watching very closely. We believe about two months have been shaved off that process. In some cases a bit more, and we're not now--I'm recommending that there not be any design changes once it moves forward into

procurement. And so, that also is saving us a lot of time. So, at this point I can confidently say about two months have been shaved. But we're looking to shave off even more time. Design takes between 9 and 15 months. We're looking to shorten that down a little bit further, and not go the full 15 months. So that's about what I can report to you at this time. As we moving through the other parts of the process, we'll see if we can shave off even more time.

COUNCIL MEMBER GREENFIELD: So just to be clear, and once again I acknowledge and respect it and appreciate it. And I certainly appreciate you're coming with a new vision as an outsider to the Parks Department. But in my experience projects have taken between three to five years to get completed from the time of the funding. So you're saying that as of now, you shaved off approximate two months off that process?

COMMISSIONER SILVER: Correct and let me just also add in terms of assigning the project, it will be a lot quicker than it had in the past. We in Parks at the start of the project is when it's assigned and scoping starts. I think in the past a

lot of elected officials assumed that when July 1 starts, the project starts. So we want to make sure within the first six to nine months, the project is assigned. And then we begin to have a more sure design process so that we can then move it through the process a lot quicker.

COUNCIL MEMBER GREENFIELD: I appreciate, but I still think we need to do better, and I think we need some clarity on what issues are internally Parks and what issues of other agencies. Which very clearly you point out, such as the Public Design Commission that you're not responsible for. So I'd love to have some clarity on that. But I only have one moment left for a final question, and that's going to be about costs. Can you tell us that you've been able to shave the costs? We know that the costs of these projects in some cases [bell] and in my particular case which is \$4,000 a square foot to renovate a bathroom. Once again, not on your watch, previous to you. But that's more money than Donald Trump charges for his buildings brand new in Midtown Manhattan. So have you been able to focus on the cost aspect of it as well?

COMMISSIONER SILVER: We have. I just want to make sure I'm clear that all of our projects are competitively bid. Parks does not set these prices. This is the response we get from our BIDs, and any time you look at some of the projects, you look at both the materials and labor. And when you look at the costs a lot of it is related to labor for very good reasons. We have very strong values in the city. And so, just that is what we're looking at, and it's very difficult to affect the costs. What we're trying to do is see how we can shave off the process. So we don't have any unforeseen added costs that added onto the project, which could be problematic. So we are looking--taking a look at it, and when the Chair suggested that we have a deeper conversation about capital. I'll certainly look forward to disclosing more information at that time with a lot more detail now that I know some of the concerns you have.

COUNCIL MEMBER GREENFIELD: So thank you. I just want to conclude by saying I appreciate what you've done on the Capital Tracker, and I appreciate that you focus on these issues. I just think that as you pointed out, some of these issues are out of your



control as well. And I think that the more information you could put out there, whether it's about process or construction or costs, I think we could perhaps have a better understanding of who is to blame for the massive amounts in costs. Once again, it's not your fault, but still very considerable. And the very lengthy time that these projects take, and there are improvements. And as you pointed out, you may be limited with what you can do. And I think if you can give us more information-

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COMMISSIONER SILVER: [interposing] Yes.

COUNCIL MEMBER GREENFIELD: --that would be helpful. So that we could try to put pressure on the other organizations as they come in and say, Hey---if it's OMB, for example--why does it cost so much? Or any relevant agency so that we can help you do what you're trying to do, which is to shorten the process as well. So thank you very much.

CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: Thank you, Council Member Greenfield. Next up, we have Council Member Treyger followed by Council Members Miller and Rodriguez.

2 COUNCIL MEMBER TREYGER: Thank you,  
3 Chair. Welcome Commissioner.

4 COMMISSIONER SILVER: Thank you.

5 COUNCIL MEMBER TREYGER: I'll begin by  
6 saying when I was still teaching, we had started a  
7 program in my school where during that time there was  
8 a shortage of life guards in New York City. And they  
9 were actually recruiting lifeguards from Europe when  
10 we had students in our school with a pool that were  
11 perfectly capable of working at our beaches. And we  
12 actually--the first year we actually worked with  
13 Deputy Commissioner Kavanagh on that. And our first  
14 year of having that, two kids from my high school  
15 saved someone's life in Coney Island. I'd like to  
16 know are we still continuing that program of working  
17 with our city's high schools, and training kids in  
18 our schools to have jobs in the summertime to meet  
19 the needs of lifeguards during the seasonal months?

20 COMMISSIONER SILVER: Well, I do know we  
21 have a heavy recruiting effort. A lot of information  
22 went out earlier this year, and we began our annual  
23 lifeguard recruiting efforts with qualifying tests in  
24 December. And we have over 300 candidates currently  
25 right now in training. So the number of the new

recruits will depend on the completion of their final test at the end of the training class. So I'll see whether Commissioner Kavanagh wants to add anything, but we are very pleased on how we've been making outreach efforts. Certain communities have asked us to spend specific attention to do some recruiting where we have some of those facilities. And so I'll pass it on right now to Commissioner Kavanagh. To see if he has anything that he wanted to add.

DEPUTY COMMISSIONER KAVANAGH: We do continue to recruit extensively from the New York City high school system. We have active training going on at Curtis High School in Staten Island and Far Rockaway High School as well as our Chelsea headquarters for life guard training. So as the Commissioner said, we had a very successful outreach earlier in the year. Over 300 applicants are in training right now, and we're looking forward to having a large and well trained group of lifeguards at the beaches and pools this summer.

COUNCIL MEMBER TREYGER: So right now there is no anticipated shortage of lifeguards because that leads to beach closures? I mean right

now you feel that we have enough in the pipeline to work with this summer?

DEPUTY COMMISSIONER KAVANAGH: Yes.

COUNCIL MEMBER TREYGER: The next question I have is about PEPs. I think the Chair touched upon this issue. There was a commitment made by you, Commissioner, to try to increase--to increase the number of PEPs. Particularly in my district where we have 2-1/2 miles of beach and boardwalk, it is extremely challenging for the local Police Department to both secure that site, the amusement district, and the residential areas. Can you speak about what added numbers we're talking about hopefully in the Coney Island/Brighton Beach areas this summer?

COMMISSIONER SILVER: Well, in our proposed budget there are no added numbers. What we are taking a look at is the entire uniformed personnel Parks Department, which at it's height is a little over 700. We're looking very carefully at how we can deploy that personnel in a very different way to maximize the impact of what they have on our park users. We certainly can have a conversation about what strategies we can use going forward. We'll continue the conversation during the budget process

to see whether we can add more of those positions that were not base-lined, but our strategy is to look very carefully about how we can deploy that personnel. Not just focus on the 280, but focus on the entire 700 plus to ensure that we could actually adequately serve the citizens of this city.

COUNCIL MEMBER TREYGER: Right, I mean to me it is--it's not just a Parks equity issue. It's public safety issue. It is extremely burdensome for the local police precinct to cover millions of tourists who come to this part of town during the summer months and the residential areas. And I again repeat the call. We definitely need more Park security, more PEP officers this coming summer. I want to touch on the issue of CPI. My analysis of CPI-- and I'm not saying that we don't-- There is certainly a need for equity across the city. But I just want to say that Southern Brooklyn was kind of really just left out from CPI for the most part. And I do know that there were certain parks over the past couple of years that might have received generous, you know, funding but many did not. As a matter of fact, the Controller just cited Bensonhurst Park, which is not physically in my district that's

actually in Council Member Vincent Gentile's district, but it serves all of us as having one of the highest number of claims because of incidents in playgrounds and so forth. And in conversations with the Parks Department, they have conceded that it has not seen any capital improvements in quite--close to a decade or more. What is being done to make sure that each region of our city, particularly Southern Brooklyn is included in this CPI initiative?

COMMISSIONER SILVER: Well, if you'll recall, we did the first cut of the analysis that identified about 215 parks. When we looked at some of those parks, we narrowed it down to about 134. I don't have the numbers before me to say exactly how many within your district were part of that. But certainly it was a data driven approach. And we identified 35 phase 1 and there are about another 99 that warrant attention. In terms of your concern, we value public safety and safety to our families and children at the utmost, and have a very aggressive program. As we go and do inspections, we identify problems. We have a whole team in place where we do certain inspections and prioritize them to make sure our playgrounds are safe. We have created a whole

program specifically for playgrounds. We'll sit down with the Controller to go through his reports so we understand that information a bit more. But we take playground safety as a huge priority, and there are other interventions we put in place. Not waiting for CPI. If we find a park is unsafe, we just into action immediately, and make that repair. We would not wait, for example, for a CPI project to intervene. But we'll certainly get back to you about specific parks that you are concerned about within or for the CPI program to see if they were on the initial list of 134.

COUNCIL MEMBER TREYGER: I have final questions. I'll wait for the second round. Thank you Chair.

CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: Thank you, Council Member Treyger. I want to acknowledge we've been joined by Council Member Jimmy Van Bramer from Queens. And next up we will hear from Council Member Miller followed by Council Member Rodriguez and Van Bramer.

COUNCIL MEMBER MILLER: Thank you, Mr. Chair and thank you, Commissioner. Good to see you and the team again. And I would be remiss if I did

not shout-out to my Parks Commissioner Lewandowski there. We spent so much time together this weekend. So I didn't know you were going to be here, but just the same. I want to speak to whatever essentially everyone has been saying, talking about here, and that is the procurement process and the process, the amount of time it takes for a project to get done. And you and I have spoken sometime in the past few months, and you indicated that you were in the process of kind of revamping the process itself. So I think that considering what you were able to do-- what your team is able to accomplish in the first year that you were given the opportunity to do so. But I would like for you to elaborate a little more clearly on what has been done to expedite the process--

COMMISSIONER SILVER: [interposing]

Right.

COUNCIL MEMBER MILLER: --over the two months, and what could we expect?

COMMISSIONER SILVER: Well, the first is that we focused on the design process. The other parts of the process have either state or city law. And so we focused on the design process where we had



the most ability to make change. The first was the Scoping [sp?] meeting. We now have a standard template for a scoping meeting. It was done differently among the staff, and so we standardized the Scoping meeting. Made it a lot more streamlined so that it could be done in a shorter period of time. That was one. Number two, we had a number of internal designs. We had five. That took about two months. We felt it could be done in two meetings. We were able to shave one month off that process. So now there are fewer meetings for internal staff to review design. So we can do that a lot quicker. In terms of design changes, once we move forward towards concept, we didn't want to see additional design changes. That means that you would have to spend a lot more time reviewing it. So now let this for life safety design that we have it's a design that we go forward.

We're now looking every month. I meet with the capital staff to find the most chronically delayed projects to find out what we could to intervene. Father Fagan, which was in the news, was one of those examples. We found that there was an issue between two agencies. We were able to

intervene and work it out within one meeting. Father Fagan is now on his proper path to move forward. So those are some examples. Just to give you some of the changes from a percentage point of view, comparing July to October, FY14 and FY15 the number of projects we completed on time is 94% in FY15 versus 73% in FY14. And the number of projects we completed within budget is 88% in FY15 compared to 67% in FY14.

So as I'm stating, we're already seeing improvements in our process. And I also mentioned earlier that we're seeing success at PDC. Last year in terms of getting through the first round, the first meeting, we were at a 20% approval rate. This year we're at an 80% approval rate. We've had meetings with PDC to look at more standardized equipment versus having customized individual designs. We've had advanced meetings with them about some of the CPAY projects so they know what the program will look like. So we can move it quicker through the process, and there are a number of other chains [sic]. I'm giving you certain highlights, but this is the example of how we've really been able to start instituting some real savings.

COUNCIL MEMBER MILLER: Okay, thank you, and as Council Member Greenfield indicated, that if there was some engagement in not necessarily transparency but engagement, we'd feel a lot better, and hopefully also be able to partner in expediting the process as well. So my other questions are about human capital. On one side I think that the real complaint is not necessarily not just because of the time length that's required for a job to be completed, but also the costs of them. Have you considered--have you done costs analyses or considered whether or not these jobs can be done in-house, and if so, to what degree?

COMMISSIONER SILVER: In terms of capital projects, a good portion of them are done in-house. We're now, because we have a backlog, we have to focus on working with consultants on the design side to move some of those projects along. So we actually do both. We both in-house, and we also use consultants. We're going to have to work with consultants to address the backlog. So that's just one of the trade-offs because a little bit more costs when you hire consultants. But that's the only strategy going forward. We can address the backlog.

2 We have a great in-house staff, talented designers.  
3 We use them to the full capacity, but now since we  
4 have a backlog, we'd have to reach out to  
5 consultants.

6 COUNCIL MEMBER MILLER: Well, I think  
7 that that would be a great opportunity to hire some  
8 civil servants, who are qualified and could use the  
9 living and prevailing wage where applicable. We did  
10 a hearing last week in the Committee of Civil Service  
11 [bell] and Labor on the provisional productions.

12 COMMISSIONER SILVER: [interposing] I'm  
13 sorry.

14 COUNCIL MEMBER MILLER: Provisional  
15 productions--

16 COMMISSIONER SILVER: [interposing] Oh,  
17 productions?

18 COUNCIL MEMBER MILLER: --reductions.  
19 Parks is in the top 10 in provisionals and agencies  
20 that still have provisionals there. We have a number  
21 of titles. In fact, we have four specific titles  
22 that exclusively provisional workers, which is Urban  
23 Park Rangers, Administrative Managers, Recreation  
24 Specialists, and Playground Park Associates. How do  
25 you plan on addressing that issue, and reducing that

2 to a satisfactory or hiring and making those folks  
3 permanent Civil Service employees?

4 COMMISSIONER SILVER: I've asked  
5 Assistant Commissioner Stark to come up and answer  
6 that question.

7 ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER STARK: David  
8 Stark, AC for Finance. On Urban Park Rangers a test  
9 is going to be given, and everyone in that title will  
10 be permanent after the list comes out. Admin Manager  
11 people have signed up for that exam. I believe that  
12 the signing up just closed two weeks ago. So when  
13 that exam is given, people will be given a chance to  
14 move into permanent titles. And rec--I believe Rec  
15 Supervisor is a promotional exam, and also when that  
16 comes out we expect our Rec Directors to take that  
17 exam and become permanent.

18 COUNCIL MEMBER MILLER: Okay, so you have  
19 been working with DCAS around these issues--

20 ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER STARK:  
21 [interposing] Yes.

22 COUNCIL MEMBER MILLER: --and we can  
23 certainly expect follow up on this on where it is?

24

25

2 ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER STARK:

3 Absolutely. And we do not have provisionals in  
4 titles where there are lists existing right now.

5 COUNCIL MEMBER MILLER: Okay. Thank you.  
6 Thank you, Mr. Chair.

7 CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: Thank you Council  
8 Member Miller. Next up we're going to hear from  
9 Council Member Rodriguez followed by Council Member  
10 Van Bramer.

11 COUNCIL MEMBER RODRIGUEZ: Thank you  
12 Chair, and Commissioner, thank you for your hard  
13 work. I know you have a sincere commitment to  
14 address inequality in our parks. When we talk about  
15 inequality in our city like parks is one of those  
16 areas. So, I love Central Park. I love--I have two  
17 daughters so I go there very often. I got to other  
18 parks. But I go to Inwood Park. In the working  
19 class community we have not been getting the same in  
20 the previous administration. So I always try to put  
21 things before and after, and I hope that we can work  
22 together to address them. You know, I was one of  
23 those who advocated the most for restoring the  
24 funding to the parks. But when I look at the number  
25 of staff in my district-- And by the way, this

pertains to Northern Manhattan, all parks together, Inwood Park, Highbridge Park and Fort Tryon Park this is the second greenest area of Central Park. So it's 700 acres, and the number of staff that we have there is not enough. And this is not acceptable, and this is now the way of how we can be closing this gap. How many staff do we have at Central Park, paid by park and by conservancy, how many staff?

COMMISSIONER SILVER: We can get you that number. I don't have that number with me.

COUNCIL MEMBER RODRIGUEZ: I'm pretty sure the number is big because, you know, last we talked about like 250 in Central Park and I believe it is--if it has not changed, I assume it should be in that number. So let me tell you--let me tell you how we're doing in Northern Manhattan: 8 regular staff; 8 seasonal; 8 welfare work; 18 welfare workers; 6 gardeners. That all they do is to plant flowers, and one maintenance person.

[background comment]

COUNCIL MEMBER RODRIGUEZ: This is the number, and this is, you know, undoubted, and all I'm saying is I trust you. I believe you. I know that you've only been for a short period of time, but as

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2 I've been my colleagues for information, and for  
3 changes, this change does not reflect how hard we  
4 work to restore the funding to parks and the  
5 commitment to close the gap. This is your number,  
6 Commissioner, and we're talking about 250 staff. And  
7 we talk about let's not put PEP Officer. If you're  
8 talking about putting three or four in that park. Do  
9 we know about how many PEP Officers do we have in our  
10 parks?

11 [background comments]

12 COUNCIL MEMBER RODRIGUEZ: Yeah, how  
13 many?

14 COMMISSIONER SILVER: PEPs work out of  
15 substations so they're deployed on an as-needed  
16 basis. So they cover a district.

17 COUNCIL MEMBER RODRIGUEZ: But, in my  
18 district we're talking about one. How many do we  
19 have in my district?

20 COMMISSIONER SILVER: There is a Northern  
21 Manhattan Substation at work.

22 COUNCIL MEMBER RODRIGUEZ: That's only  
23 four at Harvey's Park.

24 COMMISSIONER SILVER: And there are also  
25 rangers that work out of--



COUNCIL MEMBER RODRIGUEZ:

[interposing] But there's only four in Harvey Park, and they're covering the whole areas of Northern Manhattan, 700 acres. And all I'm saying is that we are committed to be here together with this Administration. But that number has to change, and we cannot waste no more. Because I'm not here as a Council member. I'm here as a father of two daughters and when I'm working in Inwood Park or Harvey's Park or Fort Tryon Park what I want for my daughters is the same thing that I want for every children in our community. So all I'm saying is time is running. We've been patient, but that number has not changed. So, how can we address it? How can we change it? Because--

COMMISSIONER SILVER: [interposing] As I stated--

COUNCIL MEMBER RODRIGUEZ: --current data. This is not an assumption, this is a fact.

COMMISSIONER SILVER: As I stated, this is the beginning of the budgeting process, and we look forward to having conversations with both Council and the Mayor's Office and OMB to address this critical issue. But we hear you. We hear you.

2 COUNCIL MEMBER RODRIGUEZ: Thank you.

3 CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: Thank you Council  
4 Member Rodriguez.

5 SERGEANT-A-ARMS: Quiet in the Chambers  
6 please. [sic]

7 CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: Next up we'll have  
8 Council Member Van Bramer.

9 COUNCIL MEMBER VAN BRAMER: Thank you  
10 very much, Mr. Chair and Commissioner thank you. I  
11 want to begin as Council Member Miller did in  
12 praising our Queens Commissioner Dottie Lewandowski  
13 who is has been a terrific partner for the last five  
14 years with myself and Western Queens. We've had a  
15 lot of good success stories. Like with Dottie the  
16 playground in Union Park and Queens Bridge Park, of  
17 course that you were at, Commissioner Silver. But I  
18 did want to ask as you focused on delays and rightly  
19 so, and I know you've had a number of questions along  
20 these lines. But with the successes that you report  
21 and which are great, when you run into a problem, and  
22 when your trackers and your team sees that something  
23 is starting to slip and in some cases has slipped a  
24 great deal, how are you going to bring it back so  
25 that it gets back onto a reasonable time frame? In

other words, can you expedite? Do you have the ability and are you seeing something, a problem whether it's your fault somebody else's. It comes up and then you're able to focus resources and team to get that thing back on schedule. So you don't have council members in communities that are looking at multi-delays on very important capital projects?

COMMISSIONER SILVER: The answer is we're meeting on a monthly basis and at that monthly meeting, we're going over some of the projects, as you mentioned, that are starting to slip in to delay, and we take a look at it. The good news about looking this, is we're starting to see certain trends identify. So now, as we start a new process, there are certain flags we can look for. For example, in the past if there are multiple agencies involved, sometimes just reaching agreement on how to go forward could be a problem. But now, with this administration there is great cooperation whether it's DOT or DEP. And now, we're recognizing when there is a difference of an approach, we can now sit down at one meeting and have it dealt with versus dragging over time, which probably had been the practice of the past. So as a result, we're not

getting those projects back on track very quickly,  
and now going forward if they're multiple agencies,  
we have those agreements upfront before the project  
starts. So we don't get into some discussions about  
design once you get into the process.

In terms of the other ones, so we're just  
finding out some decisions that we need to make,  
where I need to intervene to get the projects back on  
track. And these meetings are work. I think staff  
now is looking for a decision. What do we do? What  
is hitting a road block? And so, s far they've been  
quite effective, and we're looking at those lessons  
learned about how we can apply them going forward.  
Just having a proactive approach on these delayed  
projects for staff is very helpful because they have  
been trying-- and struggling to try and move those  
along.

COUNCIL MEMBER VAN BRAMER: And I meet  
with Commissioner Lewandowski and her team fairly  
regularly in Queens on the status of my projects.  
And again, we work really well together. But, when  
you have issues throughout the City, where  
significant problems and delays occur, are those  
brought directly to your attention? And then are you

the person who is ultimately breaking the log jam. When you actually have that list, however long that list is, of very significantly delayed projects, are you ultimately the one breaking that log jam.

COMMISSIONER SILVER: The answer is yes. Staff is bring that to my attention. We're looking at the most chronic ones. We have well over 400 and so those that are seriously delayed, the answer is yes. That's what those meetings are intended to do. We meet monthly where we look at a few. But if something arises to the top, and it's more urgent, yes, staff will bring it to my attention where I can intervene. We're also learning that some of the grant funded projects are something we're taking a look at. There's a lot of paperwork involved, a lot of checks. And so, we're just taking a look at those grants as well. Those, too, add certain delays. It's always very difficult to explain that to the public, but again we're getting a lot lessons learn about--as you go into the weaves about why some of the delays are happening. And we are now making a lot of improvements.

COUNCIL MEMBER VAN BRAMER: Lastly, I wanted to ask you about something that doesn't

usually come up, which is a mini pools. I have a couple of mini pools in my district. I certainly used the one behind IS-10. We called it Junior High School 10 Park. I think Parks has a formal name for it, but what is your--what is your commitment to mini pools, which for many New York City neighborhood kids is their only access to water in a pool. As it was for me and my siblings as kids. How expensive are they to maintain, and what is the level of commitment of parks to maintain the mini pools that you've got?

COMMISSIONER SILVER: Our commitment is to maintain our pools. I'll defer to Commissioner Kavanagh for some of the specifics, but we certainly support all of our outdoor amenities. For those two months out of the year we want to make sure our close are close by to the residents. As we look for CPI, there are some opportunities where we're having conversations where the people want to keep a pool, change it out, and have other outdoor recreation so long as there is another pool nearby. [bell] We are committed to our mini pools. It provides a great resource for staying cool in the summer for those who can't get to the beaches, or don't want to go to one of our larger pools. So we're committed to

maintaining them, and keeping our inventory of both large and small pools.

DEPUTY COMMISSIONER KAVANAGH: The mini pools cost approximately \$60,000 a year to operate each summer. They're open for, as the Commissioner said, only two months out of the year. They're old. They're approximately 20 years or more old. They're not accessible. They serve a relatively small number of children at a time. They hold a maximum of 34 children. So in some of the discussions we've had about park renovations, and it's Astoria Heights Mini Pool IS 10, which is one of the most popular mini pools in the city. We've discussed with the community whether or not they want to maintain the mini pool, and they do cost about \$3 million for a new modern accessible pool. Or, create a much more I guess larger spray feature that can be used year round. The space can be used year round even if the water system can only be used three or four months out of the year as opposed to the two months the pool is open. So there are tradeoffs involved. We're not going to do anything unilaterally. If the community is strongly in favor of it, it's something we'll consider in the new design for the park.

2 COUNCIL MEMBER VAN BRAMER: Well, I look  
3 forward to continuing that discussion, and making  
4 sure that the community gets what it rightfully needs  
5 and deserves. And we make the best decision possible  
6 for that particular mini pool, and the others that we  
7 have in the city, but thank you very much.

8 COMMISSIONER SILVER: Thank you.

9 CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: Thank you, Council  
10 Member Van Bramer. I have a few follow-up questions  
11 and then I'm going to pass it back to those of my  
12 colleagues who have asked for a second round. First,  
13 since we're giving shout-outs to all the borough  
14 commissioners, I would be remiss without recognizing  
15 the Manhattan Borough Commissioner Bill Castro, who  
16 together with you, Commissioner Silver, has been a  
17 great partner for me and my team and really a  
18 pleasure to work with.

19 I want to return to one additional item  
20 that the Council added into last year's budget, which  
21 was \$750--\$750,000 for our Parks Equity Initiative,  
22 which supported working with neighborhood stewardship  
23 groups. This morning went to Partnership for Parks.  
24 A good chunk of it I believe was designated for CPI  
25 parks. Could you just tell us a bit about how that



has played out, and whether you think it's been effective in the past year.

COMMISSIONER SILVER: Well, first, understand you will be hearing from Heather Lubov who is now the new head of the City Parks Foundation. But from my understanding, is that clearly they're a vital partner and that they are now using this to deploy some of the work that they're going to do. But Heather will most likely update you more. Because that funding went directly to the City Parks Foundation to use it for, I guess grants and other purposes. I'll allow Ms. Lubov to answer more about that one.

CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: Okay, given that it is an important program, and good partners as you just stated, I think it's unfortunate that it didn't make its way back into the Preliminary Budget that it wasn't base-lined. And I have to say that together with four or five other items that suffered a similar fate, it's feeling like the much maligned budget dance is beginning to tap its toe again. I know that's not your fault, but I want to put it on the record that I think we're taking note of that. And, we wish we could spend our energy fighting for moving

the Parks budget even further down the field as opposed to having to spend so much energy on recuperating what was in last year's budget for items that--that I think everyone agrees are important.

Moving on. Much of the renovation work that you do on the capital side is contracted out. In the case of buildings, such as comfort stations, that's all under a project labor agreement, PLA, which I think is working pretty well. But in the case of renovations and I guess you would call it open terrain or landscaping, there is no PLA. And there's been some-- Am I using the terminology correctly?

ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER STARK: I believe with PLA it's over \$100,000.

COMMISSIONER SILVER: Okay. Got it.

CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: Okay. So there's been some reporting in the press over the past year about what are really alarming violations of prevailing wage laws for some of these contractors. Again, they're not under the PLA. What sounded like frankly in some cases if the press report were to be believed abusive practices of some of the laborers. And what I've heard from some contractors who do hire

union is that they're starting to get discouraged from bidding because they feel like they can't compete with the less scrupulous contractors. I wonder if you could just say a word about the status of whose job enforcement it is, and what enforcement action is being taken. And your view on this challenge to the extent you concede that it exists?

COMMISSIONER SILVER: I'm not familiar with the report you're mentioning. So we're just consulting to find out. Deputy Braddick is going to see if she can address some your points, but I'm not familiar with some of the claims that you've just mentioned.

DEPUTY COMMISSIONER BRADDICK: Yes, there is a specific within the Parks Department that focuses on prevailing wages, and actually does the analysis to make sure that all contractors are paying prevailing wages. In addition, there's an Engineer and Audit Office that looks over every single payment for every contractor. And again, the point is to ensure that they are paying the proper prevailing wages.

DEPUTY COMMISSIONER KAVANAGH: And I would just like to add that the Labor Law

investigators that Commissioner Braddick mentioned, visit work sites. And they look for all of the requirements that a contractor is supposed to have in terms of their labor obligations. They have to have certain postings. People have to be in specific job titles. They have to have daily logs that record who is working in what title, and they--we spot check that on a random basis.

CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: I've just gotten so many reports on this, a little anecdotal that it's red flags for me. And something I think we probably want to delve into more at a future date. At the OMB Budget hearing last week I asked Director Filahan [sp?] about the Discretionary Capital Budget that your department has. Now, much capital money in Parks is designated through discretionary allocations by Council members and we think that's great because we know our districts as well or better than anybody. And it gives kind of a grassroots connection to how these decisions are made. Some of it. On the other extreme, comes to your department already earmarked by the Mayor for high profile projects. For example one today would be the Fresh Kills Landfill redesign, an incredibly important working project. But my

sense is that that leaves very, very little money that your department can allocate based on your own strategic planning decisions. I'm told the number is maybe only in the tens of millions, which on the scale of capital is really quite small. Can you clarify just how much money do you have available for your own strategic allocations independent of these other designations you mentioned?

COMMISSIONER SILVER: I don't know how it worked before, but my understanding, and this is how it's done normally is that the Department through a series of planning exercises will submit these recommendations to the Mayor's Office. And as they look at the 10-Year Capital Plan, they make those determinations based on the agency's recommendations. So, I think it's probably not clear or fair to say the agency does not have those discretionary funds. Those recommendations are made to the Mayor's Office. They find their way into the capital plan. And then that becomes essentially--it says a Mayoral recommendation that those recommendations come from the agency itself. We will be undertaking a whole new fresh exercise this summer. Again, to go through the process of what are some of the big capital needs

and planning vision going forward. Those recommendations also go to the Mayor's Office, and as they make their decisions for future capital budgets. But then there's also--I'm sure you're familiar with the requirements contract. This is baseline funding, which is used depending on the issue to do smaller projects between \$40 to \$700,000. This is if we need to do something to make a playground safe immediately. Very often, borough commissions will use it at their discretion to help address some of the other projects. So there's a lot of discretionary funds out there for the agency to use. And we just want to take a very fresh approach as we look at the more capital planning going forward. So as we give it to the Mayor's Office in years ahead, it will be different and prioritized very differently. But we will play a major role in the capital planning going forward, as we have in the past.

CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: But it does seem that there's a special category of money. For example, maybe it's about \$30 million that you can use for say a retaining wall that needs repair. And last year, the outgoing Bloomberg Administration had

put in \$80 million into the Capital Budget that left you as a department with a great deal of flexibility. Ultimately, that comprised the core of the CPI.

COMMISSIONER SILVER: [interposing]  
Correct.

CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: So, am I not right that there is a special category of capital money that you have particular discretion over?

COMMISSIONER SILVER: Not like a big bank where I can jut use it and spend on projects. No, we have to be very focused. The way you want to have a plan, and then your implementation strategy is your capital budget and that's what it should follow. It's not kind of this, you know, big piggy bank, so to speak where you can just spend on projects. It is thoughtful, focused, and strategic. And there is also the requirements contract, which is a significant amount. It's roughly about \$20 million per year. Although, again, it's a fixed amount. I don't know if you can fix a retaining wall for \$700,000, but it certainly helps us to go in there either for sites for buildings to make some improvements we need to make very quickly. But again, we play a careful role in the capital planning

process. We want to take a different approach this year, and then that will be used for both OMB and the Mayor to take a look at those projects going forward. But the agency plays a major, major role. So there isn't that big lump sum. The \$80 million was part for community parks. We reprogrammed it for something we felt was a lot more important, and that ultimately become the Community Parks Initiative.

CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: Okay. Thank you.

I'm going to pause there. I do have some additional questions, but I want to give my colleagues who asked for a second round a chance to jump in. So first we're going to hear from Council Member Greenfield, followed by Council Member Treyger and Council Member Rodriguez.

COUNCIL MEMBER GREENFIELD: Thank you Mr. Chairman and thank you, Commissioner. I just want to make final point on the capital items, and I'd like to move onto some other subjects. I think it just might be worth talking to some of your partners. For example, the Prospect Park Alliance tells us that they're able to do projects faster and cheaper than the Parks Department. And I think that it may be worth studying whether it's them or the folks at



Central Park. How do they do it, and how are they able to do it in a quicker and cheaper fashion? I would just add to the Chair's point that it really-- it boggles my mind that projects that are coming in at \$4,000 a square foot, there is a need to cheat employees out of their wages. So I think that's certainly--if that's an issues, that's certainly something that we should all be taking a look at.

I want to move onto a different question, specifically recently there--we've had a lot of snowfall in the city. And there's been a challenge, and we've heard this from different constituents across Brooklyn, but also across the city. There's been a challenge in terms of clearing the park from snow. Can you sort of give us the background of who is responsible for that, and how is that supposed to work in terms of the paths and whether you have enough manpower or people power to get that done.

COMMISSIONER SILVER: Yes, we do. Depending on the severity of the event. First, is that we have to spark the Department of Sanitation with about 44 plows so that we can supplement the work that they do to make sure the streets are clear. We have about between 900 to 1,000 personnel citywide

to do clearance. We first focus on the perimeter of the park in areas that are near schools, and then we start working on the interiors of the parks. Now, in some cases we have equipment, and in other cases it's just shovels. And so, we have to be very quick and diligent on how we make sure we clean all of our parks. But, again, the priority one is support the Department of Sanitation. After that, we work on the perimeter of the park, and then we start focusing on the interior paths of the park. But we have, again, close to 900 to 1,000 deployed citywide to do that work.

COUNCIL MEMBER GREENFIELD: Okay, and let me focus--because I'm running out time--in a different areas that has to do with trees and tree damage to city sidewalks. So, I have two questions related to this. The first question is regarding the Million Tree Initiative. Do you consult with communities or community boards or local elected officials as to where to put these trees? Or is it sort of you guys decide on your own? And is that something that you would be open to doing perhaps for reaching out for input to communities and say, Hey,

we'd like to have a tree here as opposed to over there?

And then the second question relating to tress is what is your budget for repairs for sidewalks. It's a very big issue that we have. We have a wonderful amount of trees, but as you know, they grow and once they grow they tend to uproot sidewalks. And in many cases the homeowners are found liable for that. So can you give us some information on both of those issues.

COMMISSIONER SILVER: In terms of the new planting, we now notify the homeowner or property owner I believe it's about 30 days prior. So that they are aware the tree is going to be planted. In terms of what is available for the tree [bell] and sidewalk program, there's roughly about \$10 million in active projects. I also want to be clear that a lot of concerns people have about new planting, about uprooting sidewalks we've now learned about the type of tree, and the root system that it develops. So we now are looking at a wider area where the tree was planted. As well as trees that do not have the type of root system that will start to uplift sidewalks. So the fear about a tree being planted, again it

takes about 30, 40, 50 years for a tree to fully mature. But we're now looking at a different root system that will not create the same uprooting that it had in the past.

COUNCIL MEMBER GREENFIELD: So, just to be clear, I was actually referring to the--those trees that are already 30, 40 or 50 years old--

COMMISSIONER SILVER: [interposing]  
Correct.

COUNCIL MEMBER GREENFIELD: --and are uprooting the sidewalks. Do you know how many requests for repairs, and how much of those--

COMMISSIONER SILVER: [interposing] Yes.

COUNCIL MEMBER GREENFIELD: --you're able to fund, and whether you need more funding for that?

COMMISSIONER SILVER: Since the beginning of the Trees and Sidewalk Program in 2005, we received close to 70,000 requests for the program. We've completed 40,000 ratings and repaired about 14,476. On average, we can do about 15 sites annually. With the current funding of the \$10 million roughly we expect to repair about 3,500 sites. So we are moving diligently through the funds

that we have to start making those repairs. It is a very, very, popular and well requested program.

COUNCIL MEMBER GREENFIELD: Sure, but that still leaves-- And, I appreciate that and I'm grateful, but that still leaves approximately 80% of those people who are requesting it on the hook to actually repair those sidewalks on their own.

COMMISSIONER SILVER: We do a rating--

COUNCIL MEMBER GREENFIELD:

[interposing] Yeah.

COMMISSIONER SILVER: --and that's where if it doesn't meet our rating system, that's where there's some concern by the resident, which means they have to pay for it. But we do have this rating system. As we do that evaluation, we determine which sites that qualifies for this program.

COUNCIL MEMBER GREENFIELD: Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: Thank you, Council Member Greenfield. Next up we'll be hearing from Council Member Treyger followed by Council Members Rodriguez and Miller.

COUNCIL MEMBER TREYGER: Thank you, Chair, and I just want to just echo very quickly the comments made by Council Member Greenfield. I think

the Parks Department should, if not already has done so, do an analysis of the timeline and costs that capital projects in parks with conservancies and parks without conservancies. Because we keep hearing over and over again how big parks with conservancies have projects that are cheaper and move a little bit faster. I'm not say that it's perfect or idea, but a park that does not have a conservancy should not be burdened with more costly projects and more time.

I want to move again back to the issue of CPI. We mentioned before about Bensonhurst Park. I want to point out that even with the controversial project with the boardwalk to replace a section of it, we're not talking about City money. That's State money. So, there any even funds right now proposed to them towards the maintenance of the Coney Island Boardwalk? And I will tell you, Commissioner, that we just returned from a trip to Israel--from Israel and some of the most holiest sites have a wooden boardwalk. And apparently they found a boat that's 2,000 years old made of wood from the Sea of Galilee. So I don't think the Amazon Rain Forest is the only place where we could find these types of sources. But, I just want to ask, are there funds dedicated

towards the maintenance of the boardwalk outside of the State money, which is being used for that controversial project right now?

COMMISSIONER SILVER: I'll defer to Commissioner Kavanagh in just a second, but if you recall, a lot of the wood replacement that's being done is with--really, it's just the soft wood. And you basically see that being done, and it's not resilient. It needs to be replaced on a regular basis, but that is occurring. Which is why we're moving toward a more resilient material that has a much longer life span that would require less maintenance over time. We do have the numbers of how much it would cost on an annual basis to actually maintain the park, but as you know, it requires it to be replaced every two years. As opposed to the recycled plastic, which has a lifespan that can exceed some 20 years. So, we hear you. It is something that is through our new Capital Needs Assessment, and preventive maintenance. We want to change our approach on how we take care of our assets. So that's something that you'll hear more about in the future.

COUNCIL MEMBER TREYGER: All right and other parks, Kaiser Parks. Before they heard about trees, most--many of the trees died from Sandy. There's an issue of lack of shade. I know that--has there been any conversations in replacements of the dead trees that we lost from Sandy? What's the timeline of them?

DEPUTY COMMISSIONER KAVANAGH: Yes, we lost a lot of trees in Kaiser Park, as you noted as a result of Hurricane Sandy. Many of them have been removed. More likely they've been removed, but I'm happy to say that we planted over 100 trees in Kaiser Park, and we'll be planting more.

COUNCIL MEMBER TREYGER: Great. Also, other parks that were left out of the CPI again some of the border my district, but many of them benefit all of us in Southern Brooklyn. The promenade [bell] along Bensonhurst Park that faces Graves End Bay it also was damaged by Sandy. I'm being told by the Parks Department that the costs are in the tens of millions of dollars. Again, there's a safety issue there that the pedestrian walkway, the bike path there is heavily damaged. That's the area closer toward Bay Parkway. We haven't seen a dime in



allocation there, and the cost are more than one Council member can fund. We only got about \$5 million in capital money, each member, and that's for schools, parks, and libraries, but the costs run into tens of millions of dollars, and that's a safety issue, Commissioner. Also Dreier-Offerman Park, which is known as Calvert Vaux Park, the last administration made a promise of \$40 million to turn it into a beautiful regional park. Only half of that was ever given, and all we have is two soccer fields and a parking lot. So, we really have to make sure that as we discuss parks equity, it's about every region of our city. Because we hear, you know, outer boroughs. But me, I think I speak for many people in my district, and some colleagues. In Southern Brooklyn we feel that we're the outer-outer boroughs. And, I just don't see a commitment right now towards areas that I represent. And I'd like for you to maybe comment on--

COMMISSIONER SILVER: [interposing]

Right.

COUNCIL MEMBER TREYGER: --any prospects of projects for Bensonhurst Park. Kaiser you mentioned that you'll replace the trees. Dreier-

Offerman Park. These were parks that were promised some funds, and we haven't seen them.

COMMISSIONER SILVER: I want to again underscore the importance of the Community Parks Initiative. We number one recognize that there are needs across the city in all neighborhoods, and the intent of the Capital Needs Assessment is to get a firm handle on what are all those needs citywide. That will take us some years to do. Now, this current Preliminary Budget has the funds for the consulting contract to set out that work. But the Community Parks Initiative too a very careful look. We looked at neighborhoods of growth, of poverty, and of density, and projects that we see basically neglected for two decades. We recognize there are needs throughout the city, but these are areas for all those factors, and we have identified 134 of them citywide. These are places families and generations and highly densely populated areas that hadn't seen any investment in two decades, and that became our priority. They were just hiding in plain sight. There are other needs, and over time and through this Capital Needs Assessment, we'll be able to identify those needs. And our goal was to make sure we have

an outstanding park system in all neighborhoods. But again with the CPI, we're doing other things. We have 400 active projects aside from CPI, and we have more that will be coming online this year as well. So I hear you and this is something we hope over time we can get a good handle on through the Capital Needs Assessment.

COUNCIL MEMBER TREYGER: Commissioner, just the last point, and Chair I'll turn it over. Thank you for your generosity of time. If this was a matter of let's say \$1 or \$2 million, I think we could have a conversation and working together. But, we're talking about projects that exceed tens of millions of dollars that one member does not have or two even working together just don't have. And it's not just about neglect. There are safety issues. Like the promenade that I mentioned before, there are cracks where both bikers and pedestrians have a very difficult time traveling across. So, it's safety as well and we matter. I would argue that we also have many of those needs that you discussed in other areas. And so, I'd like to work with your administration--with your team and your department on addressing those needs as well. Thank you.

COMMISSIONER SILVER: When it comes to public safety, we'll certainly meet with all the borough commissioners to identify those areas of safety. So if there is a public safety issue we need to address.

COUNCIL MEMBER TREYGER: And Commissioner Jeffries in Brooklyn has been very--he's been--he hears me a lot. He responds to me a lot. So I do want to give him a little shout-out even though I give him some headaches times, but he does get back to me. Thank you.

DEPUTY COMMISSIONER KAVANAGH: Council Member Treyger, I just want to add that the SoHo Promenade is one of the things that the City is look at as a whole. All of the edges particularly where you have a built edge that suffered damage during Sandy, that's being led by EDC. The Parks, City Planning, DOT and other agencies are all participating in that analysis. As you said, it will cost tens of millions of dollars to restore that, but this is the first step in analyzing the entire waterfront of the city and see where the problems are and where the needs are. In terms of Bensonhurst Park, we have looked very carefully at Bensonhurst Park. One of the

elements of Commissioner Silver's framework for an equitable future is a regional park strategy. Council Member Levine mentioned that earlier as well. Bensonhurst is one of those regional parks. It's a little bit larger than a neighborhood park. The playground that you mentioned does have--does have needs, but the entire park as a whole serves a much bigger constituency than just a neighborhood playground. And it's part of that regional strategy that Commissioner Silver wants to develop that I think that Bensonhurst will fall into.

CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: Thank you, Council Member Treyger, and next up we have Council Member Rodriguez followed by Council Member Miller.

COUNCIL MEMBER RODRIGUEZ: Thank you. Commissioner, in a good note--

COMMISSIONER SILVER: [interposing] Okay.

COUNCIL MEMBER RODRIGUEZ: --when will we--when will the Highbridge Park be--I mean the Highbridge bridge be finished?

COMMISSIONER SILVER: When is that?

DEPUTY COMMISSIONER KAVANAGH: This summer.

COMMISSIONER SILVER: This summer? Okay, I'm being told this summer.

COUNCIL MEMBER RODRIGUEZ: This summer?

COMMISSIONER SILVER: This summer

COUNCIL MEMBER RODRIGUEZ: So finally, I know finally this summer we'll be ready to do the ribbon cutting of the--one of the oldest bridges in the city that will connect the Bronx and-- with Highbridge Park. In the planning for the opening, the reopening of the bridge, are--is the Parks Department also ready like putting the necessary staff that will be needed since more residents will be coming to Highbridge Park. Because now they will be able to cross from the Bronx to Highbridge Park?

COMMISSIONER SILVER: The answer is yes. As you know, we have a Lower Manhattan Administrator that is very active and connected with Highbridge Park. And, yes, we are anticipating the ribbon cutting, and also the volume of people that now will have access to resource from the pool to other amenities they have had access before. But the answer to your question is yes.

COUNCIL MEMBER RODRIGUEZ: Thank you. And I just hope also that we can work on, as we

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2 agreed when we met, to put a request for proposal for  
3 the--for the outdoor ice skating rink in Highbridge  
4 Park, which the money is already there, \$2.5 million  
5 for the ice skating rink that we want to bring to the  
6 park.

7 COUNCIL MEMBER SILVER: Yes, we agreed  
8 that we'll give it one more shot.

9 COUNCIL MEMBER RODRIGUEZ: Thanks. My  
10 last question is on the Fiscal 2016 Preliminary  
11 Budget includes \$42.2 million for the Parks  
12 Opportunity Program. What is the total number of  
13 participants enrolled in this program, and how often  
14 are new participants enrolled?

15 COUNCIL MEMBER SILVER: In terms of the  
16 total number, right now it fluctuates, as I said  
17 earlier, between 900 and 2,600, an average of 1,750  
18 but right now at this point in time it's about 931--  
19 931.

20 COUNCIL MEMBER RODRIGUEZ: Okay. Does  
21 the POP [sic] have annual replacement on a retention  
22 on goal for the POP participants?

23 COUNCIL MEMBER SILVER: Yes, we do and  
24 you probably know that we're probably the leading  
25 agency when it comes to working with job training

participants, 850 private placements with the New York City Parks internal placement goal of 300 were added. So again, that number has been quite high. So we had over 850.

COUNCIL MEMBER RODRIGUEZ: Great.

Thanks.

CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: Council Member Rodriguez, just to clarify, are the POP workers represented by a union?

COUNCIL MEMBER SILVER: DC 37.

CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: Thank you, and I'd like to pass it OFF to Council Member Miller.

COUNCIL MEMBER MILLER: Thank you, Mr. Chair. So, just as you might--I just want to kind of put out that I'd like to not now, but further explore the opportunity and the responsibility of in-sourcing some of the work, and looking at the cost analysis as we move forward. Obviously, some of these projects are moving--are happening now, but we want to make sure that we have the workforce that could provide it in the future. And perhaps that would be a way to save some money. Speaking of money, could you explain the administrative fee aspect of the Capital Program?



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2 COMMISSIONER SILVER: There is--if it's  
3 in-house, it is 10%. If we're using consultants,  
4 it's 30%, which is consistent with all other  
5 agencies. It's 10% for contingency. It is 10%-- One  
6 second. Ten percent for--

7 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER KAVANAGH: [off mic]  
8 [interposing] Design.

9 COMMISSIONER SILVER: --design, and then  
10 10% for construction--

11 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER KAVANAGH: [off mic]  
12 [interposing] Consultancy.

13 COMMISSIONER SILVER: --consultant  
14 oversight. So it is 30% and that's standard for  
15 other agencies as well.

16 COUNCIL MEMBER MILLER: Okay, what else?  
17 Where is that program. It's the--one of your  
18 beautiful casing programs. You have stopped taking--  
19 holding meetings and addressing communities about  
20 that who wanted to know when they would be up and  
21 running again. There was the--

22 COMMISSIONER SILVER: [interposing] I'm  
23 sorry?

24 COUNCIL MEMBER MILLER: It was the--give  
25 me a second.

2 COMMISSIONER SILVER: I didn't hear the  
3 question.

4 COUNCIL MEMBER MILLER: I have to come  
5 back to you on that project, but the community was up  
6 in arms that you kind of stopped when you got to  
7 them, and they had a bunch of great ideas that had  
8 not--that they had not had the opportunity to explore  
9 so--

10 COMMISSIONER SILVER: [interposing]  
11 Please let us know what program that is, and we  
12 certainly want to hear what the community has to say.

13 COUNCIL MEMBER MILLER: I'll pass it on.  
14 Thank you.

15 CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: Thank you, Council  
16 Member Miller. Commissioner, you made reference a  
17 couple of times to fully funded capital projects  
18 which, of course, implies that some projects are not  
19 fully funded.

20 COMMISSIONER SILVER: [interposing]  
21 Right.

22 CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: And I wonder if you  
23 could tell us just how many partially funded projects  
24 are dangling out there and sort of stuck in  
25 purgatory?

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2 COMMISSIONER SILVER: Well, while staff  
3 is trying to get the exact number, that full list of  
4 partially funded is actually on the Tracker by  
5 borough where you could just look at them in total.  
6 But are they in the 70 range? We'll get back to you,  
7 but in terms of the transparency purposes, all of  
8 those partially funded projects are listed on the  
9 Tracker.

10 [background comment]

11 COMMISSIONER SILVER: Okay. We don't  
12 have an exact number but all those projects are  
13 listed on the Tracker under proposed projects, which  
14 means that they're not fully funded.

15 CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: Right. Well, we  
16 have a dynamic where council members are asked to  
17 fund a project, a parks renovation project, before  
18 there's been a design or even necessarily a site  
19 survey. And sometimes that can uncover barriers that  
20 run the budget up. And so council members to the  
21 best of their intentions try to fully fund the  
22 project. And all of a sudden it's unfunded, and you  
23 lose an entire year on that cycle.

24 COMMISSIONER SILVER: Well, that's where  
25 the \$1.8 million site investigation will become

helpful. I've also spoke to the Capital Division about providing some better estimates. So that we don't want to go back to a City Council member and say we need more money. We do in some cases, we can use the requirement funds to make up the difference. But this is something we recognize, and we just want to make sure we do better estimating on the front end so we don't come back and say that we'll need an additional X amount of funds to move the project forward. But the site investigation is the one that's going to be key. We'll have better intelligence up front so we can provide better estimates to provide Council members.

CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: Great. Council Member Miller is cuing me to ask about Green Streets--

COMMISSIONER SILVER: [interposing] Oh, Green Streets.

CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: --a much beloved--

COMMISSIONER SILVER: [interposing] Okay.

CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: --program that has turned little forlorn patches in asphalt into what are sometimes thriving green spaces. I believe that the PlaNYC target was 3,000 green streets, and I

wonder whether we've met that goal or how close we are and at what pace we're continuing to create new green streets going forward?

COMMISSIONER SILVER: Well, I do know we manage currently about 2,100 green streets, and I'm looking right now for the PlaNYC.

DEPUTY COMMISSIONER KAVANAGH:  
[interposing] Yeah.

COMMISSIONER SILVER: If you'd like.

DEPUTY COMMISSIONER KAVANAGH: Chairman Levine, yes, the goal when PlaNYC was launched was to bring the total number up to 3,000 citywide. However, when the Recession hit, we took cuts in our capital budget including PlaNYC. Green Streets were one of the programs that were curtailed in PlaNYC. So we're about 2,700 citywide.

COMMISSIONER SILVER: [interposing]  
2,100.

DEPUTY COMMISSIONER KAVANAGH: I'm sorry, 2,100 citywide.

COMMISSIONER SILVER: Yes, that's right.

DEPUTY COMMISSIONER KAVANAGH: 2,100 citywide. We are--we have, however, in partnership with the Department of Environmental Protection sort

of morphed into a green infrastructure program. So we're working with DEP on their green infrastructure program. We're designing what they call bio-swales that are in sidewalks that look somewhat similar to green streets, but they have the goal of capturing storm water and preventing it from entering into the combined sewer systems during heavy rainfall events. Thus, preventing overflows into the harbor. So there are thousands of them being built right now in neighborhoods throughout the city. And I think that will be the next evolution of providing more greenery on streets in local communities. Rather than the traditional Green Streets Program.

CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: Am I right that to the average New Yorker these--though they're funded by different agencies, and they have green infrastructure, which is marvelous, that they look and feel like a park, correct?

DEPUTY COMMISSIONER KAVANAGH: They do.

CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: That's great. That's wonderful. Another component of the PlaNYC strategy was investment in midsize parks, which I know the trees have gotten mentioned not only by myself but many of my colleagues today. Am I correct

that there was a goal of eight regional and midsize parks to get major renovations in the plan?

DEPUTY COMMISSIONER KAVANAGH: Yes.

CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: And where are we today? Have we finished all eight?

DEPUTY COMMISSIONER KAVANAGH: There is some--still some work ongoing in some of those--in some of those parks, but we have done work in all eight. You know, for example, one of the biggest is, of course, the Ocean Breeze Track and Field Center on Staten Island, which is still in construction and will open later this year. But we did make significant improvements in countless parks [sic] as Council Member Treyger mentioned, Far Rockaway, Soundview--

COMMISSIONER SILVER: [interposing] Highbridge.

DEPUTY COMMISSIONER KAVANAGH: -- Highbridge.

COMMISSIONER SILVER: Ocean Breeze.

DEPUTY COMMISSIONER KAVANAGH: Yes. Fort Washington, a park, of course. Those were very significant investments in those midsize parks as you mentioned.

CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: Well, Fort  
Washington--

COMMISSIONER SILVER: [interposing] An  
analysis has just started on other parks between 10  
and 150 acres. It's something we're just doing some  
analysis and taking a look right now. This is--a  
number of parks even in Council Member Treyger's  
district would fall into that category. So we're now  
taking in addition to the PlaNYC parks, we're taking  
a fresh look at parks between 10 and 150 acres.

CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: That's great. So  
you're assessing needs. Is there any money in this  
capital budget to meet those--

COMMISSIONER SILVER: [interposing] No.

CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: -- those needs.

COMMISSIONER SILVER: No. No money in  
this Capital Budget, but we're just starting the  
planning of looking at these regional parks.

CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: Okay. Well, it  
would be wonderful if some could appear in the  
Executive Budget to some of our midsize parks. I'll  
just take one privilege to say--one point about Fort  
Washington Park, which mostly is in my district, and  
which got a fabulous renovation by your department in



recent years. There is just one small oversight, which is there is no comfort station. I guess it would be about 160th Street or thereabout, and it's about a mile stretch between comfort stations there. So we have these fabulous ball fields and park benches and green space. But if you could--if you could tell OMB to fund that, we would be--we would be grateful. Moving on. I mentioned earlier my interest in seeing beaches and pools open beyond Labor Day because as it turns out schools don't open until later that week. And perhaps of global warming it's seeming like September often has days, which are warm enough to go to the beach or a pool. And I would love to see the season extended some, at least to the opening day of the public schools. And ideally to include weekends through the end of September. And, I wonder whether you've priced this out. Obviously, there would be labor costs. What do you think it would cost to make that a reality?

COMMISSIONER SILVER: Well, I'll defer to Commissioner Kavanagh in a second. We are in the process of doing all the analysis. We heard you loud and clear. The Mayor also made the same recommendation at the end of last summer. And so,

we're looking at the numbers between pools and beaches. Also, having conversations with new-- As you know, the lifeguards are coming in to know who goes back to school. Who will be staying on board, but all the analysis currently is underway. I'll pass it on to Commissioner Kavanagh to see if there is anything he would like to add. But we heard you loud and clear, and our desire is to have some announcement before the season starts. But it is something we're seriously taking a look at.

DEPUTY COMMISSIONER KAVANAGH: Depending on the scale of the program it could cost as much as a million dollars a week to operate, you know, extensively both beaches and pools. And there are a lot of questions as the Commissioner, you know, alluded to that we would have to answer before we could make a commitment. Lifeguarding, of course, is first and foremost. You can't operate these facilities without lifeguards, and the bulk of our lifeguards tend to be students who go back to school. We even see, you know, a decline in our workforce at the end of August as the college students start heading back to schools. So that's a consideration for us. The other factor is weather and usage. As,

you know, the season starts to change at the end of August into September, we do see a decline in usage particularly at the outdoor pools. And, you know, it's a question in our mind whether it's--it makes sense to try to operate throughout the entire system, you know, past Labor Day. But that's--those are questions we're going to discuss with, of course, the Mayor's Office and the Council before we make any decisions.

CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: It seems like first if you reported a \$1 million a week would that be seven-day service or is that--?

DEPUTY COMMISSIONER KAVANAGH: Yes.

CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: Right. So if it's weekends only in later September it would be less expensive, correct?

DEPUTY COMMISSIONER KAVANAGH: It would be somewhat less expensive, yes. You do have to operate the pools continuously, however. You can't just operate them on weekends. Not staffed to the full level, but you have to--

CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: [interposing]  
Understood.

DEPUTY COMMISSIONER KAVANAGH: --but you have to maintain them.

CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: [interposing] Right, the maintenance. It does seem like of the two, beaches and pool, beaches would be the priority because the reality if it's warm out, and if it's not a school day, people are going to go to the beach. And if there are no lifeguards, then they're risking their lives by swimming in the sea. So, if we had to prioritize I think that would be our preference for sure. I was really happy to hear you, Commissioner, mention Vision Zero in your remarks. As far as I'm concerned every agency should be thinking about this especially one with a fleet as big as the Parks Department. Am I right--I think this was in the Mayor's Management Report that you had about 400 or so collisions presumably with pedestrians and bicyclists in the last year. Is that right?

DEPUTY COMMISSIONER KAVANAGH: Well, not--we had over 400 collisions, but they're not involving--

CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: [interposing] Or, it could be with other vehicles.

2 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER KAVANAGH: There are  
3 a few, but it's vehicles and other objects. So, we  
4 operate in parks and occasionally you might back up,  
5 and hit a bench or hit a light pole or something like  
6 that.

7 CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: Right, right.

8 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER KAVANAGH: That's  
9 considered a--that's considered a collision, and we  
10 record it and track it very carefully. But, you  
11 know, there are unfortunately a few collisions  
12 involving either pedestrians or bicyclists. We take  
13 them very seriously, and we investigate them  
14 rigorously. And, of course, we participate in all of  
15 the Vision Zero elements of the plan to try to reduce  
16 collisions significantly.

17 CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: Okay, that's an  
18 important distinction. Do you know how many  
19 collisions there were with pedestrians and  
20 bicyclists, and possibly how many resulted in serious  
21 injury?

22 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER KAVANAGH: I--I  
23 couldn't tell you off the top of my head, and I  
24 wouldn't want to guess on that.

CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: Okay. I had mentioned in my remarks a few things about our wonderful community gardens, and the fact that the budget for them is really quite sparse. I threw out a statistic that got some weird looks from a few of you. So I want to give you a chance to correct me if I'm wrong, but how many tools do we have the money to buy every year for our 600 community gardens? Does anyone know the answer to that?

COMMISSIONER SILVER: I don't know if Nancy, Nancy Cohen is here. In terms of our numbers, I know Green Thumb has grant funding. They have funding from Parks. So I don't know specifically how much they have set aside for the purchase of tools and equipment. Although, I do know they do that, but there's grant funding as well as funding they get from Parks, but I'll allow Nancy Cohen to respond.

NANCY COHEN: Hi, how are you? We have an operating budget of about \$204,000 to cover the equipment and supplies for community gardens, for the 600 community gardens.

CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: Which is fertilizer, shovels?

NANCY COHEN: Which includes compost, lumber. We have a variety of 150 tools that we purchased. There's about--about \$40,000 in a given year that we purchase those tools with.

CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: All right, so I was right on the number. I'll try not to pat myself on the back.

NANCY COHEN: Yeah.

CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: But boy, that sounds like you are really stretched thin. So it's one tool for every four parks, and in total the supplies budget is only a few hundred dollars per community garden, right. It seems like three of four hundred dollars maybe?

COMMISSIONER SILVER: Right. Well, I mean the point is that we certainly support community gardens. The addition of the seven positions. We are always pursuing grant funding for community--for the Green Thumb Program I think we've been successful again this year. And those will go to some of the necessary equipment that the Green Thumb Program needs.

CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: Great. Thank you. Lets ask about playground associates. These are

just--it's a wonderful, wonderful presence in these parks, which just can activate the play space and create I think a very healthy and intellectually stimulating environment for the kids. Also they help to maintain conversations. So, in peak season, how many of the 680 playgrounds that also have comfort stations are staffed by a playground associate today?

COMMISSIONER SILVER: Today?

NANCY COHEN: [off mic] I'm looking for that. [sic]

COMMISSIONER SILVER: Okay, we're diligently trying to get that number for you.

NANCY COHEN: [off mic] There are 245 in FY15.

COMMISSIONER SILVER: 245 in FY15.

CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: Right. So less than half.

COMMISSIONER SILVER: Correct.

CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: I think it would be an incredibly prudent investment too staff up on playground associates. We ran the numbers, as I mentioned, earlier. For \$5 million a year, you could get 200 more playgrounds covered, which I think would be a really worthy investment. Another PlanNYC



priority was to transform asphalt into multi-purpose fields I guess with synthetic turf for the most part.

COMMISSIONER SILVER: [off mic] Yes.

CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: Could you give us an update on how many fields have been converted, and where these metrical-- And if there's future allocations for additional conversions?

COMMISSIONER SILVER: Well, in terms of the PlaNYC Initiative, only six fields were converted. And in terms of going forward, we have plans to install about another 21 synthetic turf fields with approximately 41--\$43 million in funding to address these projects.

CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: Okay, so that was-- I'm sorry, that was a going forward number?

COMMISSIONER SILVER: That was going forward.

CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: Got it

COMMISSIONER SILVER: In terms of the Plan--the PlaNYC Initiative, it was to complete--we completed 26 fields. Those were already converted.

CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: Okay. Thank you. My final question--I'm sure you're happy to hear those words--has to do with something that you and

the City are very proud of which is our commitment to Minority and Women Owned Business enterprises among the contracts that we let. Could you tell us what percent of Parks Department's contracts are currently being issued to MWBEs?

COMMISSIONER SILVER: Well, as you know, we're very proud of being one of the agencies that does quite well in this regard. I'm trying to get the numbers here. So New York City Parks--I'm looking at the numbers. We awarded \$39.2 million in prime contracts to MWBE contractors, which was 23.7% of all of our qualifying prime contract awards. In terms of the percentage of our qualifying awards that went to MWBE primes, we were the second most successful agency in the city. And we are very proud of those efforts. To date, we're registered 17 contracts totaling \$21 million to firms that are participating in this program. And additionally, we've awarded a significant percentage of subcontracts to MWBE firms as well.

CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: All right, thank you very much. Thank you Commission and Liam and Kate for sticking with us for almost two and a half hours. I found your testimony to be really frank and

transparent and collaborative, and I truly appreciate that.

COMMISSIONER SILVER: Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: Thank you all.

We're going to call up our first panel, which is Tupper Thomas from New Yorkers for Parks.

[background comments, pause]

CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: We're going to ask also Heather Lubov from the City Parks Foundation to join us, and Deborah Martin from the New York Restoration project.

[pause, background conversation]

CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: I'm sorry for the mass exodus here, but I want to assure that all of our panelists and those who are waiting that I'm very anxious to hear your thoughts. And everything you say will, of course, be entered into the record. And it's currently available for our vast viewership on the web simulcast. So, please know that what you say matters. We have so many people who want to speak so I'm going to put you all on a two-minute clock. But hopefully, we'll have room for some follow-up questions. And Tupper, we'll ask you to lead us off. Thank you.

TUPPER THOMAS: Great. Thanks so much.

Certainly, everything you said in your opening remarks are what I'm saying in my testimony. So I will try to go quickly over it because I don't want to be too repetitive. But, we're hopeful and some of the things that came up out of the budget--of the Mayor's budget, but we are very concerned about CPI. We are concerned that not the full amount was made permanent in the--in the City's budget so that we can actually be assured that CPI will be the successful program that New Yorkers for Parks supported so fully, and the Council as well. So we are concerned that that has happened, and we would like to be sure that the final budget of the Administration does come out with full funding for CPI. It is an important program because it's not just capital, but it is also the expense items, community outreach, and all of those kinds of things. We are also concerned about the lack of PEP that were added back into the budget that was originally added in, and the gardeners and maintenance lines. Really, the Parks Department has been cut back so often, and for so long that we must be more aggressive on being sure that the things that you and the Council put in there become permanent.

And so, we would like to see the Administration accept that as an enormous important part of equity.

The other things that I'd like to emphasize is that the--we would like to see that \$3.5 million for Natural Resources Group. We would love to see the Urban Park Ranger program expanded. It is a fabulous program. It has brought some of the top people in the Parks Department agency in through the Ranger Program, and we would like to see that much more funded with the crews per borough. We really support Green Thumb, and the \$3.5 million that they need. And we are very much in favor of adding the money in for pruning and tree care because that is essential, and that can be done every year. That doesn't have to be something that's permanent.

On the capital end, we would also like to be sure that there is money available for discretionary funding whether it's stated by the department or not. That's what can make the difference between a City Council project working well. And if the Commissioner has the ability to add a little bit more in at the end instead of wasting that year while the Council has to get back to it. And we are very much in favor of some master planning

money that would not be capital, but would be expense. So that you can take those midsize parks and know everything that should go into them, and then fund them over time. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: Great. I want to ask you a question on this capital issue--

TUPPER THOMAS: [interposing] Yes.

CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: --which I have now asked both the Budget Director and the Commissioner about, and the Budget Director's answer was essentially, Well, there's \$1.5 billion in there that's at the Department's discretion. And I think that he is counting everything that the Mayor directs as being department discretion. But can you explain how you view this, and to the extent you know how much is currently in the budget that is truly flexible in this way?

TUPPER THOMAS: So, almost all of the money in the budget, as the Commissioner pointed out that there is different ways that he can get some projects done. But it is not--it's not a quick ability to suddenly fix up something or take care of things that need to happen. Our organization has fought for this bit of discretionary money, and it

was finally achieved a year or to--whenever--at the end of the Bloomberg Administration, and it's essential. We feel that you can't possibly know the cost of every project. There isn't a program out there since all of us are guessing at how much this project or that project is going to cost. Even if you can do some borings and some other checks first, which is a good point, you still don't have that ability to know what that project is going to cost. Because you can't get into this design. You haven't met with the community and spent time thinking about what they need. So it would be great for the Commissioner to have that ability to say I'm going to take out of this pot, and use it to make those projects work so that the process doesn't get stopped completely. Because you find out that suddenly \$1.5 million isn't going to be enough. It's really two, and then the whole project goes back into redesign, rethink, and it's just--it's very inefficient. So if they--if there was a discretionary amount of money, I'd like it to be \$100 million or so. But even \$50 million you could throughout that year be using it in all these different ways plus for things that nobody in the world is going to want to fund. So those

kinds of non-glamorous projects I think it's  
essential

CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: Great. Thank you,  
Tupper. Heather, please.

HEATHER LUBOV: Thank you. I'm Heather  
Lubov, the Executive Director of City Parks  
Foundation. We are a non-profit organization  
committed to supporting a sustainable and equitable  
park system because we believe that 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 through arts, sports, environmental  
education, and community building programs. All of  
our programs are free of economic barriers and serve  
to promote healthy and vibrant communities. For the  
coming fiscal year we hope to work in more than 350  
parks in every council district. And we focus on  
parks serving those with the greatest need. Much of  
this support--much of these programs were  
accomplished thanks to the Council's support, and for  
that we are grateful. The Council's groundbreaking  
Parks Equity Initiative allowed us to revitalize and  
empower Partnership for Parks, a public-private



partnership with New York City Parks that facilitates community engagement as a catalyst for creating, planning, and place making. 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 of 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 be--will increase by 25%. Finally, Catalyst, our most intensive outreach effort is a four-year community building program. It 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 96th to 135th Street in Manhattan, and will continue working in Kaiser Park, which was mentioned earlier. [bell] Renewed funding

will not only allow us to continue growing these programs, but bring our arts education and sports programs to all those neighborhoods. On behalf of City Parks Foundation, I want to thank the Council for its generous funding and for its leadership in parks equity. We request that you renew this funding in FY16 to allow these programs to continue.

CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: Thank you, Heather, and thank you for the work that you and Partnership do, particularly in supporting stewardship by local residents in the parks the don't have multi-million dollar conservancies. To me this is so critical to the health of the park, and almost without fail when you see a park with a strong Friends off group in the neighborhood, even if they don't have a lot of money, but they put in a little bit of sweat equity, they are going to be extra eyes on the park. They take ownership over the park. It's going to be a safer, better maintained park. And it generally doesn't cost the city much. So, it's so important, which is why we wanted to help with that \$750,000. If that money were not to be renewed, what would the implication be? What would you not be able to do?

What services would such parks not receive that they are currently benefiting from today?

HEATHER LUBOV: The Parks Equity funding helps support three main things that we do. One is our technical assistance program, which includes our small grants program. So we award \$150,000 a year in small grants to help those Friends of Groups. We do monthly trainings for those leaders so that they can help develop those skills, and do all the work that you just described. We are going to be doing a conference this April to bring those people together to network to learn best practices. And our Catalyst Program. We're basically talking about 11, the equivalent of 11 staff people who are being funded to do all of that work throughout the City. And then we bring private dollars to the table to help match that.

CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: All right. Well, we certainly hope this will be base-lined and thank you for your wonderful work. Deborah.

DEBORAH MARTIN: [off mic] Chair Levine, thank you-- Is my mic on? [on mic] Now I'm on. Yes. Hi. So in respect of the two minutes, I want to just start by saying that I really commend the

seriousness that your office is bringing to this.

Parks are the primary place in our city where we tell our citizens, and most poignantly children, what we think about them, and how we're investing in them. And I think we have to remember that because that's an environment that we control 100% unlike walking down the street or many other environments. It's like a school, and we need to bring that kind of sense of investment to parks.

So I'm going to quickly talk about three things. One is I want to commend the work that partnerships is doing, and the work that the--that you are doing in funding positions like the Chief of Community Outreach and Partnership Development that we heard from Kate earlier. That kind of focusing on how conservancies work with the Department is really long overdue. And I really want to commend you for doing that, and to support any continued and increased funding for facilitating those really important, really valuable relationships.

Second, I also want to commend the work of CPI, and so like so many today focus a little bit on midsize parks. We under--midsize parks bring values to our system that we don't necessarily derive

from the smaller parks, although certainly we need to invest in both. They can provide ecosystem services, habitat. They manage storm water. In many instances they're historically works of landscape architecture. They 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. So that's just one example of benefits, health benefits. These parks strengthen bodies. They also strengthen communities. I have seen this at Sherman Creek Park, a park that NYRP manages where we now have a stewardship group of over 100 members who logged about 700 hours in 2014. And that group while the need our support for capital and management that group is continuing to grow both in building social capital and in contributing to the welfare and benefit of the park.

And finally, I just wanted to thank this committee for support of NYRP. Our work across the city in Sherman Creek alone we invest \$1.2 million annually in maintenance and operations not including capital. And we made a number of requests both from

your office and other council members, and we really appreciate your support. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: Thank you so much for all you do. NYRP really is a conservancy for our parks in low or moderate-income neighborhoods. It's a wonderful service. If there were one or two additional ways that the Parks Department were to serve conservancies or partner with conservancies, what would you prioritize?

DEBORAH MARTIN: Well, I think on the subject of midsize parks, and again this has been mentioned, but I'm just going to reiterate. The capital allocations allow for design. The only--once the allocation is made, as Tupper mentioned, you don't know what the cost is going to be until you've done design and particularly in midsize and larger parks. If you don't have a master plan, then you certainly don't know how to build and mobilize most efficiently. So that money for master planning really kind of doesn't exist systemically in our--in the system that we have today. So I guess that would be an important thing. I would say that there should be some funding, and that would could be done by the Parks Department who has many able landscape

architects. But organizations like NYRP who are very experienced with the combination of community outreach and design, we've been doing that for years. We do everyday around our community gardens and around the parks that we work in. That's a good way to get that master planning done. So I urge that kind of upfront investment in planning, which leads to later savings in capital.

CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: All right. Thank you very much to all of you. Thanks to your panel. Next up we're going to hear from Peter Stein, President of the Local 508; Sirra Crippen, President of Local 1507; and Malberto Farjad [sp?] who is a member of Local 508.

[background conversation]

CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: Thank you. We'll let you kick us off.

[pause]

PETER STEIN: Thank you very much. Good afternoon, Council people. My name is Peter Stein. I am the President of Local 508 representing supervisors of lifeguards. Since I understand this is a budget hearing, I'm going to limit my remarks to two items, which are impacted by the budget. One,

and the first one is the condition of the New York City Parks Department indoor swimming pools. They are old. They are in desperate need of renovation. The average air temperature over the last four weeks has been somewhere between 50 and 70 degrees in the majority of the pools. One pool had to be closed. Unheard of because of the fog. You could not see from one side of the other. Many of these structures were built in early 1900s. They were bath houses. Some were built by the WPA. They are in desperate need of rehabbing the fiscal--the physical structures of these buildings need boilers. They need air ventilation systems, and if there's a question in anyone's mind about utilization, what's the difference between a private facility and a parks facility, which is a diamond in the rough, it is amenities. And if you're not comfortable because it's 60 degrees in there, you're not regularly going to utilize the place. Not to mention the poor members of ours who are stuck sitting there for hours at a time in frigid, frigid conditions. So that' number one.

Number two, the quality of the air.

There is something called--and I know everyone will



chuckle--lifeguard lung, l-u-n-g. It has nothing to do with lifeguards. It has to do with predominantly the people who are in swimming pools with no air circulating, develop respiratory problems. The medical community named it that. So, you're jeopardizing the public's health and safety by the air quality in these places because the HVACs in many of these facilities either are not present or do not work. So my first-- [bell] That's three minutes.

CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: If you'll quickly wrap it up.

PETER STEIN: Okay, if I can take someone else's three--two minutes. So, there's a need for-- there's a need for budget to be allocated specifically for this purpose. My second reason to be here is the City bill, which I think you are the sponsor of, which requires additional budget to keep the facilities open in September. I will talk at greater length at a different time, about it, but as long as it's budgetary. One, there needs to be--we are in favor of the concept. We are very concerned about the detail of the implementation. We are concerned that public safety be given the highest priority, but this is not a mandate without

consideration of the impact of the safety situation.

Two, obviously we're union. We're concerned about

the contractual rights of our members being adhered

to. And three, is something I think nobody has

looked at as yet, is the unanticipated disparative

treatment of both our minority members, and the

minority community. The bill as written works better

for us than what we understand is the counterproposal

by the Administration. We think that pools and

beaches should open concurrently. The truth is when

it's hot, both facilities, both beaches and pools are

utilized. When it is not hot, both facilities tend

not to have the utilization. So to parse the

situation and just keep either the pools or the

beaches opened is not something we are in favor of

and we will talk--

CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: [interposing] Okay.

PETER STEIN: --at a different hearing on  
that subject.

CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: Okay.

PETER STEIN: Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: We expect to do an  
entire hearing on this topic at some point, and we  
welcome your further input. I'm deeply sensitive to

the impact on the workforce of any change in the scheduled and would look forward to coordinating with you and your members to make sure it's implemented appropriately.

PETER STEIN: Thank you for your time.

CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: Thank your, Mr. Stein. Ms. Crippen.

SIRRA CRIPPEN: 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 New York City Parks and 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 their additional funding in fiscal year 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 39,000 acres of land. Meaning that one gardener is responsible for maintaining an average of 254 acres of parkland.

Council Members, the Department of Parks and Recreation is woefully under-funded, and we

request your support in making our communities and those under-served communities beautiful. Since the 2015 additional funding has not be base-lined for fiscal year 2016, 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 garden lines and other related titles to perform the duties I stated above. Further, 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. This 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. [bell]

CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: You can quickly wrap up if you have just a summary--

SIRRA CRIPPEN: [interposing] Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: --sentence or two.

SIRRA CRIPPEN: 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 warm weather in the parks.

The beautification of parks is important to New Yorkers as well as the thousands of tourists who visit these areas. Earlier you--earlier you asked the Parks Department what would happen with the new people that were hired with the Council Funding. If the money is not restored, it concerns me that the new hires will be laid off. There already is enough--is not enough gardeners. This will really impact how much work will be done. I want to thank you and if you have any questions, I'd be glad to answer them.

CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: Thank you so much, Ms. Crippen for the work that your members do in beautifying our green spaces. It affects New Yorkers in a really powerful way, and we're grateful for it. And we're going to fight very hard to make sure that there are no layoffs and your ranks. Actually, we should be increasing from the current number. But at a minimum we will be working to make sure we can keep all of our great gardeners on staff. Thank you.

SIRRA CRIPPEN: Thank you very

CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: All right. Mr. Farjad [sp?]

MALBERTO FARJAD: No comment at this time. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: Well, thank you all very much, panel, for coming up. All right. Okay, next up we'll have Joe Puleo, President of Local 983; Keith Cavaleri. I believe it's President or a leader of Local 983; and Marlana Giga, who is Treasurer of Local 983.

[background conversation]

JOE PULEO: All right. Good afternoon, City Council people. My name is Joe Puleo. I'm vice--excuse me--I'm President of District Council 37, Local 983. I'm also the Chair of the Parks Policy Committee for DC 37. I'd like to begin by thanking the City Council. You always have done a great job in restorations, especially you, Mark. You know, you've been a really tremendous in reaching out and being on top of issues when they relate to parks. Unfortunately, it's not enough in this budget, as you can see. We had hired 80 additional officers last years and, you know, they'll be gone in this budget if it reads the way it is. We need not only to retain the 80 that we have, we need to hire more. You know, we need to hire more. There's a lot of

waterways throughout the boroughs that are seeking PEP Officers. They're very popular these days.

They do a great job. They deter crime. They keep our parks safe and clear. You know, they do a--they do a tremendous--they do a tremendous job. The problem we're having with the PEP Officers, too, is that the salary rate is so low that they're not staying, and especially when you get told from the beginning that you'll probably only have a job for one year. That's the day you'll probably start looking for a job. So we need more civil services, you know, employees that are armed that have job stability. And, you know, they have the ability. They feel like they're not going to be ousted within--within a year. Also, too, they can do a lot of insourcing in parks. Okay, we also represent the Associate Park Service workers.

They do a wide variety of work. They operate machinery like the packer. Like they do like sanitation worker, and they also do a lot of construction work, the work that gets contracted out. And they get paid substantially less than what the outside contractors do. And, in fact, they end up finishing the shoddy jobs that the contractors do.

They put them in afterwards, and they finish the job. We have--currently, we have about anywhere from like 15 or 20 [bell] specialized APSWs that do this work. We would like to increase this, and in our last contract there was a provision in there that said that there is gain sharing. Okay. So anything that would gain the city from saving money, would also be, you know, allocated to the actual workers. I think this is a great opportunity to use some in sourcing. Have these workers do what the out--what the outsiders do, and eliminate a lot of these consultant, you know, positions. I'm going to have Keith talk a little bit about what he does so you get a clearer idea. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: Okay, Mr. Cavaleri.

KEITH CAVALERI: Okay. I operate front-end loaders, backhoes, track loaders, bulldozers and sometime excavators. I love my job. I love what I do, but it gets frustrating to see outside contractors coming in and doing what we can do, and they're getting \$60 an hour, and we're getting \$25 an hour. So I mean, we did--we did boardwalk work. We did four-fifths of the job. They did 20% of the job and we did 80% of the job, and I think they ran out



of money to pay the contractor. So they had us come in, 40 carpenters and three APSWs that operate on the capabilities that I do, and we finished the job.

[pause]

CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: How--

KEITH CAVALERI: [interposing] However, I have a list of things that we do if you're interested in hearing what we do, but--

CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: No, I--I get a sense of it, and it seems like a pretty compelling idea to in-source, as you say, additional work as opposed to requiring you to step in and-- When there's a funding shortfall to clean work necessary. Has anyone in the Parks Department leadership engaged you all in a discussion of--in a discussion of how this might work, Joe.

JOE PULEO: Not as of yet. I mean it's something that we've advocated for a long time. You know, we never get any--you never get any traction. We would like to see it, you know, especially now that there's budgetary time. You know, we could hire more APSWs, you know, and have them do even, you know, a lot more of the stuff that's currently being done and projected to be. As you know, the capital

projects are way into the future. I mean you can hire a new APSW today and he could probably retire 25 years later and still there would still be capital work. So I think it's a wise investment to focus in on this title that already has those mentioned in their job specs that can do the work. We're talking about heavy machinery. We're talking about bulldozers, back--back--backhoes, front-end loaders. They do excavation as well as demolition. So if you have this skilled workforce that's there at your fingertips, why would you want to go out and hire people to do assessments to the work that ends up never getting completed?

CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: All right. Thank you to both of you, Mr. Puleo and Mr. Cavaleri. And Ms. Giga.

MARLENA GIGA: Hi. My name is Marlena Giga, and I'm currently with Local 983, and I was a PEP Officer and a PEP sergeant for 15 years. What's disturbing to me about the PEP Officers is the Parks Department continues to mislead the public and mislead the Council about the work that the PEP Officers do. I would just like to make it be known that the Security, CSA Securities do not even have

the State minimum requirements as security officer. They don't have the 8-hour or the 16-hour training. They have one to two days worth of training, and then they're put at beaches and pools. And we cannot substitute PEP Officers in place of CSA. There is a need for CSAs, but they're not able to go out on patrol. They're strictly for stationary posts at the pool and beaches.

And the Parks Department has continued to cut back and cut corners, and that affects the quality of life and safety for all New Yorkers. The PEP Officers are the police of the parks. NYPD only responds. The PEP Officers are proactive in the parks. We have such a high turnover rate, and the salary is so low that the PEP Officers leave within one to two years. We are also currently working out of bathrooms, and we don't have enough vehicles to patrol either. I would ask that you increase the funding for PEP to continue to function.

I would also like to talk about the APSWs and the Maintenance Division. We cannot continue to rely on the Welfare to Work. It seems like the welfare workers are 1,900. So it's the same amount of welfare workers as full-time employees. The

welfare workers are only physically at work about three days a week, and they don't have the skills. They're not allowed to use the equipment that the full-time employees are able to use either. And it's revolving door. I've had welfare workers work for me in 2002 and then I'd see them come back in 2004. So they're really not learning anything working at the Parks Department. Thank you.

KEITH CAVALERI: Okay. We would like to see those people that are on public assistance to have jobs. We don't want to see them exploited into--you know, given these temporary fixes, and then like Marlana Giga said, be back in the system again two or three years later. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: We agree with that, and I think our next panel may be speaking directly to that issue. Thank you all very much.

MARLENA GIGA: Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: I'd like to call up Geoffrey Croft from New York City Park Advocates; Mia Bell of Community Voices Heard; and Joseph Mpa [sic] also of Community Voices Heard.

[background comments, pause]

CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: Okay, Mr. Croft,  
take it away.

GEOFFREY CROFT: Good afternoon. My name is Geoffrey Croft, and I'm President of New York City Park Advocates. I'm here today to give testify on the FY16 budget for the Parks Department specifically on the Expense Budget. Sadly, every year at this hearing, which is arguably the most important, takes the least amount of time to prepare. Each year our elected officials allocate a fraction of the necessary funds needed to properly maintain programs and secure public parks. Over the last 40 years, no other city agency has lost a greater percentage of its workforce than the Parks Department. Mayor de Blasio's \$78 billion budget proposed allocates only a fraction, just \$336 million in tax levied funds that are desperately needed to properly maintain, operate, and secure and program our almost 30,000 acres of parks. That's only .4% of the proposed of the proposed \$78 billion budget to care for 14% of our city's land. The Parks Department is in dire need of thousands of additional workers and hundreds of millions of dollars in additional expense funding annually. Funding and personnel many say the Parks

Department will never receive. This, in my opinion, is shameful, and I know you are also angry. The City routinely allocates one-third of what the Parks Department actually needs. This is imperative. It is imperative that the City allocate a budget that reflects the true needs of the Parks Department. Unfortunately, this one does not come remotely close as usual.

For a decades, the public has been told the expense funding needed to hire the skilled laborers, the gardeners, the climbers and pruners, the foresters, park enforcement, qualified managers among other positions that are so desperately needed are not available for our public parks. This proposed budget is an unfortunate and constant reminder of how in both good economic times and bad, public funding for parks is simply not a priority. Our elected officials refuse to allocate proper funding. We need the political will obviously to do this. And although this is a citywide problem that affects virtually every segment of the population, it is no secrete that a disproportionate amount of these--of the most severe issues exist in poor neighborhoods. The city's underserved communities,

namely the working class, the poor, the disenfranchised and areas populated by people predominately of color. This, of course, is the great irony considering these are the communities that rely on these public services the most. This pattern of neglect must be reversed.

As we know, the budget is a reflection of our government's priorities, and funding for parks is not a priority. The question is when will this change? How much longer will the city's elected officials collectively ignore this problem. We are obviously asking the City Council and all of your colleagues, Mark, not just people on the Parks Committee, to really take a look at this stuff. Again, this proposed budget from the Mayor it's way off.

I did want to address just one thing on the crime issue, and I know you brought this up earlier. There was an article on forest land in the Wall Street Journal a couple of weeks ago that really just mischaracterized what's going on in our public parks. Thanks to you, thanks to the advocates and to Local 983, we finally are tracking crimes in the majority of our parks now. I just want to go on the

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2 record saying again seven people were raped; 180  
3 people were robbed; 98 people were assaulted; and one  
4 person was murdered in the last two quarters or  
5 reporting. And again, this is the first time in the  
6 city's history that we're actually tracking crime in  
7 parks. Those are real numbers and they are scary  
8 numbers, and the public should be aware of that. And  
9 also just one last thing that you had brought up,  
10 Mark. You know, you had brought up how few PEP  
11 enforcement can be available for patrol. During the  
12 summer it can be as few as two available for an  
13 entire borough. All right, thank you.

14 CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: Thank you, Mr.

15 Croft. Ms. Bell.

16 MIA BELL: Good afternoon, Council. My  
17 name is Mia Bell. I a leader and board member of  
18 Community Voices Heard. I am here to talk about the  
19 importance of the Parks Opportunities Program. As an  
20 alternative to the WEP experience program in the  
21 Parks Department. Mayor Bill de Blasio committed to  
22 ending WEP during his campaign. And HRA Commissioner  
23 Bates announced on October 1, 2014 that the city  
24 would phase out WEP. [coughs] We are glad that the  
25 Parks Department has already stopped receiving new



WEF workers. Also, for 15 years the Parks Department has been a model alternative to WEP providing patrons new jobs and training opportunities for thousands of people. Community Voices Heard is interested in maintaining POP, but also improving it. While there may be times when a person needs a short-term position that is subsidized in order to earn points towards Social Security or to prove yourself able to hold a job. Most people need this position 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 New York City Department of Environmental Protection positions that will be opening up in the participation for climate changes, and to make the city more environmentally friendly. Certain trainees during the JTP position could prepare people for these 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 the

Parks Department would like to extend the length of time for the JTP positions to nine months. Which would allow for better training as well. We would like to extend to one year, but we do not want there--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 city. Again, thank you.

CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: Thank you so much, Ms. Bell. Joseph it's great to see you.

JOSEPH MPA: It's good to see you. I hope your son is doing well.

CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: He is. Thank you.

JOSEPH MPA: Once again, thank you Chairman Mark Levine and members of the City Council who are here. Once again, my name is Joseph Mpa from Community Voices Heard and also the Welfare Workforce Campaign. I'm also a board member with CVH. Just to reiterate in reference to what Ms. Mia Bell was saying-- And my testimony is not there if you're looking for it. Okay. So just to reiterate what Ms. Mia Bell was saying, what we're really looking for is a pathway to employment, to full-time employment. We understand and it has been spoke on before the severe

cuts that the City Administration has done to the Parks Department over a number of years has left these gaping holes in terms of its services that it can deliver. We feel that the people who have undergone training, and go through training constantly through the JTPA Program can be a model for other city agencies in reference to employment positions. It gives you an opportunity to measure a person's work, to see their values. To see whether or not they're on time. To see how they cooperate. To see how they follow orders. So this can be an excellent training ground for full-time positions, which I'm asking that would be. [sic]

We support DC 37, who JTM POP workers also become a member of. We support the unions and we also want to acknowledge the fact that this administration is not responsible for the type of union busting that was responsible in the other administration, we would like to support--we would like to thank you for your--on behalf of what you've done to replace WEP. And also in terms of what you've done for the parks. Because the reality is that one thing about the parks is the city parks are truly the beauty of-- The beauty of New York lies in

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2 its people and in it's parks, not just its buildings.

3 So that's something that we have to come together on.

4 Thank you.

5 CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: Very well said.

6 Thank you so much, Joseph. Thanks to the panel.

7 GEOFFREY CROFT: Mark, when I said just

8 on the capital stuff, I encourage everyone who has

9 not read the Controller's Report from a couple of

10 weeks ago on the State of the Capital Division of all

11 of the city's agencies, but especially on the Parks

12 Department--

13 CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: [interposing] All

14 right.

15 GEOFFREY CROFT: --very good to read.

16 CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: Thank you. Thank

17 you very much. Okay, next up we have Ann Valdez from

18 Surfside Multicultural Garden--

19 ANN VALDEZ: [off mic] And Community

20 Voices Heard.

21 CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: And Community Voices

22 Heard. I would have--I would have called you on the

23 previous panel. Sorry about that. And Christina

24 Taylor from Friends of Van Cortlandt Park, and David

25 Vigil from East New York Families.

[background comments]

CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: And Ann, we'll lead it off with you whenever you're ready.

ANN VALDEZ: Thank you. Okay, as you already mentioned, my name is Ann Valdez. I'm a member and leader of Community Voices Heard for over 12 years. I'm a resident of Coney Island, born and raised there, and I also am a native New Yorker. I care very much about what happens in all of our parks and parklands. I am also a member of Community Garden in Coney Island, Surfside Multicultural Community Garden. It is named that for the purpose of what it should be. It includes the entire community, which is impacted by many different groups from all over, not just from New York. They have ancestries in many other states, countries and so on. I am here to speak on the many different issues that are being said. But to back up what my other co-members of Community Voices Heard have said, we at Community Voices Heard had created the Parks Opportunity Program many years ago because no matter where you go, a job is a job and job should be paid for.

When it was first initiated we had the WEP program, the Work Experience Program, it was work. Not much experience, and it definitely wasn't a program that should be continued. I appreciate and I commend this--this whole--from the Mayor down to every city council to agreed to end the WEP program. I commend you. I thank you very much because labor should come at a price that's monetary and revolutionary and not at a price of someone's health or someone's life. We've had many different issues happen upon that, and I'm so glad to see it's on its way out. Now, as part of that, we have a lot of different areas in which instead of having the Work Experience Program, we can have programs where people learn issues, learn things, learn how to take care of things and also get paid for it. I noticed in what you had said at the beginning of this hearing, and what the Parks Department had said, and also what the other City Council have said. And there are a few things I want to basically point out. First of all, in Kaiser Park--

CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: [interposing] Can you can try and just sort of summarize.

ANN VALDEZ: Sure. First of all, in Kaiser Park the most important thing that needs to be said is that we have never had a full recreation center, and there is nowhere really for these kids to go. If you have not already noticed, there's been a high incidents in crimes there because there is nothing for anyone to do. Whether it's children or adults, there's no jobs. There's no trainings. There's no programs. The only there is the YMCA, which is expensive and not everyone can afford it. And on top of that we have Community Gardens, which beautify our neighborhoods, and it can also help feed the neighborhoods. And instead of increasing that and helping us out, we're doing it without the things that we need. And I believe that instead of the Parks Department worrying about increasing the jobs in the Green Thumb, they should worry about putting those jobs into people who are actually maintaining those gardens, especially our youth. Our youth can learn a lot, and can take it on into generations, and also help to beautify--

CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: [interposing] Thank you.

ANN VALDEZ: --the environment and take care of everyone.

CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: Thank you so much, Ann.

ANN VALDEZ: Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: Okay, Christina.

CHRISTINA TAYLOR: Good morning--good afternoon. Thank you for having me here. My name is Christina Taylor, and I'm the Executive Director for the Friends of Van Cortlandt Park. First I want to start with saying thank you to our Councilmen who already left. Andrew Cohen for helping to secure funding for the Van Cortlandt Park Forest Restoration crew for the upcoming year.

The Friends is a independent community based organization, which actively promotes the conservation and improvement of Van Cortlandt 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's unfortunate that over 20 years later the Parks Department is still not adequately funded. With the larges New York City Park, Pelham Bay and the third largest park, Van



Cortlandt, the Bronx has more parkland than any other borough. But we often wonder if we're 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 would happily join you to urge the Mayor to increase funding for New York City Parks especially those in the Bronx. The City also needs to be more creative in raising revenue for parks. And the Friends have already begun a comprehensive plan to do that for our park. Now that New York City Parks has approved a comprehensive master plan for the first time in the Parks' history, the opportunity to solve the equitable funding situation in the Bronx parks has never been greater.

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

First, I'm sorry to sound like a broken record, but a pedestrian bridge of the major Deegan to connect Van Cortlandt's eastern and western halves, and connect the Old Croton Aqueduct Trail. In 1999, the City Council determined that the DEP

should build a pedestrian bridge if it was feasible.

A study found that it is feasible, but the DEP still

has refused to pay for it. The pedestrian bridge is

now part of the master plan. We are once again

asking the Mayor and the City Council and the borough

president to please press the DEP to keep its promise

to fund the bridge.

The second is the Friends have a trails

plan for the park, and the implementation of our plan

will allow the 20 plus miles of hiking trail in the

park to become a hiking destination in New York City.

We would like funding to help support that trails

plan.

The third is probably the most important

for all parks is maintenance funding. We strongly

believe that New York City Parks is not funded at the

level needed for the agency to properly maintain and

care for all of its parks. Each year we see finding

for [bell] capital projects, which vastly improve our

parks, but we don't see an increase in maintenance

funding to do that. 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 keep a maintenance staff, PEP Officers and other staff for the park. The Friends fully support the Parks Department in its efforts to maintain and improve all parks in New York City. It's important to the future of our boroughs that we fund our parks. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: Thank you, Christina. Thanks to everyone who testified. Thanks to all of you who stuck it out to the end. 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 March 17, 2015