

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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MARK LEVINE
Chairperson

COUNCIL MEMBERS:

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

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Heather Lubov
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Let's Rebuild Cromwell Coalition

Christina Taylor
Friends of Van Cortlandt

Peter Stein
Local 508

COMMITTEE ON PARKS AND RECREATION

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[gavel]

CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: Good morning

everyone. Welcome to the Parks and Recreation Committee's hearing on the fiscal 2017 preliminary budget and the fiscal 2016 preliminary Mayor's Management Report for the Department of Parks and Recreation. My name is Mark Levine and I am the chair of the Parks and Recreation Committee. I'm pleased we're joined by steward Committee Member Andy Cohen from the Bronx. In line with the budget process mandated by the city charter that will ultimately lead to the adoption of the fiscal 2017 budget. Today we will hear testimony from the Department of Parks and Recreation on this expense and capital budgets for fiscal 2017. New York City today develops only a little over one half of one percent of its total budget to its parks far less than in any other... far less than at other points in our history and far less than most other major American cities today. Thanks to the creativity and hard work of the Parks Department staff, the efforts of thousands of volunteers, and the increasing generosity of private donors. Our parks today are still far better off in almost every way

compared to years passed. Improvements in our Park system however have not been felt equally throughout the city with particularly striking contrast between parks with well-funded conservancies and those in low and moderate income neighborhoods and even differences in quality amongst peer publically funded parks. We thankfully are beginning to chip away with these inequities with conservancies providing significantly increased support to Parks and left... less well-off areas. In legislation the council passed last year will for the first time give us the day that we need to compare spending from all sources on a park by park bases. The mayor's preliminary budget contains some excellent news for park users, most notably the addition of 67 new parks enforcement personnel which will help improve the park's experience in key locations around the five boroughs. Sadly, that's about it for good news in the preliminary parks budget. While there is a nominal projected increase in the department's total spending from 454.7 million in FY '16 to 459.3 million in FY '17. This actually represents a slight drop in the portion of the total city budget

which we're devoting to our parks. From 0.58 percent this year suggests 0.56 percent next year. And in a time when usage of our park system is soaring this proposed budget may actually amount to a decrease in funding per user. On the critical measure of headcount, the 7,185 full time equivalent positions that would be funded under the proposed FY '17 budget would actually represent a drop of 19 employees. And unfortunately for the second year running the mayor's budget fails to baseline 8.7 million dollars for park maintenance workers which the city council has put in place over the last two years. The loss of these funds would mean that 50 gardeners and 100 maintenance workers would be laid off as of June 30th depriving our parks of critical staffing and depriving 150 hardworking New Yorkers of their livelihood. New Yorkers deserve better. We deserve a parks budget which reflects the outsize role our precious green spaces play in the life of every community in the city. A few of the ways I believe this budget can and should be improved include the following. We need to expand resources for our city's sprawling network of natural areas which totals more than

10,000 acres and today is supported by a total staff of only 75, far less than what we need to adequately maintain resources which play such an important role in our city's environmental resilience. Today there are a total of only 30 park rangers for all of New York City down dramatically from nearly 200 in years passed. Rangers serve as ambassadors to the natural world supporting environmental education, outdoor recreation, wildlife management, and active conservation. But today their number is so poultry that most New Yorkers will simply never come into contact with them and might not even be aware of their existence. We need one million dollars to hire more park rangers specifically those specializing in wildlife management. We need 11 million dollars to further develop and expand the department's seasonal staff including park workers, playground associates, gardeners, and other supervisors so we have adequate staffing during the warmer months in which usership is so heavy. We need 4.5 million dollars in expense funding for smaller vehicle fleets which are not considered capital and are especially important in larger parks like

Riverside, Morningside, or Van Cortland. We need 500,000 to complete the department's extensive and important tree census which will give us.. give every tree its own webpage detailing its species, age, amount of maintenance, and other useful information. We need 2.6 million for lieder mapping and for digitizing map files that will provide improved information for planning purposes as well as greater public transparency. We need one million to offer more employee training that will better prepare staff for specialty rolls within the department and to train those rising through the ranks into managerial positions. We need 1.7 million dollars to hire an artificial turf maintenance crew as the number of artificial turf fields under DPR's jurisdiction is growing. So is the need for special care and maintenance of these fields beyond the usual seasonal cleanups. A dedicated and trained crew should be put in place to make repairs and better fix turf issues as they arise. We need 750,000 dollars for green thumb, to hire six outreach workers.. outreach coordinators and six field technical staff, double the current levels to better manage gardens and to hire

additional staff to implement expanded educational programs at the gardens and to help community groups resolve administrative issues. Finally, we need 2.4 million dollars to permanently expand the beach season by a week beyond labor day and to keep pools open an extra week for this time as well.

Lest you think that this land of important budget enhancements would be prohibitively expensive I'll point out that every one of these items combined would only push the park's budget from its current level of 0.56 percent of the city's total budget to 0.59 percent. I now want to say a few words about the Parks Department's capital budget. During the Bloomberg era the city committed hundreds of millions of dollars to grand transformative projects like the highline Brooklyn Bridge Park and Governor's Island. Some critics remind to the fact that mega... that this mega spending was focused on the city's wealthier areas with far less investment in parks in outlying low and moderate income neighborhoods. But I believe that the best response to this criticism isn't simply to end the era of grand parks projects as the current capital budget does. Our response should be to continue to invest

heavily but to focus these resources on parks and areas of the city which have been too often left behind. Let's renovate St. Mary's Park in the South Bronx, a park desperately in need of investment in the heart of the Mott Haven Community or long neglected Astoria Park in Queens heavily used by a thriving immigrant community. Let's think big and turn an abandoned rail line into the Queens way, a mile's long linear park. Let's bring some environmental justice to park starved Bushwick and deck over part of the BQE to create a new green space called BQ Green less reclaimed lost resources in daylight Tibbetts Brook in the Northwest Bronx unearthing a long buried stream to create new recreation space. Let's expand waterfront access in the north shore of Staten Island and connect a growing number of new attractions emerging there. Let's finish the renovation of Fort Washington Park in southern Washington heights and create the long planned comfort station and operations building along the Hudson River at 159th Street. These projects are not cheap. They can't be funded with two million dollars and three million dollar allocations from council members and borough

presidents. They will require major investment by the Parks Department itself but these projects could easily be in... accommodated if we simply return to the Bloomberg era pace of capital spending on Parks. And with the city's current debt today more than 14 billion dollars below its statutory limit. There is ample fiscal room to make a relatively modest bump up in Park's capital spending over the next decade. Making this kind of investment would have a transformative impact in neighborhoods all over the five boroughs in the places where the potential for private contributions is minimal and where the city itself has underinvested for years. Let's start thinking big again. Let's double down on investment in our parks. Let's bring spectacular new green spaces to life for New Yorkers who most stand to benefit. Let's create a parks budget worthy of this great city. I look forward to hearing the administration's testimony on this critical topic. And I want to welcome Council Member Rory Lancman from Queens has joined us. And now Commissioner I'll turn it over to you.

COMMITTEE ON PARKS AND RECREATION

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COMMISSIONER SILVER: Good morning Chair
Levine and members of the Parks Committee.

CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: Sorry Commissioner
I forgot I need to ask our Committee Council to the
perfunctory swearing in.

COMMITTEE COUNSEL SARTORI: Chris
Sartori Committee Council do you affirm to tell the
truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth
in your testimony before this committee today?

COMMISSIONER SILVER: I do. Good morning
Chair Levine and members of the Parks Committee.
I'm Mitchell Silver, Commissioner of New York City
Parks and Recreation. And I'm joined here today by
a number of our senior staff. Thank you for
allowing me the opportunity to discuss the
preliminary budget for fiscal year 2017. I'd like
to begin by providing some context about New York...
NYC Parks. We are a steward of over 30,000 acres,
14 percent of New York City's land mass including
10,000 acres of natural areas. We oversee nearly 45
hundred individual properties ranging from parks
and playgrounds to community gardens and green
streets. We operate more than 800 athletic fields
and nearly 1,000 playgrounds, 67 public pools, 51

recreation facilities, 15 nature centers, and 14 miles of public beaches. There are currently 491 active capital contracts with parks and improvement projects including 156 in design, 178 in procurement and 157 in construction. I have to say that 2015 was an exciting year for the Parks Department. And I was thrilled to spend my full calendar year as Parks Commissioner working closely with our senior management team, elected officials and other partners to bring a new strategy and focus to NYC Parks and to make sure we remain responsive and responsible stewards of city tax dollars. Thanks to the leadership of Mayor de Blasio and a strong partnership with the city council I'm proud to report on the progress we've made by focusing on key strategic themes and outcome oriented goals. We're working to make our parks cleaner and safer reflecting that our mission is not simply maintaining our parks and green spaces but caring for them as well. We're seeking to continually improve and refine our capital and operations processes, increasing efficiency, and delivering services that are smarter and faster and achieved through innovation. We are helping New

Yorkers live greener and healthier lifestyles by creating and improving our open spaces through targeted place making efforts. And we are undertaking all of these efforts with a specific mission in mind, increase access to parks for all New Yorkers in a fair and focused manner that reflects our dedication to equity. The preliminary budget for fiscal year 2017 reflects these ongoing priorities providing for operating expenses of 459 million, a five million increase from fiscal year 2016 adopted budget. The preliminary four-year capital plan provides a total parks capital budget of 3.2 billion with 150 million in mayoral funding for approved new capital needs. The budget demonstrates a continued strong investment in maintaining the state of good repair for many of our park properties. For these reasons I'm excited to be here today to report on all of the positive strides that we've made at the agency for the second consecutive year and to report on our plans for next year. Our dedicated maintenance and operations staff do their best to keep our parks in the best condition possible. Each of these individual properties requires targeted maintenance

and we're striving to truly care for our parks and green spaces with all of the dedication and investment that the word caring implies. Through our Parks inspection program NYC Parks conducts 6,000 detailed park inspections throughout the year as a way to consistently observe conditions encountered by the public the result of these inspections are shared with senior management on a regular basis guiding our decisions regarding resource allocations. For example, after observing last year that high destination parks were receiving increased usage on weekends resulting in increased trash we instituted new cleaning schedules for our maintenance crews which will continue this year to target these hotspots for picnicking sports and other activities. This was a first. It was never done before. We're clearly seeing the benefits of the investments made by this administration for Parks ranging from dedicated funding for playground equipment maintenance and repairs to record level funding for block pruning of our street trees. So far in fiscal year 2016 nearly 70,000 trees have been pruned using this funding well within the industry standard cycle of

seven years. Increased funding for tree stump removal reduce our estimated stump backlog by almost one-third and a record level of funding for our tree and sidewalk program will allow us to repair over 2,000 sites in this fiscal year. Care for our parks also means caring for the safety of New Yorkers. NYC Parks is dedicated to constantly assessing and improving our standards and protocols whether through the inspection and repair of older playground equipment or the implementation of improved safety practices and oversight for our crew tree care and tree removal projects. Caring is also reflected in our excellent work done by our uniformed officers who serve the public and enforce our park rules. The Urban Park Rangers who connect New Yorkers to the natural world to environmental education wildlife conservation, outdoor programming, and our parks security service staff. Many of whom are seasonal hires who provide important presence and enhance the experience of our park users, especially our parks enforcement patrol or PEP officers. We were pleased that last year's budget included baseline funding for 80 PEP officers and they were added to our ranks the

previous year. And these officers continue to make a positive impact throughout the city enforcing park rules and working closely with NYPD to coordinate efforts and provide assistance as needed by the NYPD invest... at to investigate crimes.

Recognizing the vital role that PEP officer play in our parks the mayor's provided over 5.3 million dollars in this year's preliminary budget to hire 67 additional new PEP officers. The 50 additional park security service staff and... I'm sorry and additional, 50 additional park security staff. With this increased funding we'll be able to increase patrols in all five boroughs to better educate the public on the proper use of our parks and playgrounds and watch over our beaches, pools, recreation centers, and other public spaces. We'll also be able to create a citywide unit to help our fellow age3ncies address problems associated with homeless encampments and bolstered enforcement efforts related to unauthorized vendor activity in our parks. This strong sense of caring is also present in our passionate dedication and involvement of thousands of volunteers and stewards and organizations each of whom donate countless

hours of their free time to help take care of their committee parks, gardens, and street trees.

Partnership for Parks our public private program, managing cooperation with the city parks foundation supports a growing network of individual advocates and organizations dedicated in their... through their neighborhood parks and green spaces. Partnership for Parks is able to equip local leaders with the skills and tools needed to transform neighborhood parks and green spaces into dynamic community assets. In fiscal year 2015 upon a ship for Parks outreach coordinators worked with over 650 existing park advocacy groups and identified another 257 new groups to organize caretaking efforts for their local park. This takes the form of trainings and workshops to individual leaders, assistance for local organizations, and great volunteer driven programs such as park cleanups and it's my park event. In fiscal year 2015 partnership for parks organized over 1,000 volunteers, events throughout the year engaging close to 30,000 New Yorkers. The volunteer stewards at our community gardens are among the most dedicated you'll find in New York City. Green thumb, our division that provides

programming and material support to over 600 community gardens throughout the city works closely with over 20,000 volunteer gardens. Green thumb offers support in the form of supply giveaways and other material assistance and held more than 130 workshops and classes in 2015 providing training and advice to a record breaking attendance of over 15 hundred passionate urban farms. At the end of 2015 the city announced the biggest addition to the parks department community garden system in more than a decade transferring 34 interim sites from the Department of Housing Preservation and Development to NYC parks for permanent assignment as green thumb gardens. By transferring these 34 gardens, these spaces where people of all walks of life come together to grow food, play and learn, exercise and relax who receive support and be part of a citywide green thumb network that provides resources and expertise to help make these gardens even stronger. Volunteer stewards are also vital to taking care of our natural area, urban forests, and last year our forestry, horticulture, and natural resource group created that NYC Parks stewardship program. Since its inception the winner of 2015,

the stewardship program has engaged over 6,000 volunteers through 175 events on New York City streets and in forests and wetlands. By encouraging the New Yorkers to help care for the trees, shrubs, wetlands, and wildlife that helps make the city a vibrant and liberal place. In 2016 we plan to increase the reach of our programming further, encourage repeat volunteerism, and expand our cores of super stewards working to positively impact the city. One exciting initiative that couldn't succeed without the help of our dedicated volunteers is our tree count census beginning the past year and continuing through this year a team of volunteers and park staff are undertaking our third decennial tree census. This will give us an accurate count and assessment of the street base component of our urban forest allowing for more sophisticated management of our street trees. And this data will put us... will put it to good use. We're excited to announce that our online information portal and interactive map of every single street tree in New York City will be ready for our broad launch this year. By using the data collected by trees count census we'll be able to create an accurate and

continually updated map of our city street trees. And great... and greatly increase public understanding of the need of tree care and how to create access support resources for such care. This map will provide the public with an easy to understand real time inventory of trees encouraging New Yorkers to explore our city's urban forest, understand the ecological benefits of trees to the city and report on volunteer efforts. The online tree portal is one example of our dedication to innovation which we are also applying to our operating... operations and capital projects to improve our efficiency and deliver services in a smarter and faster manner. Regarding the capital process, we continue our efforts to streamline the internal procedures standardizing designs and encouraging the use of preapproved contractors as well as closely monitoring projects to identify potential problems before they occur and get all projects moving forward right away. With mayoral funding provided in last year's budget we've been able to conduct predesigned testing at 83 sites over the past two years which has helped us understand site conditions prior to beginning

design reducing the likelihood of change orders during construction avoiding goals, associated delays and additional costs. These and other forms have already shaved months off of the capital process... process which results in further cost savings. In the first six months of... of this fiscal year our on time completion rate has risen to 93 percent and increased from 90 percent in fiscal year 2015 and 72 percent from fiscal year 2014. And our on budget completion rate has risen to nearly perfect 98 percent, a phenomenal rise from 86 percent in FY 2015 and 78 percent in 2014. So in just two years we're able to increase both on time and on budget by over 20 percentage points. In October 2014 there were 124 capital projects on the backlog meaning they were fully funded but largely due to staff availability or unable to start design. Thanks to funding provided in fiscal year 2015 budget we now have 55 new design staff in our capital division. And I'm very proud to announce that we've begun to design on all of the 124 backlog projects. Moving forward our goal is to have all newly funded projects enter into design within the same fiscal year that funding has

received. During this current administration we've begun to design on 275 projects and started construction on 187. And in fiscal year 2015 NYC Parks registered over 650 million dollars in capital spending, a record level to the best of our knowledge. And I'm happy to announce that the mayor has provided close to four million dollars in funding in fiscal year 2017 preliminary budget with an additional 18 capital designers to help us continue this momentum as well as 28 resident engineers to serve as construction project managers and help keep our projects on track when they begin construction. Since all of our capital projects are subject to open public bidding process one source of potential delay is a reality that contractors submit bids higher than the project estimates initially expected due in part to the ongoing construction boom underway in New York City. I recognize that this could be frustrating for all elected official partners who do their best to make wise allocation decisions regarding their discretionary funding. To help improve the accuracy of our capital estimates and better track the rapidly rising cost of materials and labor the city

is experiencing across the board we have received mayoral funding in the preliminary budget to establish a pilot capital estimating unit. This team will utilize specialized estimating software used by industry contractors and provide our agency and partners with more accurate sense of what a given capital project should cost further reducing unexpected delays. Gathering better information clearly helps us work smarter and faster and make better decisions by allocating our resources which in my... which I'm pleased that the mayor has extended funding in fiscal year 2017 to continue development of our citywide parks capital needs assessment which gives us more comprehensive of understanding of the state of our park system. This capital needs assessment will give us the tools to keep our parks in the state of good repair on an ongoing basis implement for preventative maintenance program and make the best possible decisions about spending city dollars. We are applying the same approach to work smarter and faster in our daily operations and maintenance practices. This past year innovation and performance management division prototyped a field

tested mobile solutions for capturing the daily maintenance task performed by our mobile crews. We're currently in the process of rolling out a new mobile app based on our prototypes and developed by Parks information technology division. As of two days ago, March 1st, all of our park's mobile crews across the city are now using this app to capture their daily cleaning activities at each park. This will enable more streamline operations and allow us to accurately capture the report on the park level services we provide. To further help us explore innovative ways to manage parks property are innovation and performance management division. We instituting a pilot program for substantial trash management to take place in Crotona Park in the Bronx. Based on our trash management program created by the central park conservancy. The success of which has garnered national attention we expect that this fresh approach will significantly decrease the time spent on daily cleaning activities and aid in past prevention. This project will also encourage park stewardship not to mention improve the quality of patrolling the parks' beautiful natural landscape. Further in partnership

with the central park conservancy we're exploring additional sites where this approach of trash management can be beneficial including St. Mary's in the Bronx, Fort Green, and McCarren Parks in Brooklyn, Flushing Meadows Corona Park in Queens, and East River Park in Manhattan. NYC Parks is dedicated to helping New Yorkers live greener and healthier lifestyles. And the best way we can do this is by encouraging them to get back out and enjoy our parks by creating and improving creative open spaces through our targeted place making efforts. We strive to make our parks special destinations that reflect the diversity and variety of New York changing demographics. And since people of different age groups and cultural backgrounds seek different experiences for the neighborhood parks. In some places parks are designed in a manner that doesn't take the surrounding area into consideration which results in a park built in a vacuum. We want our outdoor spaces to be part of the fabric of the community and are parks to be an inviting place to spend time whether it's a picnic on a lazy summer weekend afternoon or brisk job before work on a cold winter morning. Chief among

these new planning efforts of our parks make them more welcoming as our parks without borders. Our exciting new design initiative which unveiled by the mayor in his 1NYC plan last year which included 50 million dollars of capital funding. This program focuses on our park edges, entrances, and adjacent spaces where they most directly interact with the surrounding community utilizing 10 million of the allocated funding Parks will incorporate these design ideas in capital projects where opportunities exist and has succeeded in doing so in over 50 projects so far. We are creating more access to parks, creating more park line by opening up entrances and edges and reclaiming unused park space. Additionally, NYC Parks will be allocating the remaining 40 million dollars to eight new signature projects where this design approach can have a transformative impact at an average budget of about five million dollars. To help choose these projects NYC Parks launched a comprehensive outreach effort last November which included briefings, community meetings, and for the first time in New York City history an interactive website where New Yorkers could submit direct

feedback about the city parks they felt would benefit from this new design approach. And response has been phenomenal. The website received over 6,000 specific nominations and suggestions on the website during the comment period which ended earlier this week. Additionally, we hosted 40 public meetings at community boards, libraries, park... and park resource... computer resource centers to receive direct feedback from New Yorkers who did not have reliable access to the internet or didn't feel comfortable using the website. Beyond its funding initiative our capital projects team will be considering this design approach where appropriate in consultation with local communities and stake holders to make sure the entrances and edges of our parks are as welcoming as possible encouraging greater access and interaction with the surrounding neighborhood. Guided by our planning efforts to increase access to Parks and Open Spaces concentrating on areas of the city that are under resourced and where residents are living further than a walk to a park. This past year we've been able to create some truly wonderful destinations encouraging New Yorkers to live greener and

healthier lives. After being closed to the public since the 1970s the High Bridge the only inter-borough bridge that is exclusively for pedestrians and bicycles reopened in June reconnecting communities in the Bronx and Manhattan. Thanks to tremendous work with our partners at the New York City Department of Design and Construction the renovated bridge provides a quarter of a mile of a new space for the public to play, exercise, and enjoy views of the Harlem River and the New York City skyline and serves as a direct connection to more than 125 acres of parkland with paths, lawns, natural areas, baseball fields, basketball courts, a mountain bike miking [phonetic] course and a High Bridge pool and recreation center all within easy access. We commemorated opening of the high bridge festival in July, a wonderful gathering featuring free music, art, recreational activities entertaining neighborhood residents and visitors on both sides of the bridge. The project has attracted regional and national attention winning the municipal art society 2016, MAS Masterworks Award for best neighborhood catalyst and recognition from the rolls in British magazine as one of the top ten

bridges of the year. Our efforts to reconstruct the Rockaway Boardwalk after devastation of Superstorm Sandy continues as we have been rebuilding it with a stronger and more resilient design in partnership with the New York City economic development corporation. We open the first two phases on schedule this past season allowing the public to have access to a mile of continuous boardwalk resulting in over 7.6 million visitors to the Rockaway Beach, a 66 percent increase over 2014. And just last month we open additional phase at Beach 73 and Beach 86th Street ahead of schedule. In November we proudly opened up the Ocean Breeze Track and Field Athletic Complex in Staten Island. Another great partnership with DDC this 135 square foot facility features a 200 meter eight lane running track with room for 25 hundred spectators and it's only world class track facility on the East Coast certified by the International Association of Athletics Confederation. The social and economic benefits of this facility for Staten Islanders in the city will be tremendous drawing visitors from all over the country as more than 70 meets are taking place in its inaugural season.

These have been included high profile events such as the Bishop Lockland Games, the longest running and largest high school indoor track and field meet in the country. The elite New York City Marathon Runner's warm up and New York's USA Track and Field Hershey Youth indoor championships which will mark the first... the final event of the indoor track and field season. And of course you don't need to be an elite athlete to enjoy physical health and fitness benefits of Ocean Breeze. Over 4,000 New Yorkers have already signed up to access the facility's state of the art recreational amenities and fitness classes. Though we're remarkably proud of this new facility our 35 recreation centers continue to provide a variety of amenities that help New Yorkers stay fit and get healthy while also providing local New Yorkers with a sense of community within their neighborhood. In 2016 our free citywide shape up NYC continued its growth averaging 36 hundred class attendees every week. And we were excited to stand with first lady Shirley McCray this January as she helped us announce the program's expansion which is focused on ensuring more than half of our Shape Up classes

take place in high need communities. Our Urban Forest and natural areas help make our parks extremely memorable and pleasant to spend time and assure that New Yorkers can lead greener healthy lives by exploring and enjoying more natural settings. The Million Trees NYC was a citywide public/private initiative to improve our urban forest with the goal of planting and caring for one million new trees in New York City by 2017. With support from the restoration project and other partners NYC Parks engaged over 50,000 volunteers to help plant these trees providing a vast array of social economic environmental benefits for all New Yorkers. In November NYC Parks was joined by Mayor Bill de Blasio and Mayor Bloomberg to plant a lacebark elm in Joyce Kilmer Park in the Bronx representing the one million tree planted two years ahead of schedule. In addition, our street and park trees, New York City Parks is responsible for maintenance, restoration, and reforestation of our natural areas which represents the full third of our park land and serve as special destinations for New Yorkers looking to find peace and quiet in the great outdoors. Fiscal year 2016 budget provided

baseline expense, personnel funding to replace the filtration plant restitution funds which has enabled our forest restoration team to continue to improve the work in Van Cortlandt Park and other locations in the Bronx. In addition, these upland areas, New York City Parks manages over 3,000 acres of Salt Marsh and fresh water wetlands including many areas which had been newly restored over the past decade. These wetlands are vulnerable valuable tools in storm resilience and combatting climate change but require consistent and dedicated maintenance to survive. For example, we've recently completed a wet... a watershed plan for the alley creek little neck bay in Northeastern Queens to provide a road map and implementation strategy for short and long-term projects throughout the watershed including ecological restoration and storm water management. As the city population continues to grow in size and diversity the need to provide access to green and open space is important more than ever. NYC Parks is proud to work with the mayor and Department of City Planning to plan holistically for increased density and merging from growing neighborhoods as part of Mayor de Blasio's

affordable housing agenda. NYC Parks is working closely with our sister agencies to develop the capital strategies and alignment with the ongoing neighbor study in potential rezoning areas. NYC Parks is proud to be a leader in national trends regarding parks and open space planning this spring. We look forward to conducting a dialogue on the future of Parks and public space in New York City anchored by a conference in May 24 co-hosted by the new school. The conference will focus on the role of the 21st century Park system and the next era of park planning engaging experts and advocates in the topic of innovative design, equity, engagement, resiliency, iconological and landscape connectivity, and much more. Our strong dedication to strategic planning is guided by a clear principal to distribute resources in a fair and focused manner that reflects this administration's commitment to equity. Our signature effort and centerpiece of this strategic blueprint is a community parks initiative with more than 285 million dollars dedicated to delivering capital funding, enhanced programming, maintenance, and community partnership building to neighborhood

parks that needed the most in a way that's inclusive and equitable. The initial phase of CPI is on schedule and the first 35 projects all located in high need neighborhoods have... have completed the design phase and is now in procurement or out to bid. These capital improvements were complimented by immediate target improvements in 60 additional parks located in the CPI neighborhoods. High impact, quick enhancement such as new pavement for basketball courts, and plantings, and aesthetic improvements have transformed these parks and delivered and improved experience to our parks users. Last year CPI's expansion of CPI funding will allow us to reimagine, recreate an additional 32 neighborhood parks in the coming years. And this spring we'll be hosting community scoping sessions in the first 12 projects, target improvements for an additional 25 sites is also underway and will be completed before this summer is over. We are excited to continue this community initiative, engage in the community, delivering needed improvements and investing in projects that produce the most benefits for millions of additional New Yorkers. As... CPI and

clear commitment to equity last November we're proud to announce a comprehensive package of conservancy engagements to improve parks and open space in CPI neighborhoods through targeted contributions of funding and in kind support over three years, our conservancy partners including Battery Park Conservancy, Bryan Park Corporation, Central Park Conservancy, Friends of the High Line, Madison Square Park Conservancy, New York Restoration Project, Prospect Park Alliance, and the Randall's Island Park Alliance will bring an influx resources valued at 15 million dollars to CPI neighborhoods through 2018 ranging from enhanced maintenance to new public programming landscape horticulture improvements, gardening training programs, design services, and more. This fair and focused approach to park equity will continue to serve our guiding principal as we look forward to engaging even more partners; advocates, stakeholders, and every day New Yorkers in the work that we do. I'd like to close by offering a recent example of our commitment to equity and improving park access to all New Yorkers. After a cooperative dialogue between the city council, the Mayor's

Office for People with Disabilities and the Mayor's Office of Veterans Affairs and dedicated advocates and stakeholders NYC Parks will be offering discounted annual recreation center memberships for military veterans and people with disabilities.

Beginning this Spring members of these communities will be able to enjoy increased affordable access to our recreation centers for 25 dollars a year allowing them to join the ranks of millions of New Yorkers staying healthy and active and enjoying that all of our city parks and facilities have to offer. It is this spirit of inclusion and openness that New York City Parks is focused on providing even better services and access to green and open spaces for all New Yorkers. Thank you for allowing me to testify before you today and for your

dedication to provide great parks and open spaces for all New Yorkers. We look forward to working with the mayor, city council to create a bright green and more equitable and innovative park system. We value partnership and thank you for your support for our agency. And now I'd be happy to answer your questions that you may have in joining me here as First Deputy Commissioner Liam Cavanaugh

and Matt Drury our Director for Governmental Relations. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: Commissioner...

COMMISSIONER SILVER: Yes.

CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: ...thank you for that very thorough presentation. Before I launch into my questions I want to acknowledge that we've got... we've been joined now by Council Members Van Bramer, Cabrera, Treyger, and Maisel. Council Member Lancman is on a very tight schedule so if he wants to jump in with his question now that would be fine. And I'll ask the Sergeant to put five minutes on the clock.

COUNCIL MEMBER LANCOUNCIL MEMBER AN:

Thank you Mr. Chairman. I appreciate your consideration. Good morning Commissioner. I want to ask two questions. One is... they're both about Flushing Meadows Corona Park. I represent about half of the park. My first question has to do with the assignment distribution of parks enforcement patrol officers, Flushing Meadows Corona Park as you know has the second highest crime rate of any park in New York City. And after central park which has its own police precinct. And I'm very concerned

1 that the 67 new pep officers are not being fairly
2 distributed to Queens as a whole but Flushing
3 Meadows Corona Park in particular Manhattan
4 currently has 21 PEP officers per 1,000 acres of
5 park, Brooklyn has 15, Queens has less than five.
6 What that means in the raw numbers is that there
7 are currently 28 PEP officers assigned to Queens,
8 46 to Manhattan, 48 to Brooklyn, 46 to the Bronx,
9 and 48 to Staten Island. Of the new 67 PEP officers
10 as I understand it only eight will be assigned to
11 Queens, 12 to Manhattan, 20 to Brooklyn, eight to
12 the Bronx, 10 to Staten Island. So there is a
13 currently... currently a distribution of PEP officers
14 is unequal and does not seem to reflect the crime
15 situation, safety situation on the ground and the
16 distribution of the 67 new officers does not
17 alleviate that but instead aggravates it. So can
18 you tell me what is the analysis that the Parks
19 Department has done to determine how these new PEP
20 officers will be distributed and can you share that
21 with the council?

22
23 COMMISSIONER SILVER: Well first we
24 worked very closely with NYPD and you mentioned
25 crime... the primary role of our PEP officers who

1 enforce park rules. Well we certainly work in close
2 cooperation with NYPD. As we look at these new
3 officers... currently have six dedicated to the
4 Flushing Meadows Corona Park. There'll be an
5 addition of eight that'll be now 14 but we work
6 closely as we look at the park experience
7 throughout our entire system and working with NYPD
8 so if there is an increase in the... not just solely
9 on the PEP officers but it's about a relationship
10 with NYPD as well. So if you want to know
11 specifically I could bring up our assistant
12 commission about how allocations are made. But we
13 look at some of these parks and we're very pleased
14 we're able to enhance those officers specifically
15 in Flushing Meadow Corona Park but we also have
16 citywide units that are able to rotate on a as
17 needed basis as we identify some spikes in any
18 specific issue want to concentrate on... but we do
19 believe that the distribution of the 67 was done
20 based upon the need that was out there. But we
21 again want to emphasize that NYPD... we work very
22 closely with them but our primary role is to be
23 eyes out there to communicate the park rules,
24
25

educate the public on the park rules, and if necessary we'll do...

COUNCIL MEMBER LAN: COUNCIL MEMBER AN:

Well I don't... I don't see how this distribution can be justified, either the existing distribution of... the distribution of existing PEP officers or the distribution of the 67. But I have a very specific question. I'm assuming I hope that there is some written document, some analysis that someone in the Parks Department did which resulted in the decision that we're going to send eight to Queens, 12 to Manhattan, 20 to Brooklyn, etcetera. And I would like to see that document because I would like to understand the thinking that went into this distribution. I'm hoping that it wasn't just a bunch of folks sit in the room picking numbers you know out of a hat. So can I get access to that document?

COMMISSIONER SILVER: I can... let me see if I can refer it to first deputy in the second. But I want to just emphasize that citywide we have 235 PEP officers and we have to work with NYPD to address some of these issues. The belief that the PEP is going to be addressed crime city wide we

1 need partnerships and NYPD is that. We look at
2 those high destination parks. That's where we focus
3 our attention recognizing that we have to do our
4 best to mobilize those 235 and its also involved in
5 how many tours and patrols you can get out of those
6 numbers. And we believe that the... the way we
7 distributed the 67 addresses the concerns that
8 we're getting from the field. And so I'm fordable
9 with that distribution and we're always willing to
10 make some adjustments but they're related to the
11 number of staff and the number of patrols that we
12 can issue for those specific... [cross-talk]

14 COUNCIL MEMBER LAN: COUNCIL MEMBER AN:

15 Alright well... well I'd like to follow-up with you
16 and get the... the background analysis that produced
17 that distribution. For my second question because I
18 want to be mindful of the curtesy that the chair
19 has extended to me... Flushing Meadows Corona Park
20 Alliance was formerly formed last year. What is the
21 status of the creation of some kind of operating
22 agreement between the Parks Department in this
23 alliance or some document that spells out the
24 relationship between the Parks Department? And...
25 and... and the alliance... I understand that that is

standard for these kinds of alliances,
conservancies, etcetera citywide.

COMMISSIONER SILVER: Right. Yeah my... my
understanding is that... my understanding is that
that document was recently finalized. We've already
had two board meetings. And in each one we clearly
delineate the roles responsibilities between NYC
Parks and the alliance. But that document was
recently executed.

COUNCIL MEMBER LANCOUNCIL MEMBERAN: And
it's a document between Parks Department and the
alliance.

COMMISSIONER SILVER: Yeah... I'm... I'm
not... yes... oh the answer is yes.

COUNCIL MEMBER LANCOUNCIL MEMBERAN:
Yes?

COMMISSIONER SILVER: Yes.

COUNCIL MEMBER LANCOUNCIL MEMBERAN:
Okay so I would like to get a copy of that
document. We've been requesting it for some time.
Now that I'm told it's available we'd like to get a
copy of that. Yes?

COMMISSIONER SILVER: Okay, yes.

COUNCIL MEMBER LANCOUNCIL MEMBERAN:

Terrific, thank you. Mr. Chairman thank you very much for your indulgence.

COMMISSIONER SILVER: No problem.

CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: Commissioner since the mayor announced the preliminary budget has your department requested any additional funding items from OMB?

COMMISSIONER SILVER: There's always ongoing back and forth communication. We're here to talk about this preliminary budget. We're very pleased with the budget. We appreciate the five-minute increase but as the budget process continues we're always in conversation about ways we can enhance it. But there's nothing specific that I do want to share but certainly we're very pleased with this new budget and how we can help provide the same level of service we had in past years.

CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: Okay the 150 maintenance workers... gardeners and maintenance workers which the council's funded for two years running, what kind of impact did they had in the parks?

COMMISSIONER SILVER: We are still prepared through our Ops 21 and how we distribute our resources. We're always in close conversation with borough commissioners and first deputy to make sure with any shortfall we can still maintain the same level of service. As you know with that funding we were able to fund one gardener in each one of the council districts. The rest of the CP workers were distributed throughout the city. So certainly there would be some adjustments we'll have to make to maintain that same level of service. But with our new innovation performance management division, the first deputy is watching exactly how we would distribute those resources. We want to make sure we maintain that same level. So will have to be some adjustments made.

CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: So every council district would see then on a loss of a gardener and on average the loss of two maintenance workers?

COMMISSIONER SILVER: Well the maintenance workers were distributed a little bit differently but for the gardeners yes it was one per council district roughly. And then the other workers were distributed out to various locations

to educate them on how to do some of the maintenance practices.

CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: It's what's the... what's the logic of... of the cuts then?

COMMISSIONER SILVER: It was... it was a one shot allocation. It was a significant amount of 8.7. And so as the budget process continues this is the beginning that will have those conversations about what we can do with those 150 positions.

CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: Look I'm all for pushing automation and improving management systems. I think that stuff really matters but end of the day the work of the Parks Department is mostly only going to be done by actual humans. Just it's the nature of the work. And when you have more staff you can do more and when you have less staff you can do less. It's hard to avoid that reality. So we're... we're... we're going to be working very very hard on that front in the coming months. You have acquired... now... you have now put in place I believe 55 additional staff in the capital division? Is that correct?

COMMISSIONER SILVER: That's correct.

CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: Are all those positions currently filled and... [cross-talk]

COMMISSIONER SILVER: Yes, correct, yes.

CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: ...backfilled any... any internal moves as well?

COMMISSIONER SILVER: Yes.

CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: Okay. Do you feel that you're up to capacity to... are you... are you at the acquired level of resources that you need in the capital division?

COMMISSIONER SILVER: Well as you know that there's 18 additional designers coming on board. We're seeing an increase. We had a record number and I have to thank council... somewhat of a mixed blessing but we had a record number of new projects last year. I'm committed to reducing that backlog and sell those 18 additional designers will allow us to assign those project. In the past when we receive the project the fiscal year you can wait anywhere from nine months to over a year to have it even assigned to staff. We've now cut that number down... that backlog. And so as we see a surge in new projects from council members from borough presidents we want to be able to keep pace so that

there'll no longer be a backlog in a year a project's funded we can start to design that year. So it is necessary to have those additional staff. And the 55 have been tremendous in reducing that backlog.

CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: Two years ago what would the average length of a capital project have been?

COMMISSIONER SILVER: Well in terms of the whole length it could be well over four years. Our average was somewhere I believe up maybe 45 months. So that was the average a few years ago. Now that's cut down by four to six months but the construction piece is one at as just... as I had mentioned in my testimony has changed almost 20 percentage points but it's come down about four to six months.

CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: Four to six months?

COMMISSIONER SILVER: Correct.

CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: You have no project which have run a full cycle at this point though?

COMMISSIONER SILVER: Correct.

CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: So how do you... how do you give such a... a certain assessment of the time saved?

COMMISSIONER SILVER: On the Construction side we could measure the construction side we could measure the construction side because that's... that roughly is between 12 and 18 months so we can measure the construction period. We're also tracking CPA. That's on track... that's on schedule and on time. So we're able to track the construction schedule. As you suggested the whole four-year cycle because we've been administration two years can't track that entire length.

CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: I do know that the capital divisions work very closely with the public design commission to shave off time.

COMMISSIONER SILVER: Correct.

CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: ...and the back and forth there which may save about a month or so. I assume that's built into what you're calling the four to six-month savings.

COMMISSIONER SILVER: Yes, that's part of the design side. About a year or two ago 20 percent success rate with PDC... jumped over 80

percent on first review with PDC. Plus, they're doing more staff level design that has shaved months off the process. So there's a number of key factors that allowed us to expedite the process. I can go through the long list but they've been significant and they're working. When I came here my first year almost every council member would tell me project's taking long. I hear from time to time but it's something I don't hear on a regular basis. We roll up our sleeves and we dealt with the issue. And I have to thank staff because they're pushing it out and were able to streamline the projects.

CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: Look you have the full picture and the anecdotal evidence that we hear from our colleagues is almost uniformly that projects are taking you're saying... I guess it would be 40 months now and that of your average. I think most council members would be pleasantly surprised if a project was completed in 40 months. So I know this... just to finish the thoughts... the CPI I know has gotten added priority and added resources. I'm wondering if that is skewing the average and we're...

more traditional projects are still languishing longer.

COMMISSIONER SILVER: No, all the projects when we put the changes after the summer of 2014 around October, Fall of 2014 whether CPI or any projects in that group are benefiting from the new design approaches. We've collapsed our design review internally from five to two. We've worked with PDC so that we could have more success on the first review. We now have pre-scoping meetings, we're doing pre-site investigation. So there are a series of things that we're doing that's benefiting all projects, not just CPI. So that just gave us an opportunity to shift gears when we met over the summer to streamline a capital process but anything that started really in the end of 2014, early 2015 are benefiting from a new cycle. The older projects... we're doing our best to see what we can do on the construction side. We don't allow change orders any... once construction starts... safety. That has saved a significant amount of time.

CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: So is 40 months the best we can expect?

COMMISSIONER SILVER: We can do better but there are opportunities to make changes in the procurement process so we're working with MOX [sp?] to see how we can help expedite that process. Procurement could be seven to 12 months, design could be 10 to 15 months, construction 12 to 18. So we're trying to take each segment to see where we can cut it down. We've been very successful on the design side and we've also made huge improvements on the construction side. And now we're working with the administration to see how we can truncate the procurement process.

CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: So what is your goal then for the average capital?

COMMISSIONER SILVER: I personally would like to see it three to three to three and a half years but a lot of things have to happen for that... for that... for that benchmark to occur.

CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: So you want to be at 36 to 40 months and you think you're about at 40 months right now.

COMMISSIONER SILVER: Correct, no that is a goal, that is a goal.

CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: Alright we... we will hold you to that for sure. [cross-talk]

COMMISSIONER SILVER: Not a promise. Because a lot of that involves the cooperation of other entities. And so that's why I'm saying that the goal should be three to three and a half years but we certainly need the cooperation of others to make sure that happens. But we're doing our part and seeing great results with CPI and other projects that came along in the same time frame.

CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: You identified two mid-sized park projects that you're justifiably very proud of which was the... the high bridge as well as Ocean Breeze Track and Field Complex. Those projects were funded under Bloomberg as part of the PlanNYC correct?

COMMISSIONER SILVER: Correct.

CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: So what's the successor to that?

COMMISSIONER SILVER: Well we're always having conversations with administration. When you look at some of the larger parks they come with a... quite a high price tag of well over 30 to 60 million dollars each. But we're very pleased about

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CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: And... and I'm a huge fan of CPI Commissioner. But talking about something different here. I'm not talking about one acre playgrounds. I'm talking about the kind of anchor parks that are 20 to 30, sometimes even hundreds of acres that serve as really regional engines of better life and parks in the city which have not gotten their fair share of investment. And as I mentioned in my remarks we council members, we can't fund them on our own. Two and three million dollars is... is nowhere near enough to have an

1 impact on parks of this scale. We're not seeing in
2 the capital plan any kind of big... big vision of
3 investing in these larger parks. Is that correct?

4 COMMISSIONER SILVER: Our concern we... if
5 you look what's in the capital budget there's some
6 issues of state of good repair that come with a
7 very high price tag. Some of the bridges in our
8 parks, you know 50 in some cases there's a parcel,
9 the porpoise bridge, that's a title gate. These are
10 very critical piece of infrastructure that fall
11 into state of good repair that cost a lot. So
12 certainly we're focusing on state of good repair.
13 We're always doing our planning to see if... how we
14 can look at some of the larger parks or mid-size
15 parks. But this one is really addressing some of
16 the state of good repair issues that must be
17 addressed. So that is included in this budget and
18 is something we're going to continue to push for
19 state of good repair as well as a plan going
20 forward about how we can look at some of those
21 larger parks.

22 CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: But... but the
23 department's always had a pot of capital money to
24 do infrastructure work, repairing retaining walls
25

1 and things like that. I mean that's... that's been
2 true forever. I don't think that's any different
3 today by any significant amount. I'm... I'm not
4 talking about that kind of work. I'm talking about
5 really transformative projects, not maintaining
6 bridges.
7

8 COMMISSIONER SILVER: Well actually we
9 have what's called requirements money that's
10 limited to playgrounds and buildings so it's not a
11 pot of money. And that's limited between 40 and
12 700,000. So it's not a pot of money that can deal
13 with a major infrastructure you know whether it be
14 a bridge or row. So no we do not have that
15 discretionary funds of capital. The requirements
16 will... it's only about 20 million per year and it
17 doesn't allow us to do those big projects.

18 CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: Alright more... more
19 on that in a little bit. I'm going to pause for a
20 moment in my questions and give my colleagues a
21 chance to weigh in. Council Member Cabrera please.

22 COUNCIL MEMBER CABRERA: Thank you so
23 much Chair and also Commissioner thank you for that
24 wonderful presentation. I first want to commend you
25 for your selection of the wonderful... now for your

new Bronx Parks Commissioner. Iris Rodriguez she has really has stepped up to the plate and... and... and... and engaged at a level that I have not seen since I've been a council member. And I also want to take a moment to thank you because you're a door. We have seen things in the last two years that I didn't see in my first four years here. And so I... I commend you for that and your staff for their wonderful work. I have basically two question and a small amount of time that we have here. First I... we... I know Chair talk about how long the projects take and I know of us still have some projects that been around for seven years and so... but I want to talk about the cost. Some of these projects just seems so expensive. Fort four in the Bronx I... I... you know we want to put... the vision is to have you know restrooms of little house... restrooms... and when I look at the price of three million dollars I say can we put a mansion instead. I know I could build a mansion for three million dollars just about anywhere, we don't have to pay for the land. Is there any way that we could replicate... I'm sure you put a lot of thought into this and I'm sure you're brainstorming with... with

1 the brightest minds in your team. But is there any
2 way to create and replicate with the school the
3 Board of Education has done with the School
4 Construction Authority to have our Parks Authority
5 to be able to have the own construction teams.
6 Because it seems to me that these contractors are
7 really taking advantage... The prices are just beyond
8 anything that I can imagine. I know Council Member
9 Greenfield... I remember last year in the hearing he
10 wanted to repair a bathroom it was going to be a
11 million dollars. I say well it's going to be laced
12 with gold or... you know it just... can you help us
13 understand that. And what's... what's the remedy
14 here?

16 COMMISSIONER SILVER: We certainly share
17 your concern. We put this out for competitive
18 bidding and these are the prices that we get back.
19 It is a product of the market. And as you know in
20 any bid it's materials, it's labor, and it reflects
21 the market. And right now there's a lot of work
22 going out there you know there are both scaffolding
23 and cranes everywhere throughout the city. So it's
24 a product of the market that we do not control.
25 What we're trying to do as I mentioned we're trying

to create this new estimation unit to see how we can better predict the prices because we don't want to go back to a council member and say as a shortfall we need more money. And we are seeing comfort stations starting to increase toward two million for a new comfort station. We're trying to standardize designs and get away from customization. So at least that'll keep the cost down. I've heard people suggest parks construction authority that's something I'll leave to others. I don't know the history of how the school construction authority was created but we're doing everything we can as something we watch on a regular basis. The estimation unit, standardizing design, working with contractors, but in the end of the day it's competitively bid and we're subject to the market and it's just something that we're trying to figure out what we can do to see how we can brainstorm and figure out as you suggested ways of trying to keep those costs down. So there... there is... all I can say is that we are trying our best but we too... when we had mayoral projects we're seeing the same thing and it's not just us. Every agency DDC are seeing prices just escalate and so

1
2 it's just really a challenge of the market. And we
3 just hope that... I don't want the market to tank so
4 we can get it more affordably but certainly we'll
5 see how we could be more creative to make sure we
6 can build it faster, cheaper, and better.

7 COUNCIL MEMBER CABRERA: It's my
8 understanding that SCA was created at... by
9 legislation at the state level. I don't know if...
10 and we're doing research into this, if that was
11 related to the fact that the Board of Ed was under
12 the state jurisdiction. And I'm pretty sure that we
13 could do... at the city level. I'm going to close
14 with a second question because I'm down to 30
15 second. And that is... it's... it's more actually of a
16 request. My whole park in my district is considered
17 by many advocates who have come and in seen the
18 park as the worst park in all of New York City.
19 There was a construction that was there. It... it
20 sank literally three months after it was done just
21 prior to me becoming a council member. We put the
22 funding... we put more funding because the
23 discrepancy of how much it going to cost and then
24 the Mayor's Office put a million dollars to a
25 retaining wall. And I just come to find out that we

1 need more money that retaining wall. And I'm asking
2 for your help. If we could finally get this done...
3 it's been four years and we haven't put a shovel
4 down. I'd love to get that project done and get
5 this eye sore of the community... Appreciate your
6 support. Thank you.

7 CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: Thank you Council
8 Member Cabrera. Council Member Treyger.

9 COUNCIL MEMBER TREYGER: Seems like
10 Council Member Cohen is interim acting chair for a
11 number of committees now. You have to... welcome
12 Commissioner and I just... I actually wanted to first
13 begin with... with some... some words of... of... of praise
14 to your staff. I want to say that in the past
15 couple of years we've worked with your staff and
16 Commissioner Jeffry and... and those involved in the
17 programming parks of parks to activate programming
18 in parks historically do not see the type of
19 programming that we see in the larger park system.
20 Councilman Levine Chair Levine and I worked on a
21 council parks initiative about parks equity to
22 create programs, movie nights, drive in movie
23 nights, festivals, and my district is in love with
24 them. And we're praying to do more. And I just want
25

1 to credit first your staff for working very closely
2 with our offices to make these events a huge
3 success. I want to give kudos to them. I do want to
4 just for a moment build on the remarks that my
5 colleague Councilman Cabrera. A previous hearing we
6 had about Parks. My colleague Councilman Maisel
7 raised the issue about the cost of comfort stations
8 in restaurants. We do in my district where
9 residents have a chance to vote on capital
10 projects, one million dollars PB right? And still
11 residents are saying well let's do a couple of
12 bathrooms in different parks. And we still cannot...
13 one million dollars does not get you one bathroom
14 in a park. And it's... again you have to explain to
15 people... and your staff did a pretty good job of
16 explaining to me why these costs ballooned to two
17 million dollars plus. I seriously believe we need
18 to discuss and plan procurement reform... contract
19 reform within the Parks Department. I... I envision
20 and we're open maybe to what names but I think that
21 this is something that should be handled in house.
22 I don't know why we can't have one template that
23 becomes a template of... of... of you know of a comfort
24 station for parks across the city of New York. I
25

1 don't know why we have to always hire a new
2 designer or a new person. Why can't we have a parks
3 department that is in house, has in house
4 employees, unionized, you know designing and
5 implementing and building these structures. We are
6 too much at the mercy of outside contractors... too
7 much at the mercy of their subcontractors. And then
8 their subcontractors and market forces and market
9 prices. We need some stability in our city budget
10 especially with uncertain times right now in the
11 economy. Why can't we create and build up a
12 workforce and hire people in New York City to be
13 the people that will be building these things and...
14 and for them to wear parks department uniforms. And
15 rather than have people... because you know we met
16 with... Deputy Commissioner Cavanaugh to discuss for
17 example the poor job that was done that... that was...
18 that led to a tragic death in Red Hook where we... we
19 relied on... on a outside contractor to do... who did a
20 terrible job and had a history of doing terrible
21 job and even before this administration hit a track
22 record of just doing terrible work and was for some
23 reason contracted again I think that we need to
24 have a discussion and a plan to bring this work in
25

1 house. Is that something commissioner that you're
2 willing to engage with us in the council and will
3 work with you on this and work with the mayor on
4 this. But I believe that we are too reliant on
5 outside forces which in my opinion increase costs
6 astronomically. It increases time just to put it
7 into perspective it took about 13 months to build
8 the empire state building. It shouldn't... and it
9 takes about four years, five years to build a
10 bathroom in a park. It doesn't make sense.
11 Something is not... and I'm sure that you agree with
12 us that it just doesn't make sense. I just want to
13 hear your thoughts on that.

15 COMMISSIONER SILVER: Well first any
16 reform has to be citywide. Parks is just one of the
17 many agencies and I had mentioned earlier that the
18 administration is looking at procurement but that's
19 for everyone. The only two agencies; School
20 Construction Authority and EDC have a different
21 process but all of the city agencies, not just
22 Parks have to follow existing rules. Our
23 construction period like the empire state building
24 is 12 to 18 months so at least we're comparable
25 there. The four years are the design procurement

1 and then you go to construction. We're open to
2 sitting down and having conversation. I don't know
3 about creating a whole force to start doing
4 construction. We haven't gone back far. But we
5 certainly like to sit down and... and discuss some of
6 your ideas. But we do share the concern. Because we
7 don't set the prices. We go out... competitive
8 bidding and it comes back quite high. And so I
9 agree with you that we share the same concern. And
10 we'll sit down and talk to you and see what ideas
11 you have... what can work.

13 COUNCIL MEMBER TREYGER: And I would
14 like to have that conversation. And just to wrap up
15 by saying that Chair Levine mentioned before about
16 the Plan NYC initiative. One of the parks in that
17 initiative you heard this before Commissioner, I'll
18 again repeat it is Calvert Vaux Dreier Offerman
19 Park, that is a park that was also neglected for
20 many many many years. I... I'm not faulting the
21 current administration that park was promised under
22 Bloomberg a 40-million-dollar makeover and it quite
23 frankly is in serious need of a lot of TLC. And
24 residents in Coney Island when they face their...
25 when they look out the window they see that... that...

1 that park across the creek that is just in decrepit
2 condition. And so that is something that I'd like
3 to work with your agency on... on a long... on a plan...
4 short term and long term plan and how to give that...
5 how to give that... how to give our neighborhood the
6 park that they truly deserve. Thank... thank you for
7 your time. Thanks Chair.

9 CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: Thank you Council
10 Member Treyger and thank you Council Member Cohen
11 for your skillful stewardship of the committee
12 during my absence. Ah so you were... you were a
13 selfless leader and you skipped your own
14 opportunity to offer questions so now we'll cue
15 you. Thank you.

16 COUNCIL MEMBER COHEN: Thank you very
17 much Chair. While it is more fun as a council
18 member to give the admen a hard time I... I think
19 that in all fairness I have to say that we have
20 made a lot of progress in the Northwest Bronx on
21 some very stalled projects that were really tangled
22 deep into the weeds, no pun intended, in terms of
23 getting them moving again. So we've made some real
24 progress on... on my infamous Woodlawn dog run and...
25 and the Putnam trail is a... is moving forward. So I...

1 I am... and that really took you know work from the
2 very top you and I have had several conversations
3 about those projects to get them moving. And I... I
4 also just want to acknowledge on the record how...
5 what a breath of fresh air our new borough
6 commissioner has been... commissioner Rose Rodriguez
7 at some point I thought about charging her rent in
8 my office she's been there so often. So I do want
9 to say thank you for that. I would just to follow
10 up on something that Council Member Lancman said.
11 The distribution of PEP... and I don't want to pit
12 the boroughs against each other but Staten Island
13 seems to have a very you know number of park users...
14 number of pep officers seems to be really
15 disproportionate I... is there a... I mean do you know
16 what the rational is for that?

18 COMMISSIONER SILVER: I don't know if he
19 has to be sworn in... Assistant Commissioner Docket
20 [sp?].

21 ASSISTANT: Hi, my name is Mike Docket.
22 I oversee the Park Enforcement Patrol. I'll just
23 give a general overview of PEP staffing and where
24 the new needs are going. So we're... we're currently
25 baselined for 225 PEP officers now. And if we're at

1 full staffing that would mean 46 in the Bronx, 48
2 in Brooklyn, 46 in Manhattan, 48 in Queens, and 28
3 in Staten Island and then nine assigned to our
4 training academy and that brings us to the 225.
5 Okay our actual staffing because we have vacancies
6 and people in the academy is 23 in the Bronx, 21 in
7 Brooklyn, 39 in Manhattan, 24 in Queens, 22 in
8 Staten Island, nine in the academy. We have 16
9 recruits in the current academy. That brings us to
10 154. We have staff that are on leave of absence. So
11 our current actives are 176 as of today. We have 32
12 vacancies alright. And we have 17 people that are
13 approved to go into our next academy which starts
14 on March 21st. That brings us to the 225. When we
15 add in the new needs we ask for eight in the Bronx
16 to be assigned to the Crotona sector. That's to
17 cover Crotona Park so we can go to a seven day
18 operation there, cover two shifts, and have units
19 that are focused on that park and other units that
20 patrol that sector from Crotona Park. For Brooklyn
21 we put in 20 of... of the 67. So that's 12 dedicated
22 to Coney Island to do expressive matter enforcement
23 in front of the amusement area. That 12 over seven
24 days gives us eight officers per day to cover the
25

1 amusement sector. After this summer they cover the
2 entire borough of Brooklyn. And then we have eight
3 officers that go into Prospect Park. Prospect Park
4 currently has fixed post officers there; six that
5 cover that park from 8:00 a.m. to midnight. That's
6 one patrol unit, alright, for seven days a week.
7 And we putting an additional eight officers which
8 is going to take it from one patrol unit to three
9 patrol units per day. So dedicate it the Prospect
10 Park. So that's how we get the 20 for Brooklyn. In
11 Manhattan we're putting in 12 new officers to be
12 working in Battery Park... to deal with the
13 expressive matter, the illegal ticket vending
14 that's going on at that spot. Those 12 officers
15 gives us eight officers per day for one shift. And
16 with those eight officers we think we can make a
17 dent in protecting the tourists in... from the ticket
18 scammers down there. In Queens you're getting eight
19 officers for Flushing Meadow Park which is similar
20 to Prospect Park. They have six dedicated officers
21 now. That's one patrol unit seven days a week from
22 eight to midnight, 8:00 a.m. to midnight. The
23 additional eight officers will put into more patrol
24 units per day. So we're going from one patrol unit
25

1 to three and... at Flushing Meadow and specifically
2 the deal with car drifting, amplified noise,
3 illegal vendors, the issues in the parking lots we
4 worked very closely with the precinct last year to
5 tackle that. So this number of officers we feel
6 will have a big impact. We covered that last year
7 through overtime and detailing people in from other
8 areas. We won't have to do that this year. That
9 frees up those officers to go patrol the rest of
10 the borough. So not only does Flushing Meadow get
11 an impact but the rest of the boroughs as well. And
12 then in Staten Island we're assigning 10 right. And
13 those additional 10 are predominantly going to be
14 put on the second shift to deal with issues in the
15 natural areas. That's the keg parties, ATV riding,
16 that kind of stuff. So kind of like a nighttime
17 patrol. And then we're creating a citywide
18 taskforce, about nine officers, to start, and that
19 could go up a little bit. And those officers are
20 going to be focused on dealing with stuff on the
21 overnight when we have to do curfew enforcement.
22 They're going to be doing an expressive matter
23 enforcement, that's the costume characters. They're
24 going to focus on homeless issues in parks and
25

1 working with our sister agencies to deal with... with
2 those issues. So that's the... kind of the rational
3 for the 67. That's what we talked to OMB about
4 tackling those problems. And that's how we
5 distributed the 67. So after this... after the 67 are
6 on board this will be the new baseline funding or
7 staffing for parks. The Bronx would have 54, this
8 is if we're at... when we're at 100 percent staffing,
9 Brooklyn 68, Manhattan 58, Queens 56, Staten Island
10 38, the taskforce which is citywide, nine, it's
11 still nine in our academy. And that brings us to a
12 new staffing level of 292. That was kind of...
13 background...

14
15 COUNCIL MEMBER COHEN: Thank... thank you
16 very much for that lengthy answer. It is hard
17 though for officers who are not actually on the job
18 to carry out the work. So I would really strongly
19 encourage that the vacancies be filled as soon as
20 they possibly can.

21 ASSISTANT: We're... we're... we're
22 interviewing every day. We're bringing in qualified
23 candidates. They're so qualified though that they
24 are a feeder group for the Department of
25 Corrections, Police Academy, FBI, etcetera.

COUNCIL MEMBER COHEN: We've been briefed on that. I appreciate it. I just... I just want to echo the comments of my colleagues regarding you know the cost as well as the time of the capital projects. It really is a fundamental concern. It is... you know I understand you know... went to a normal New York it does... just doesn't make sense even if you say it's market conditions there's something about that there's a disconnect between the... our experiences and what's happening. They are... there just... on the security I do want to mention that we have had a rash of fires this... this... the fall... in the fall season in the Northwest Bronx. The William Van Drogen [phonetic] Van Cortlandt Park were both the scenes of a significant number of arson activity. And I could go on but I really used up my time so thank you very much.

CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: Thank you Council Member Cohen. We'll now hear from Majority Leader Van Bramer.

MAJORITY LEADER VAN BRAMER: Thank you very much Mr. Chair. I want to say first thank you to Dia [sp?] Lewandowski and Teramo McGranday [sp?]

1 in your Queens office. They are terrific and have
2 been for the entire time that I've been office... in
3 office. I want to point out although I'm not sure
4 you've seen it yet Commissioner but I sent you a
5 letter last week because Ms. Elizabeth McQueen
6 [sp?] who is the caretaker of Queens Bridge Park
7 for the last 20 or 30 years passed away and went to
8 her funeral and in that letter I formally requested
9 that we rename the esplanade at Queens Bridge Park
10 in honor of Ms. Elizabeth McQueen. And I hope that
11 your office will respond positively as soon as
12 possible so we can rightly honor this amazing woman
13 who made Queens Bridge Park what it is today.

15 COMMISSIONER SILVER: I haven't seen the
16 letter yet but I know you and I have had this
17 conversation.

18 MAJORITY LEADER VAN BRAMER: Right.

19 COMMISSIONER SILVER: I did hear that
20 she... that she...

21 MAJORITY LEADER VAN BRAMER: What did
22 you say?

23 COMMISSIONER SILVER: I did hear that
24 she passed. I did hear about that.

MAJORITY LEADER VAN BRAMER: Great. So I know you have some internal rules about these sorts of things but I... I really think that the city should do the right thing and make sure we do this renaming of that section of Queens Bridge Park for Ms. McQueen this summer. So I want to move on to a couple of questions. One you mentioned the rezonings and the fact that you are already in the loop with respect to making sure that there's adequate green space for those neighborhoods that are proposed to be rezoned. Long Island City is one that the administration is looking at. And other than the waterfront park which of course is great and expanding we are at a lack of green space particularly within that rezoning section. So I want to make sure that you're at the table, you're aware of it, and Parks is part of those conversations in terms of addressing what will be a significant rezoning if it happens.

COMMISSIONER SILVER: Yes on all of the neighborhood planning studies we're working very closely with part of the team with city planning to identify open space opportunities. So the answer to that is yes.

MAJORITY LEADER VAN BRAMER: Good. And I know the administration already knows this. But if we're going to go down that road increasing green space would... in the rezoned area is among my top priorities. So we will be working and... and I'm sure there'll be a significant capital allocation to make sure that that happens. I do want to say you mentioned that your focus is on high destination parks and while I... I certainly understand that and I think we have a high destination park in Hunters Point South Park and it will be even more so when it expands. I want to make sure that we're also focused on the smaller neighborhood parks that are equally important to our constituents and our residents but may not be as high destination as Flushing Meadows which of course we love. And so I just want to make sure that that's equal focus because the folks who live around Windmuller Park in Woodside may not have you know a sexy park. But it's our park and we love it and it deserves the same attention.

COMMISSIONER SILVER: Just to clarify the point... Father's Day last year... we recognize our parks are open seven days a week. Those that had

picnicking what would happen is that there would be no weekend pickup and so as the trash collects it starts to snow-cone. And so we want to make sure those that had picnicking, major sports events where people bring in large trash is not neglecting the others is just you don't see the snow cone effect in some of those other parks. So on Monday morning it would be very challenging from M&L staff to see a park fully littered because there were no weekend pickups. So it's focusing on those with Bar-B-Qing, picnicking, sporting events. So... high destination is not the premier. It could be the fairy points parks. So our focus is that those that receive a lot of traffic and a lot of trash that we get those weekend pickups. And so that has made a major difference all the borough commissioners and visitors. We've got great response this year that now on Sunday Monday morning the parks are clean. So we'll see how we can expand that but it's not neglecting the smaller parks. The trash is contained within the baskets, those that are just overflowing. And I'm sure you've seen them. You should not see that this summer.

MAJORITY LEADER VAN BRAMER: At any

park. So I understand and look I think you've done a great job and you've been a great partner with us. So to PEP officers which as you can see as a team amongst just about all of us I appreciate the... that the eight new officers assigned to Flushing Meadows may allow some of the others to then go borough wide but I think it's fair to say that a common complaint from some of the folks again in our smaller neighborhood Parks is that they don't see the PEP officers and the Windmullers, and the Newnan. And... and that is an issue. And to back up Council Member Cohen's point, your actual numbers are... are lower than I would have thought they are. 24 active in Queens which is a very very big borough geographically speaking with a lot of green space. I'm very very concerned about that number and your vacancies. You mentioned that your... your... your other commissioner, that you're working very hard to fill those vacancies but I'm surprised at a time when folks would probably very much want and need those jobs that... that we're having some issues filling them as quickly as possible. And again we love our borough wide resource at Flushing Meadows

Corona Park but I just want to make sure that the resources and those PEP officers are getting to all of the parks and making the rounds and... and that is a big concern for me.

CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: Alright thank you Majority Leader Van Bramer. Next up we have Council Member Maisel. Oh and I want to acknowledge we've been joined by Darlene Mealy, Council Member from Brooklyn.

COUNCIL MEMBER MAISEL: Good morning Commissioner. Thank you for being here to give testimony. I have two issues involving enforcement in my district. One is in Currency Seaview Park where we have a huge number of people barbequing. Not only are they barbequing I think illegally because not supposed to have open flames but they leave a tremendous mess after they finish their barbequing. And although I don't want to deny people the right to use the parks and have a good time this is a problem that just does not get enforced. And when we complain to the police department they don't have the man power to do it. So I just would like to point out that the Park Enforcement Officers should be concentrating this

summer in Canarsie Park. And the second problem is which... Commissioner Jeffries [sp?] and I have discussed and we're trying to come up with resolutions to is the... in... in Marine Park in Gerritsen Avenue, Seber park it's commonly referred to, we have a problem with ATVs and the... the damage that they're doing. And one of the problems there is that Gerritsen Avenue is the driving line between two precincts, the 61st and 63rd. So the 63rd precinct which has no population to serve, just the land, and the 61st precinct which has Garrison Beach but not the... not the park area. So it's very very hard to get any kind of enforcement. And these people who are coming in from the outside in many instances are doing damage to the baseball fields and the trails. And you're going to be doing a lot of work fixing up the trails and the people are going to come in with their ATVs and they're going to destroy it all. So I just urge you to put some effort into getting additional enforcement into the parks because we can't rely on the police doing it. They're overburdened in... from their point of view. So just my... my appeal to you.

LIAM CAVANAUGH: Introduce myself; I'm Liam Cavanaugh, I'm the First Deputy Commissioner. To the first point the barbequing and... and the... and the trash one of the aspects of the additional PEP officers we're going to be receiving are... we'll have 50 park security staff members who will be assigned to parks like Canarsie during the summer top address thus... just the kind of problems that you identified. But Gerritsen Beach is an ongoing problem with us and the ATVs. They do a tremendous amount of damage to play fields and the natural areas. It... it can create a dangerous situation for our officers because you don't want to I don't know pursue them and cause an accident to happen. So we... we try to find ways to prevent them from getting in but as you know they are very persistent and...

COUNCIL MEMBER MAISEL: Well we're talking about raising the... the fence... the height of the fences that are currently on the perimeter.

LIAM CAVANAUGH: Yes.

COUNCIL MEMBER MAISEL: But someone told me last night at a meeting that people coming in with rams and they just go right over the fence so I assume if we build a fence higher they'll come in

with bigger ramps. There'll be a... it's like an evolutionary struggle to who's going to build the... the bigger ramp or the bigger fence.

LIAM CAVANAUGH: I hope it doesn't come to that but... we will focus more attention on Gerritsen Beach and the ATV problem.

COUNCIL MEMBER MAISEL: Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: Thank you Council Member Maisel. Council Member Cohen was informing he has a bill for civil fortitude of... of ATVs. Oh okay. Look forward... look forward to... prescient excellent. Okay we've been joined by Council Member Brad Lander from Brooklyn, Council Member Jumaane Williams from Brooklyn, and I believe that Council Member Williams was in the queue for a question. So if you're ready it's all you. How's that for good timing.

COUNCIL MEMBER WILLIAMS: Excellent.

Thank you Chair and Commissioner... I could also say professor since he was my professor in grad school. But I thank you very much for allowing me ask the questions. But one I'm all... and some of this may have come up so I apologize and I'm concerned about park beautification and maintenance. I just want to

1 know if you spoke about parks without borders and I
2 wanted to see if you... As I understand it's 45
3 million that's planned between 2016 and 2019. And
4 if you can outline what that spending is going to
5 be like and what for and then I have another
6 question. What... how many...

8 COMMISSIONER SILVER: The Parks Without...
9 the Parks Without Borders is a 50 million dollar
10 program, 10 million to set aside, to supplement
11 existing projects in the pipeline. The rest of the
12 40 million we put out a call for suggestions. We
13 received over 6,000 suggestions and we're now going
14 through with the process of evaluating which of the
15 parks... we're certainly going to pick one for each
16 borough and then there'll be three others we'll
17 pick throughout the city. So we expect to make an
18 announcement in May. Those parks will look at the
19 edges, entrances, and adjacent park spaces. We're
20 evaluating all the comments that we received from
21 the public. And I can tell you we have some
22 outstanding candidates. So other than that the
23 program has been a huge success, a lot of feedback
24 not just from New York but interests from around
25 the country and around the world of how we can

better connect our parks to communities and provide better access and usability of parks.

COUNCIL MEMBER WILLIAMS: Thank you.

Just two more topics. Okay just... this is more about signage. So in the last few months I became aware of... there's a arrest of individuals for violating park rules. And I actually visited one of the areas where the arrest occurred. It was the... depending on the entrance that you went into there either wasn't a sign there or it seemed different than what for instance park openings. And so those things are on every entrance. Has this been a problem across the city? Are we doing anything to try to rectify and clarify some of the park rules?

COMMISSIONER SILVER: Well first we'll see whether to be... to my knowledge you want to have a park sign at all the entrances so the public is notified. But our approach is to educate first. It's not just to issue a violation but to educate the public and to give him an opportunity to rectify the situation. So that is the approach that we take, it's education. So... happen to tell me the park in question... our goal is to have a park rules that are consistent across the board at all of our

entrances. Different parks do have different closing times. So that is something that probably is one of the more popular questions from our public. But if you let us know that park will take a look to make sure those signs are consistent.

COUNCIL MEMBER WILLIAMS: And have you been in conversations with NYPD to try to lessen the use of arresting summons and making more of a communication and education?

COMMISSIONER SILVER: That is generally our approach. I may ask Commissioner Docket or Cavanaugh to respond but our approach is to educate first. And... and that is our general approach toward enforcement our parks. We do have the opportunity of ECB violations, criminal violations as well. But our general approach is educate the public first. If there's lack of a cooperation, we'll see what is the best approach thereafter.

COUNCIL MEMBER WILLIAMS: Thank you. If there's any other information... I definitely know this was... this one in particular was an arrest. And I've heard of others and for... and it was for violating the... the park being closed. But lastly I've been... and my colleagues including the Chair of

1 Youth Department... Youth Committee and Chair
2
3 Ferreras and the speaker and many of us in the
4 council have been pushing for the universal youth
5 jobs program. I think it's fantastic. I was just
6 curious and I'm going to ask a lot of agencies if
7 they have any SYEP all year round, young people
8 working in the agency...

9 COMMISSIONER SILVER: We... we certainly
10 have internships. I don't know about a full out
11 youth program. We have a number of volunteers in
12 our rec centers that we work with on a regular
13 basis particularly in the summertime. We do have
14 internships that we offer but I don't think we have
15 a formalized youth employment program per say. I'm
16 always willing to work with other agencies and
17 departments because summertime with our seasonal,
18 camps, tournaments, we have a very elaborate
19 recreation program but it's something we're open to
20 talking to those agencies to see if we can adapt
21 that to our parks.

22 COUNCIL MEMBER WILLIAMS: Thank you. Or
23 thank you I take quite a few myself in the summer.
24 And as we're... we're trying hopefully to be
25 successful in increasing the program and so I think

1 it'll be... the agencies to... themselves as well
2 because I know they need partners. And so I just...
3 that's the end of my question. And thank you Mr.
4 Chair. I have to go back to chairing my... my own
5 committee. But when I... when people get frustrated
6 at me for my trouble making skills I can blame
7 Professor Silver. So thank you very much...

9 CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: I don't remember
10 that in the courses either but...

11 COUNCIL MEMBER WILLIAMS: Thank you.

12 CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: Pleasure. Thank you
13 Council Member Lander... up next.

14 COUNCIL MEMBER LANDER: Thank you very
15 much Mr. Chair. Thank you Commissioner and of
16 course to your great team to... to Liam who I have
17 the honor of serving on the Prospect Park Alliance
18 Board with and of course to Commissioner Jeffry and
19 his Chief of Staff Marty Maher and... and the whole
20 team at Prospect Park, especially... there's a lot
21 of... further I feel very happy to see in your
22 testimony. I... there's a few things in the MMR that
23 could make me happier than the increase in times
24 that our Parks capital projects are on time and on
25 budget. And I know this council has been a pain in

the ass on that too. You and prior commissioners and I can't promise we'll stop doing that but seeing progress is... is really great and I appreciate it. And I like seeing the additional progress this year of the new estimators, more work on the Park's capital needs assessment. I'm going to give you praise as well on the information technology and the work we did together to be able to have more transparency in budgeting and reporting. And I was very happy to see that starting March 1st everybody out in the field is working on the app in a way that's going to let you track data for good management purposes and report it to us for good transparency purposes. So that's a lot of progress. And I'm happy to see it. On the... on the capital side we had a dialogue, finance Chair Ferreras had a dialogue with OMB Director Fuleihan more broadly about city capital issues at... at DDC. And just... we are... and he agreed there that it's something that he thinks we need to take a look at citywide and really compare experiences across agencies, understand what helps some do the work better you know... and so I hope that the Parks

Department will be a part of that dialogue and conversation.

COMMISSIONER SILVER: Yes we already are and absolutely one of the things people should to know... all the agencies we have close to 500 active projects. And so we're certainly willing to listen and see how we could streamline even further what we're doing. But we certainly welcome... be part of that conversation.

COUNCIL MEMBER LANDER: And obviously many of the things that make the parks process still take a long time. Some are within the control of the parks department but many of them are outside the control of the parks department.

COMMISSIONER SILVER: We have both city and state law, mostly embodied... we'll stew out the entire process for the one where there's many many checks and balances happens to be the procurement process where about five or six entities have to touch the project before it can go onto construction. So... so that is a one that as I stated earlier the administrations focused on working with MOX to see how we can streamline that procurement effort and... and people are cooperating and we're

1 COMMITTEE ON PARKS AND RECREATION 88
2 seeing the dividends of... of a facet procurement
3 process was more toward a seven month than the 12
4 month. And I assume that some of the contractors
5 that bid on Parks projects also bid on other city
6 agency projects. So if we were able to do to more
7 together to monitor the performance of contractors
8 on projects having information compared across
9 agencies could be useful in helping identify both
10 best and... and worst performers.

11 COMMISSIONER SILVER: We are constantly
12 reevaluating the capital process to see where we
13 can gain innovation. We have a great team out at
14 Umstead and Capital. And so the answer is we're
15 always looking for more recommendations,
16 prequalified lists, whatever we can do to ensure
17 that the process is as smooth and quick as
18 possible.

19 COUNCIL MEMBER LANDER: That's great.
20 And then one other thing in budgeting you talked a
21 lot about the stewardship initiatives that you have
22 underway which are great under Chair Levine. This
23 council has put more resources into stewardship.
24 One of the things that really helps a lot of us do
25 that is participatory budgeting. I know that

1 because you guys have such good strong borough
2 offices we engage with those offices. But I wonder
3 if there might be some ways to strengthen the
4 partnership between participatory budgeting and the
5 department as a whole and just think about how we
6 could... and the DOT has done a pretty good job of
7 moving forward to think of it as how does the
8 agency relate to participatory budgeting, how do we
9 help delegates understand the most effective
10 projects and I wonder if we could work with you
11 just to keep improve... there's been a lot of parks
12 projects funded through participatory budgeting.
13 But it'd be great to further streamline and improve
14 that process.

16 COMMISSIONER SILVER: We're open... we
17 believe we're partners of participatory budgeting
18 and we're willing if you have suggestions on how we
19 can strengthen that partnership further.

20 COUNCIL MEMBER LANDER: That'd be great.

21 COMMISSIONER SILVER: So we know a
22 number of projects... I... I get the list and there are
23 a couple that are starting quite soon that were
24 beneficiaries of participatory budgeting.

COUNCIL MEMBER LANDER: Absolutely.

Thank you. That's great. I think we could sit down.

We have some thoughts about ways that we could make it even stronger. And then finally I'll just say I...

Im very enthusiastic about Parks Without Borders.

It's hard to imagine a park whose boarders define a borough more than Prospect Park. So as you are

making your decisions I just want to let you know

that the elected officials all around that park

whose boarders are the neighborhoods of Brooklyn

are really excited about this program and... and hope

that we're in strong contention and also looking

really forward to seeing you at the Ribbon cutting

for dome playground out in... from the borough park

Kensington boarder which is looking fantastic and

we're really excited to open...

COUNCIL MEMBER LANDER: Thank you Chair.

Thank you Mr. Chair.

CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: Thank you Council

Member Lander and thank you for your impeccable

timing. Right on the nail. I want to relay a

message that Council Member Williams asked that I

share which is he wants everyone to know how

wonderful Brooklyn Commissioner Jeffrey is. I think

he's here somewhere. And as long as we're giving shout outs I want you to know how wonderful the Manhattan Commissioner Castro is who's here and also his Chief of Staff Steve Simon is an incredible... incredible partner for our office.

UNKNOWN: Now I have to add the Brooklyn Chief of Staff Marty Marr who'll... great part of Commissioner Jeffrey's Brooklyn Team.

CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: And you know the Northern Manhattan Administrator Jennifer Hoppa. She is just dynamite.

UNKNOWN: We will take a break for a group hug in a second and...

CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: Alright very good. Thanks to Council legislation now the public can see crime data reported on a park by park basis in the 100 largest parks. And looking at the MMR I noticed what could be seen as a contradictory trend in the first four months of this fiscal year. And if I have this right while crimes against property are down crimes against persons are up. I can get the percentages... Yes. And since we're talking so much about PEP Officers these questions of public

safety are even more relevant. Do you have any explanation for the trends?

COMMISSIONER SILVER: I'm going to let Commissioner Cavanaugh respond because I did receive these numbers recently and don't know if it's just a... not a trend but just a short term blip. Again to reinforce that the primary role of the PEP is to enforce park rules we must work... we have a... you heard a staff would... fully staff will be at 292, or roughly about 225. So we definitely need a cooperation of NYPD but I'll now defer to Commissioner Cavanaugh to go... specifically about some possible trends that we're seeing.

CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: I just have the... the percentages here... it looks like crimes against persons are up 96 percent. This is the first four months of this fiscal year versus the first four months of last fiscal year and property crimes are down 49 percent.

LIAM CAVANAUGH: Yes the... the two categories in which crimes against persons have grown are robberies and felonious assaults. Robberies seems to be part of the pattern of... of sort of quick shove and snatch robberies involving

cell phones and smartphones and things like that.
We worked very closely with the Police Department to understand where they're happening, when they're happening. So there are staff, both PEP and staff assigned to the park are... are vigilant to look for situations where there is some suspicious activity and reported to the police. But you know the police as Commissioner Silver said are the primary agency responsible for managing and addressing crime problems across the city.

CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: Can you say more about the locations of these crimes? Are they concentrated in certain parks or certain parks of the city?

LIAM CAVANAUGH: They tend to... they tend to occur in larger more... more popular parks. Obviously there's more people and there's more potential for... you know for crime to occur you know. For example, in one instance if you're familiar with Riverside Park there were a number of those types of crimes occurred along Riverside Drive in the evening at night in some cases where who were walking their dogs or you know coming from their car or something like that were... were

CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: The Manhattan District Attorney Cy Vance announced in the last day or so they will no longer be making arrests for a number of minor infractions such as public consumption of alcohol, public urination, littering... Will this impact the way such infractions are enforced against in the parks by the PEP officers?

COMMISSIONER SILVER: It won't change the way PEP approaches those kind of infractions. As Commissioner Silva said earlier our approach is always to educate and correct the condition wherever we can. We rely on summonses as a last resort or when a situation has... has you know gone beyond the initial infraction. So that's been our practice it... I think it shows up in... in our summons numbers where criminal court summonses which is a

higher level of summons is a very low percentage of the summonses that we issue in the course of a year and our arrests are... are actually very small in comparison to the... to the interactions that we have with the public are...

CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: But PEP officers do have arrest powers correct?

COMMISSIONER SILVER: They do have arrest power, yes.

CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: So will... will those now... will those powers no longer be used in the case of such infractions in Manhattan?

COMMISSIONER SILVER: I... I think we will still apply the same approach which I... I believe is consistent with what the police department is doing is to again to educate, to correct, issue a summons where we have to but either a ECB summons which carries a less sort of long term burden than a criminal court summons may and then only in those rare instances where a situation has escalated beyond the original infraction when we make arrests.

CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: So you retain the ability to arrest if situations get escalated or those repeated problem, is that correct?

COMMISSIONER SILVER: Yes, but just to put it in context last year PEP officers made 55 arrests citywide. So it's not something that we rely heavily on in the regular course of our enforcing rules and regulations.

CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: Got it, understood. Last year the city council was really excited to partner with the administration with the Parks Department and the extension of the beach season from a week to a week beyond labor day where it traditionally ended. We were so thrilled about that. The beaches are incredibly heavily used and for better or for worse global climate change has meant that September is getting warmer. And it's more likely that even days beyond labor day could be warm enough for people to attend the beach. We're very excited about that. Curiously the pool season was not extended in a similar way. And we do feel that it's important because pools tend to be located in low income communities in New York City and their usership and their staff tend to more

likely be people of color relative to beaches. So we think there's a compelling case to extend... excuse me, for both pools and beaches. And I wonder if you could state your current position on that and whether there's any money in the budget for extension of the pools.

COMMISSIONER SILVER: I will defer to Commissioner Cavanaugh specifically on the beaches and... the beaches and pools. One of the issues that was happening throughout the season is to make sure we had enough staffing to cover all of the pools. I know that we were going to use a number of lifeguards to open up portions of the beaches so we can shut it down. We didn't want to get in a situation of picking certain pools and not others. And so we weren't sure of our lifeguard count for some of the pools. So I'll defer to Commissioner Cavanaugh on the numbers because we did track the numbers and the costs to extend the beaches for that period of time. We did see a reduction. There was if you recall a 90 plus day... I believe the day before school started, but we saw the numbers drop dramatically for the additional days we did open up the beaches for last season.

CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: Sorry the usership...

COMMISSIONER SILVER: ...the visitors... how many visitors came to the beaches themselves for the extended period of time that we opened up the beaches.

CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: Does that say to you that... that people just didn't know it was open or was it weather conditions or what... what was the cause?

COMMISSIONER SILVER: We... we think it... it's primarily weather as Commissioner Silver said. Tuesday, the day before school opened it was a 93-degree day. We estimated about 70,000 attendees at the beach. Not a... not a very high number for a typical hot summer weekday. The following day when school opened however it was also 90 degrees and usership plummeted to less than 20,000. The following days were cooler and rainier. Usership was very low on the... on the Thursday. It was about 38 hundred, only slightly higher on... on... on Friday, Saturday again was overcast and rainy. I think we only had about 20,000 visitors to the beach on that day. Sunday was a nicer day but even then we only had about 70,000 visitors. And so you know the...

1 it's... I don't know if this week was a... the best
2 gage of how popular it would be. We thought people
3 generally knew that the... that beaches were
4 remaining open. We did post signs at the beaches
5 letting people know that we were open an additional
6 week. Our concessionaires were certainly aware of
7 it. And they were very pleased by the fact that the
8 beaches were open later. We... you know we did have
9 concerns about how... if we were going to be able to
10 manage it successfully. And while we're very
11 grateful that we had a sufficient number of
12 lifeguards to manage the... the crowds that did show
13 up you know there are concerns that if it was an
14 extremely hot day and many people did come to the
15 beach we might not have enough lifeguards to safely
16 open enough beach to accommodate you know very
17 large crowds. So that was one concern that we did
18 have. Unfortunately, it didn't materialize this...
19 this last summer.

21 COMMISSIONER SILVER: So to be clear
22 there is no funding in this budget to extend the
23 pool and beach season beyond what we traditionally
24 close... what would traditionally keep the beaches
25 and pools open?

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2 CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: Alright well that
3 still is something we're going to continue to
4 advocate for for the reasons I laid out. You've
5 added many new artificial turf fields in recent
6 years. Something which has done great things for
7 parks all over the city. You think they're almost
8 universally popular. Have you similarly increased
9 the size of the maintenance crews for artificial
10 turf people might not understand that though it
11 doesn't need the kind of care that a natural turf
12 field would that there... there... there is upkeep
13 that's required on artificial turf? So do you have
14 a larger team doing that work now that you've added
15 so many new fields.

16 COMMISSIONER SILVER: We do not have an
17 exclusive team but I'm working with Commissioner
18 Cavanaugh to see if we can't create a very
19 specialized team. We have about 180 artificial turf
20 fields throughout the city. And we know that if we
21 can have a... a specialized team focused on them we
22 could extend the care. But to do that means that
23 you're taking away resources from somewhere else.
24 But it's something we're exploring to see if we can
25 actually develop a crew. Clearly more staff would

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2 be helpful to do that. So that is something that is
3 a big focus of ours because we know that we have so
4 many that provide recreational resources 12 months
5 out of the year if there's no snow on the ground,
6 that's the resiliency of the artificial turf.

7 CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: But there's...
8 there's no money in the budget to expand the
9 staffing for that work at the moment, is that
10 right? That's something we'd like to see for sure.
11 We are at the end... we have now completed the new
12 entry initiative. We're thrilled about that. It was
13 an incredible milestone for the city. What's next?
14 What's next in terms of street tree planning? What
15 are our next stretch goals?

16 COMMISSIONER SILVER: Well right now we
17 have funding through 2017 and so we'll be
18 continually seeing ways that we can start to
19 replenish our urban forest. So we still have a
20 little bit of time but certainly our goal is to
21 continue to at least keep pace with the amount of
22 trees that we lose on an annual basis. But there is
23 no... no new million tree initiative but certainly
24 recognize the importance and value of trees and
25 it's something that we're committed to seeing how

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2 we continue to push for additional trees. But right
3 now there's nothing in the budget that expands the
4 million tree initiative. We have funding for about
5 another 130,000 trees to be planted. And we'll
6 continue to have conversations about how we could
7 get more funding to keep those trees... more trees
8 being planted in our city.

9 CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: Okay I'm going to
10 pause for a moment and allow my colleague Ydanis
11 Rodriguez whose got some questions.

12 COUNCIL MEMBER RODRIGUEZ: Thank you
13 Chairman. Thank you Commissioner for your work and
14 of course thank you Commissioner... as a Manhattan
15 Commission... who always ae there when we need them.
16 When we look at the capital the... the capital plan
17 for 2017 when do we get to see to which project
18 would that capital money being going to be used.

19 COMMISSIONER SILVER: We actually have
20 that... outline in the capital budget. Do you mean...
21 that's already outlined in the capital budget of
22 what we are planning to go forward but that was...

23 COUNCIL MEMBER RODRIGUEZ: Okay.

24 COMMISSIONER SILVER: We can go over
25 that specifically...

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2 COUNCIL MEMBER RODRIGUEZ: So I... I think
3 it is... if... I would like to see how with your staff
4 and of course I can say that you are the first one..
5 probably the first commissioner... the first... the
6 first agency that you know is putting all the
7 information online. I think that there's... that's
8 very important or at least to be... to allow us to
9 keep track of capital funding but I think it is
10 important that if we can get let's say a breakdown...

11 COMMISSIONER SILVER: Yes.

12 COUNCIL MEMBER RODRIGUEZ: ...per
13 district, you know everything is local. I advocate
14 for the whole citywide but at the end of the day I
15 had to deliver to the district that I represent. So
16 for me it is important to see how those... that
17 capital was translated into particular project. In
18 my districts especially they average estimate of
19 600 acres that I have... Park, Fort Tryon Park, and
20 Inyu [sp?] Park.

21 COMMISSIONER SILVER: Council Member
22 Rodriguez is that new or existing because we can...
23 we are...

24 COUNCIL MEMBER RODRIGUEZ: The new one.
25 The new one for 2017.

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2 COMMISSIONER SILVER: Okay.

3 COUNCIL MEMBER RODRIGUEZ: Yeah the one
4 that we will be... starting in they... with the next...
5 budget, that's the one... [cross-talk]

6 COMMISSIONER: Okay.

7 COUNCIL MEMBER RODRIGUEZ: Yeah.

8 COMMISSIONER SILVER: Yes.

9 COUNCIL MEMBER RODRIGUEZ: So and... and
10 in that direction I... I will like call to your
11 attention two thing... One is when it come to pools
12 in New York City I have to say one of the
13 playground... I don't know if the playground on
14 Broadway and... Street that used to be a pool. And I...
15 I think it could be probably a great legacy that
16 you can leave if you can identify parks and
17 playground throughout the city that they used to
18 have pool decades ago that they are not there
19 anymore. Because when you look at New York City
20 especially in the older served communities. First
21 of all, I need... final swimming because you know I
22 would go every... to the corner of any particular
23 community to take my daughters to swim. But as
24 something that I advocate from my daughter it is
25 something that I would like to see for every single

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2 child. So you know having pool in our city. It's
3 so... it's not a luxury. It's something that is part
4 of the middle class and the upper class especially
5 the new... help put everywhere... indoor. We don't
6 have an indoor pool in the whole community... all.
7 And... and... I know that indoor pool is very
8 expensive. You know that it too... the maintenance is
9 very expensive but at least in area where we used
10 to have pool... playground with a pool I think if you
11 at least can put a look and do a sensibility study
12 to see on how many area... how many location do we
13 have through the five borough study we might that
14 they used to have pool that we can say how much it
15 would take to renovate those pool.

16 COMMISSIONER SILVER: Well we have 67
17 public pools citywide does not in... so that's one
18 point I wanted to share with you. There are the
19 larger pools like the one at High Bridge... [cross-
20 talk]

21 COUNCIL MEMBER RODRIGUEZ: No I know... I
22 know what we have. What I'm thinking is about if
23 you can look on potential to renovate playground or
24 park where we used to have pool in the past. And I
25 just give you one of the particular example. I love

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2 the playground Broadway and... there used to be a
3 pool, a children pool. And there's no many... as you
4 know you have a big... there... there's staff who work
5 in High Bridge Park... you know had to limit like for
6 three hours or whatever hour because they hold... how
7 overcrowd is that pool. Because there's no many in
8 the whole northern Manhattan. And now with the High
9 Bridge Park. The... and even the overcrowd we're
10 going to be... easy to going be a big challenge this
11 year. Because all the youngster who live across the
12 Bronx now they will come to the High Bridge Park...
13 My suggestion is to look at the opportunity.

14 COMMISSIONER SILVER: I will ensure
15 Commissioner Castro and Steve Simon will sit down
16 and talk to you about this... this particular
17 location.

18 COUNCIL MEMBER RODRIGUEZ: Wait my
19 second question is about at the local level... at the
20 end of the FDR... of the FDR where we have... High
21 Bridge Park [sp?] in the left side. And then the
22 east side... in the East Park close to the river
23 where you have the... restoration they should be
24 opportunity to build a walk bridge so that thousand
25 of people that they heavily use that area at the

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2 end of the FDR on the right side they should be
3 able to cross to the High Bridge Park and at the
4 end of that connection were hope all to take
5 advantage of all the resources that High Bridge
6 Park has.

7 COMMISSIONER SILVER: We'll have
8 Commissioner Castro follow up with you on that
9 request as well.

10 COUNCIL MEMBER RODRIGUEZ: Okay.

11 CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: Thank you Council
12 Member Rodriguez. Next up we have questions from
13 Council Member Helen Rosenthal from Manhattan.

14 COUNCIL MEMBER CABRERA: Thank you Mr.
15 Chair for allowing me to... Oh I'm sorry.

16 CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: I meant to say
17 Fernando Cabrera from the Bronx. Please take it
18 away sir.

19 COUNCIL MEMBER ROSENTHAL: Council
20 Member I know when I walk in the room people want
21 me to just ask questions but really it's your turn.
22 Thank you.

23 COUNCIL MEMBER CABRERA: So much love in
24 this room today. Thank you. Thank you. I... I'll make
25 it a 30 seconds. I was intrigued by the question

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2 the chairman was asking about how many trees we
3 have. And this is kind of an unusual question. Do
4 we... do we have enough trees to compensate for all
5 the New Yorkers that we have in the city?

6 COMMISSIONER SILVER: I may defer that
7 to the foresters. I can tell you we have over two
8 million street trees in our... we have two million
9 trees in our parks. And we're completing the census
10 but well over 650,000 street trees. Believe you
11 probably know the benefits of trees to our
12 environment. I don't know if there's a per capita
13 per tree but... but certainly if someone wants to
14 share what is the... the standard of certainly for us
15 to more trees the better. It's better for storm
16 water, environment, public health, mental health,
17 physical health. Everyone sees the value of trees
18 which is why we make sure we take care of our urban
19 forests.

20 CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: Is there a... we have
21 our forester... per capita per...

22 COUNCIL MEMBER CABRERA: How many trees
23 do we need per person.

24 COMMISSIONER SILVER: No... it's an
25 interesting question and one that we've been

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2 thinking about lately. Based on the last estimate
3 provided by the forest service there are 5.2
4 million trees in New York City. They're actually
5 redoing their estimates now using later... more
6 modern technology. We know it's going to be a
7 higher number, one because a million trees and
8 other developments that have happened in natural
9 areas. It's still not going to be 8.3 million trees
10 though. We're pretty sure of that. And while you
11 know it's... it's nice to think about having a tree
12 for every person in New York and it's not a bad
13 thing. The real way that you measure tree benefits.
14 It's not just the number of trees, it's canopy
15 cover. The canopy of a tree is where all the
16 environmental benefits occur. And in fact because
17 of you know longstanding development in New York
18 City canopy cover has declined even though the
19 number of trees has increased. And... and that's
20 where we see a real sort of opportunity for us to
21 improve the environmental functions around the city
22 by increasing canopy cover. It's a complicated
23 subject but the number of trees is one element of
24 it and it's an important one. And we're thinking

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2 along the same lines as how do we get to the number
3 of trees to match the number of people in New York.

4 COUNCIL MEMBER CABRERA: And I
5 appreciate that you appreciate the... the fact... the
6 canopy fact especially when it comes to birds
7 migrating to this area and living in this are. We
8 want to be able to... I know this... it's an important...
9 important factor. I'll... I'll give it back to the
10 chair. So my colleague... [cross-talk]

11 CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: Thank you Council
12 Member Cabrera. And I think now Council Member
13 Rosenthal is ready.

14 COUNCIL MEMBER ROSENTHAL: Thank you so
15 much. Thank you Commissioner for all your testimony
16 today and all the hard work of your department. As
17 you know I work very closely with both Bill and
18 Steve and they're amazing always. And I really
19 appreciate their work. So whatever you're doing to
20 support them keep doing it. As you know I'd like to
21 actually follow up from some questions that I
22 talked about last year. So as chair of the... putting
23 on my hat as chair of the Contracts Committee last
24 year when we talked about the contracting process
25 if I recall correctly you mentioned that one of

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2 your... that you too were concerned about how long it
3 takes to contract or a capital project to be
4 completed and that you had worked on it immediately
5 and shaved off two months of the process. And so
6 I'm wondering two years and sort of where we are in
7 terms of how long it takes to get a contract
8 approved. Has that amount of time decreased even
9 further? Has the amount of time it takes to get a
10 capital project finished improved? Where are you on
11 that? Things have improved dramatically in the past
12 two years. What we're able to measure and focus on
13 the most was construction. And what I stated
14 earlier in 2014 we're at 73 and 74 percent on time,
15 on budget for construction. We're now at 93 and 98
16 percent.

17 COUNCIL MEMBER ROSENTHAL: Wow.

18 COMMISSIONER SILVER: For construction
19 on time on budget. So made a lot of headway on the
20 construction side. On the procurement because we've
21 been watching what happened, basically end of 2014
22 early 2015 seven to 12 months could be the average
23 timeframe for procurement, work with the
24 administration MOX and others there are about five
25 or six entities that touch the procurement process.

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2 Been great cooperation and we're seeing it more
3 toward the seven to eight month than the higher
4 number, I'm sorry seven to 10 months for
5 procurement. So we're actually seeing that the
6 lower end of that range I think people recognize
7 that there are opportunities for improvement.
8 Design is where we found the most efficiency, made
9 a number of changes, and now we're seeing that
10 number come down dramatically where I had mentioned
11 we're able to shave several months off the process.
12 So all projects, CPI, and the projects that came in
13 that grouping is a good measurement. We expect it
14 to kick off in October 2014 and finish that by end
15 of 2017. That's three years. And right now we're on
16 time on budget. Some of those projects are going
17 out to bid right now. Some that we're actually
18 receiving bids. So the... the changes have worked and
19 we're always going to monitor, see how we can
20 improve it better so I can report to you after two
21 years all the hard work that staff has put in and
22 other partners is bearing fruit and positive
23 results.

24 COUNCIL MEMBER ROSENTHAL: So what's the
25 next... That's great news, thank you. What's the next

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2 effort. It sounds like you focused on shortening
3 the design process.

4 COMMISSIONER SILVER: Right.

5 COUNCIL MEMBER ROSENTHAL: Made good
6 efforts there. What's the next piece you're working
7 on this year?

8 COMMISSIONER SILVER: We still have a
9 number of... I... I can... there's still about I say
10 about five or six other initiatives are working
11 with our partners. I know we want to... see if we
12 can... so the next steps is creating standard
13 operating procedures for the procurement phase of
14 the capital process establishing a task force and
15 capital projects division to address some of the
16 key areas including approving training and
17 monitoring programs. So we've... they're just... and
18 we're work with the other partners still citywide
19 to see how we can continue to improve the
20 procurement process and MOX has taken a lead on
21 that when to see what else that we can do. So there
22 are still some next steps and... but we're moving
23 toward that three to three and a half year goal
24 that I had established when I came onboard.

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2 COUNCIL MEMBER ROSENTHAL: Great. Would
3 you be open to a separate hearing about that to
4 talk about the contracting process and how that's
5 going and the steps that you're taking.

6 COMMISSIONER SILVER: This is a citywide
7 issue. We certainly would be welcome to have that
8 conversation with other members of the capital
9 process team.

10 COUNCIL MEMBER ROSENTHAL: Yeah. I mean
11 one of the things that surprised me the other day
12 was that there were 70 steps needed to finish a
13 capital project in the Department of Parks. And
14 sort of if we use that as a measure...

15 COMMISSIONER SILVER: And I recount it
16 but thank you but now I could appreciate the
17 process even more.

18 COUNCIL MEMBER ROSENTHAL: Right, how
19 can we get that down to 20. If it would be... I think
20 that would be the name of the hearing. From 70 to
21 20 how fast can we go?

22 COMMISSIONER SILVER: Yes. Yes.

23 CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: Give me a
24 blockbuster.

25

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2 COUNCIL MEMBER ROSENTHAL: That's right.

3 Sorry I have a second question.

4 COMMISSIONER SILVER: Well... Yeah I think
5 I've heard you say before is that everybody wants
6 us to move the process like a Porsche,
7 unfortunately, we inherited a minivan which cares a
8 lot and so we're doing our best to move it along
9 given what we have. So we'd welcome the
10 conversation but I do want to say we've seen
11 incredible progress in the two years. And so we
12 think all of our partners across city government
13 and within parks to help expedite the process.

14 COUNCIL MEMBER ROSENTHAL: Oh that's
15 great. Okay so we're going to retitle it from
16 Minivan to Porsche.

17 COMMISSIONER SILVER: Yes.

18 COUNCIL MEMBER ROSENTHAL: I like it.

19 COMMISSIONER SILVER: Now we are still
20 challenged by some of the legacy ones that have
21 been stalled for a variety of reasons. Those
22 continue to get some attention but if you look at
23 that part of really October 2014 and beyond that's
24 where you start to see some huge differences that

25

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2 are benefitting the whole process from some of the
3 new changes.

4 COUNCIL MEMBER ROSENTHAL: And now your...
5 do you have the tools necessary to keep up to date
6 the capital tracker that you have so I could go
7 online today. And see... look at the capital tracker
8 for my district and see it up to date as to where
9 we are?

10 COMMISSIONER SILVER: The answer is yes.
11 We want to make sure it's updated on the regular
12 basis so people could stay current and know exactly
13 where the project is in the... in the timeline.

14 COUNCIL MEMBER ROSENTHAL: Okay so I'll
15 put out a press release this afternoon about
16 whether or not it's up to date or if you need more
17 resources.

18 COMMISSIONER SILVER: Staff is now on
19 notice... [cross-talk] supposed to be updated
20 monthly... [cross-talk]

21 COUNCIL MEMBER ROSENTHAL: Doing it
22 right now.

23 COMMISSIONER SILVER: ...so...

24 COUNCIL MEMBER ROSENTHAL: That would be
25 very helpful. Secondly, I want to ask about the...

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2 how you're doing on a MWBE contracts. I noticed
3 that you got some staff to track how you're doing
4 but I'm a little more interested... sorry you had to
5 add staff to track your reporting of it. I'm... I'm
6 interested to know what your... what changes you're
7 making to move along there although I think Parks
8 is generally pretty good.

9 COMMISSIONER SILVER: Right among prime
10 contracts I believe we're second third in the city.
11 And on subcontracts we're second... we set a goal
12 about 86... trying to see the number here... 86.6
13 million, that's our target for FY '16. And we're 40
14 percent halfway toward that goal, subcontracts a
15 little bit more complicated to give the response.
16 But overall we're the second best performing of the
17 agencies and we take our MWBE commitment very very
18 seriously. So we are making sure we have staff to
19 track it because we do know it's important both the
20 administration but also the elected officials and
21 the industry.

22 COUNCIL MEMBER ROSENTHAL: Was the
23 reason you needed staff to track it because they
24 weren't necessarily registered as MWBEs. And so you
25 were trying to get in there and find out who are

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2 these companies or... not registered I mean,
3 certified.

4 COMMISSIONER SILVER: That was more
5 about the recruitment. We... so it's more about the
6 recruitment.

7 COUNCIL MEMBER ROSENTHAL: Oh okay. So
8 it's a misnomer to say that it's for tracking. It's
9 actually for recruitment of more finding, more... oh
10 but really thank you very much for that. That helps
11 a lot. And are you able now again with my
12 contracting hat on are you able to distinguish in
13 your reporting of MWBE contracts the notion of sort
14 of micro contract, small, medium, and large. Is
15 that possible to get that kind of report?

16 COMMISSIONER SILVER: I believe that is
17 correct, the answer is yes.

18 COUNCIL MEMBER ROSENTHAL: Okay.

19 COMMISSIONER SILVER: We do... [cross-
20 talk]

21 COUNCIL MEMBER ROSENTHAL: I'd love to
22 see that. Maybe it's already online so if somebody
23 could just send me a link or something... and the
24 reason I ask is because some of the MWBEs have
25 talked to me that... talked to me about how it's

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2 easier for them to just given where they stay... what
3 stage they're in in their growth as a company that
4 at this juncture they are better served if they're
5 applying for the small ones or the medium ones in
6 order to move... work themselves up. So I'm just
7 wondering how you're doing there.

8 COMMISSIONER SILVER: Okay.

9 COUNCIL MEMBER ROSENTHAL: Thank you so
10 much. I really appreciate it. Thank you Chair
11 Levine for always running a great meeting.

12 CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: Thank you Council
13 Member Rosenthal. We've been joined by Council
14 Member Barry Grodenchik from Queens. Council Member
15 if you have a question give me a signal and we'll
16 work you right in. Alright you ready to jump in
17 now?

18 COUNCIL MEMBER GRODENCHIK: ...Chair. It's
19 great to see our Parks... [cross-talk]

20 CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: Sorry Barry I also
21 want to acknowledge we've been joined by Council
22 Member Rosie, Rosie Mendez from Manhattan. If you
23 have a question Rosie let me know.

24 COUNCIL MEMBER GRODENCHIK: She was here
25 first, she can go first.

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2 CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: Okay.

3 COUNCIL MEMBER GRODENCHIK: Sure. I'm
4 sure you go question about this already because I'd
5 watched the tweets of my colleagues. But I just
6 want to reiterate the importance to us... all of us
7 who fund... Parks programs and you know I have a
8 great working relationship with your Commissioner
9 in Queens; Dottie [sp?], and it's been a great
10 pleasure to work with Liam over the years. And I
11 see Joe Anamagrandy [phonetic] trying to hide in
12 the back. But we just really need you to stay on
13 that construction because it's... it tears my heart
14 out to drive past a park, thank you, and see it
15 closed for an extended period of time. I'm looking
16 forward to in the next capital year to funding some
17 new playgrounds in... in our neck of the woods in
18 Eastern Queens where we have... my district has over
19 a thousand acres of parkland which is one of the
20 largest in the city. But I just asking you... I know
21 that you've been asked this but I just want to add
22 my voice Commissioner to my colleagues to stay on
23 top of that. And I know that was a first... very
24 first discussion I had with you the first time I
25

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2 met you. And I'll probably keep having it as long
3 as we're both in our jobs.

4 COMMISSIONER SILVER: And under
5 construction we... we do have good news to report.
6 We're now under construction phase. 98, 93, 98
7 percent on time on budget. We just started doing
8 some work on some of the legacy projects that
9 didn't benefit from some of the innovations but now
10 some new protocols, no change orders, and less life
11 safety once construction starts is really starting
12 to curtail the length of construction. So you'll
13 see those parks starting opening up sooner.

14 COUNCIL MEMBER GRODENCHIK: That's
15 great.

16 COMMISSIONER SILVER: And so that is my
17 hope and I'm... and I know that's your hope as well.

18 COUNCIL MEMBER GRODENCHIK: My hope as
19 well. I look forward to cutting many ribbons with
20 you. Thank you Mr. Chairman.

21 CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: Thank you Council
22 Member Grodenchik. Okay great. The city's in the
23 process of upzoning 15 neighborhoods. Many have
24 already been announced. You're an urban planner and
25 so I'm sure you thought a lot about the need for

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2 green space in the upzoned areas. I wonder whether
3 there are standard metrics that we use to judge
4 whether a neighborhood has adequate green space.
5 For example, park acreage for 10,000 residents. Is
6 there some other objective way we can gauge whether
7 growing neighborhoods have enough open space?

8 COMMISSIONER SILVER: There are
9 certainly metrics across the board from national
10 organizations for trust for public land. There are
11 a lot of numbers put out there. We're certainly
12 working very closely with the Department of City
13 Planning on all the neighborhood planning and we
14 very much appreciate the mayor putting out that
15 neighborhood investment fund to ensure that those
16 open spaces and infrastructure needs are addressed
17 going forward. So in terms of standards there are..
18 there are numbers that are out there for small, for
19 large, for regional parks. So we look at that
20 looking at what is there because this is now a
21 build up city. It's very different when you're a
22 growing city as you're starting to annex and
23 convert green fields and development. So we look
24 very specific at the resources. We always look at
25 opportunities for increased open space balancing

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2 the need for new sites for housing. So if something
3 were at the table and on all of the work with city
4 planning and that is both as a planner but also now
5 as Parks Commissioner. It is a role we don't take
6 very seriously. We recognize density and open space
7 go together. But it's not just about... housing as
8 quality neighborhoods. The mayor understands that
9 and so he's putting that fund to make sure that is
10 a quality neighborhood that grows along with the
11 affordable housing. And... and he mentioned the... very
12 important... dollars...

13 CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: How much of that is
14 earmarked for parks?

15 COMMISSIONER SILVER: I can say
16 specifically right now on the East New York that's
17 the one I am most familiar with. There are actually
18 some projects that are going forth if you give me a
19 second. There's one where we already have funds
20 dedicated to some improvements in east New York.
21 See... So it's... alright... it's... alright I'm sorry.
22 Okay. Thank you. So Sea Lion Park is getting 5.2
23 and a new play. And so that's for new... seven
24 million for a new recreational space at Saline Park
25 and 5.2 million and a new playground at Highland

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2 Park and 1.7 for a... so total of seven million is
3 5.2 and 1.7 for Sea Lion Park and for Highland
4 Park.

5 CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: Right. That's for
6 upgrades of existing parks. But the... there might be
7 cases where you determine that there simply aren't
8 enough parks when you add thousands of new
9 residents. And in that case either you be lucky and
10 have city owned land that you could build a park on
11 or in a more difficult case you have to acquire a
12 new property. Is there any provision for actually
13 expanding the number of parks or the size of parks
14 in growing neighborhoods?

15 COMMISSIONER SILVER: Well it's the
16 availability of some of the land balanced with some
17 of the sites for housing so they're looked at
18 together. In all the areas being rezoned we look at
19 both what a city owned land, opportunities for
20 acquisition, we look at some of the existing
21 resources, or even taking a Parks without Borders
22 approach just creating a new entrance is now giving
23 someone a walk to a park that did not exist before.
24 So we look at all of those options for each area
25 being rezoned to make sure that we are either

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2 increasing or expanding the open space
3 opportunities. But you should know by CPI that
4 there are some places that just have an asphalt
5 playground that while it's quoted... called a park
6 it's not really usable. You can tell by the number
7 of people or lack of in that park. By converting it
8 into a quality space you're now actually creating...
9 you're actually putting a real park there while it
10 was there in name only. That is part of our
11 approach as well to enhance and improve what's
12 there so it actually now improves the quality of
13 the park itself. But there are opportunities we
14 look for for acquisition where it is an opportunity
15 to do that in that neighborhood.

16 CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: Understood. Just
17 want to observe that a billion dollars sounds like
18 a lot of money but when you consider that we might
19 have schools to build, store systems to expand, a
20 transportation infrastructure to install, and you
21 realize we have 15 neighborhoods that... I guess at
22 least 75 or 80 million per neighborhood. You could
23 spend that money very very quickly and not have
24 anything left over for green space especially if we
25 need to build new parks. So we're going to continue

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2 to advocate for very robust commitment to
3 infrastructure needs in these growing neighborhoods
4 particularly when it comes to green space. I have
5 one final very narrow question for you. I
6 appreciate your patience through so many questions
7 but after Hurricane Sandy both the Rockaway
8 peninsula and Long Beach in Long Island were
9 terribly battered and the boardwalks in both places
10 were pretty badly damaged, Long Beach opened its
11 boardwalk I believe in the summer of 2014.
12 Rockaways are still in process. There are the same
13 restrictive state rules on bidding in both places.
14 Can you explain the differential and time for those
15 projects?

16 COMMISSIONER SILVER: Well part of that
17 as you know preceded my tenor but what I can say
18 what we're building in the Rockaway is stronger,
19 more resilient and the length... is a lot longer. And
20 we're now building it... one part just opened up
21 early this year ahead of schedule and all of this
22 will be complete by memorial day of... of next year.
23 This is a new approach to how to design a... a
24 boardwalk to me one that's going to be resilient in
25 the 21st century. And again I don't believe the one

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2 in Long Beach was built the same way we built the
3 Rockaway. So I'll defer to Commissioner Cavanaugh
4 who was here during that time but from my opinion
5 that I believe that the Rockaway Boardwalk is state
6 of the art, built better to protect the community,
7 it's concrete, it is strong, it has protections on...
8 on both sides, and it now is an incredible amenity
9 that's going to really transform the Rockaway
10 community but also protect lives and property.

11 LIAM CAVANAUGH: I can only... reiterate
12 what Commissioner Silver said. We took a different
13 approach to rebuilding the boardwalk in Long Beach
14 and they did a beautiful job no... no question about
15 that but they replaced what was damaged. We
16 replaced the entire boardwalk down to the piles
17 that were installed 80 or 90 years ago because we
18 didn't think they were going to give the city a
19 long enough return on investment. So we replaced
20 the entire thing. It's more than twice as big and
21 the cost of the project is probably six times the
22 cost of the Long Beach project when all things are
23 factored into it. And then as Commissioner Silver
24 said we very consciously build resiliency measures
25 into the project. Beyond just the boardwalk itself

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2 there's a sand retaining wall. There's a sand
3 barrier that is placed between the boardwalk and
4 the new dune that was created by the Army Corp. And
5 it was specifically planned to anticipate further
6 improvements that the Army Corp will make on
7 Rockaway Beach to improve resiliency in the long
8 term. So we're... we're... we're... we understand that
9 people are impatient, we understand that, but we
10 think we're delivering a really great project for
11 the people of the city as a whole but Rockaway in
12 particular.

13 CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: Thank you for that
14 explanation. Council Member Mendez I believe you
15 have a question.

16 COUNCIL MEMBER MENDEZ: Yes, thank you
17 Mr. Chair. I understand a lot of questions were ask
18 about the PEP officers so I hope... I'm going to try
19 to not go through all the questions I have knowing
20 I'll get it from staff. And if you answered any of
21 these please just let me know and... and I'll get the
22 answers from staff. I want to know more about this
23 citywide unit that you mentioned in your testimony
24 on page three. I wanted to know what other agencies
25 parks will be working with, how this unit will be

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2 distributed borough by borough, and I wanted to
3 know in terms of PEP officer were being directed to
4 children's playgrounds or children only playground.
5 My district, very diverse district, and I have some
6 issues with the homeless and other places of my
7 district we have the homeless not a problem in our
8 parks and we have feeding programs that we work
9 very well with the feeding programs to get their
10 needs serviced. But in others we do have some
11 issues. I also have a lot of issues with vendors,
12 some authorized, some unauthorized. So if you can
13 talk me through that and... and what the head count
14 increase would be for that.

15 COMMISSIONER SILVER: Okay. So first on
16 the citywide unit the primary purpose is to have a
17 mobile unit that can specifically address homeless
18 encampments and also illegal vending. So they're
19 going to be going to hot spots where they know is a
20 problem but we'd like them to be mobile. They're
21 supported by DHS when it comes to homeless NYPD
22 same when it comes to illegal vending. So... so that
23 is what the citywide unit is about. In terms of our
24 approach citywide you have to recognize at this
25 point in time we have about 225 officers. When

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fully staffed we can go up to 292. That's for the entire city. So we have to be very strategic about how we deploy that staff and then you have multiple patrols. So even though you see that number that means that you have to have a team of two and you have to divide it between shifts. And so carpeting the whole city we must be very strategic about how we deploy our staff. So we do have some mobile crews if there's a concern of patrols that if there is specific playground that was a problem it could be called in and then we could have our officer go out and educate the public about the rules of that park. But we do have it deployed in all five boroughs. They have locations where they're stationed in parts of the city. And then from there they can go out to patrols based on calls. So we're trying to cooperate and do our best to work with NYPD with a staff of a little over 200 for the city we just have to be very strategic in how we deploy our staff and our patrols and working very very closely with NYPD. We can give you specific numbers which we shared earlier what the actuals, current staffing is right now. We have a bunch of vacancies. We receive 67 from the new needs and so

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2 we can tell you what the baseline will look like
3 July 1 at the beginning of the fiscal year.

4 COUNCIL MEMBER MENDEZ: Thank you I
5 don't want to take up everyone else's time. I...
6 [cross-talk]

7 COMMISSIONER SILVER: But we can share
8 those numbers with you.

9 COUNCIL MEMBER MENDEZ: ...I can get... I
10 can get that information from staff or from the
11 Manhattan Commissioner so thank you very much.
12 Thank you Mr. Chair.

13 CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: Thank you Council
14 Member and thank you to the administration for all
15 your answers and testimony. Thank you very much.
16 We're going to call up our first panel which will
17 be Tupper Thomas from New Yorkers for Parks and
18 Heather Lubov from the City Parks Foundation. Yeah...
19 Folks if you're... if you're going to be leaving us
20 if you could quickly... Folks if you're leaving if
21 you could quickly move... I also want you to know
22 you're missing very compelling testimony from our
23 first two witnesses. Why don't you start Tupper and
24 we'll make sure people are respectfully...

25 TUPPER THOMAS: Will respectfully leave.

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2 CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: Indeed.

3 TUPPER THOMAS: I know these parkies
4 [phonetic]. Hi, I'm Tupper Thomas, New Yorkers for
5 Parks. Thank you for inviting us to here today. You
6 know the Parks Department has made unbelievable
7 strides towards becoming more resourceful,
8 efficient, and innovative. We find that very
9 encouraging and inspiring. But the great new motto
10 of the Commissioner that of care is a terrific
11 motto but there's not enough money in the budget
12 currently to actually fulfill that... that concept.
13 It is... we have to improve our expense and capital
14 funding to this targeted funding that creates full
15 time permanent staff to maintain our parks. These
16 positions are essential. And they're great jobs.
17 They are jobs that can go to many kinds of people
18 who you know only need like a college degree and
19 you can have an amazing career. They should be made
20 permanent and they have to be here for... to maintain
21 our parks. How can the city accomplish this? We
22 strongly support the creation of the 100 full time
23 permanent city park workers and 50 assistant
24 gardeners that have been put in by you and the
25 council before but never made baselined. Dedicated

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2 employees are not only essential to the quality of
3 open space across the city but these are good
4 dependable jobs with room for advancement. Creating
5 new positions will go a long way towards addressing
6 equity both in our parks and city workforce. That
7 is not the only opportunity that the city has to
8 increase the quality of parks and open space while
9 also creating jobs. Expanding the urban park ranger
10 program with rangers specially trained in wildlife
11 management will help residents coexist with
12 increasing presence of urban wildlife. While full
13 time permanent jobs are most crucial expanding the
14 parks department seasonal workforce is also
15 necessary to keep our parks and playgrounds well
16 maintained throughout the summer and fall months,
17 spring, summer, and fall when beaches and pools are
18 also open. Additionally the city should provide
19 employee training programs which is a cost
20 effective way to enable staff to do a better job.
21 To empower local level stewards of open space
22 partnerships for parks, green thumb, and the city
23 parks foundations technical assistance program are
24 essential. In order for us to have all the
25 community people involved in these efforts that we

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2 really need to have we have to have a stronger
3 staff to support those. Green thumb is the largest
4 community garden program in the nation and yet they
5 are severely... severely understaffed. Their current
6 employees can only serve half of the gardens in the
7 system. The staff needs to be increased as this
8 program is essential to cultivating the next
9 generation of gardeners. With the expense budget
10 money the parks department should increase its
11 fleet of small vehicles, complete the tree census
12 program. But I think as we start to look at capital
13 which you raised so importantly those ancor parks,
14 in particularly the CPI zones and the lower income
15 neighborhoods, those are the parks that have to be
16 addressed. There's no way to do it with two to
17 three million dollars as you said. So even if you
18 combine borough president and everything else the
19 mayor has to make a true commitment to those as
20 well as some very significant parks in a new
21 concept. But we love parks without borders. We
22 like CPI as a concept but we feel that CPI has not
23 been lived up to by the mayor because he has not
24 committed these long term staff. They need planning

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2 money but really the point is that caring for our
3 parks is only possible with enough staff.

4 CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: Eloquently stated.
5 Thank you very much Tupper. And thank you for your
6 years of service to the parks community. You've
7 been an amazing partner. And...

8 TUPPER THOMAS: Thanks.

9 CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: ...we'll miss you
10 terribly but we wish you all the best.

11 TUPPER THOMAS: Well thank you but I
12 have to say it's the best parks council... council
13 parks chair we've ever had.

14 CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: You're very nice.
15 Thank you very much. Thank you. Thank you. Flattery
16 will get you everywhere.

17 TUPPER THOMAS: Yes exactly, well more
18 money for parks.

19 CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: There you go. Okay
20 Heather.

21 HEATHER LUBOV: Thank you Chairman
22 Levine, members of the committee. I am Heather
23 Lubov, Executive Director of the City Parks
24 foundation, the only independent non-profit
25 organization with a mission to offer programs and

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2 parks throughout the city. We're the Parks
3 Department's largest private programming partner
4 bringing 12 million dollars worth of private money,
5 working in every council district, serving more
6 than 300 parks and rec centers with arts, sports,
7 education, and community development programs for
8 425,000 New Yorkers working in their local parks
9 creating safe and thriving spaces. This year thanks
10 to council leadership expense funding we offer
11 track and field instruction to 2,000 kids in 12
12 parks. We also connected 3,000 students to
13 experiential learning in parks and urban forests
14 and coastal areas helping them to nurture a
15 lifelong relationship with the natural world.
16 Thanks to the council's parks equity initiative now
17 in its second year that has allowed us to grow
18 partnerships for parks. And that is the
19 public/private partnership we jointly manage with
20 the parks department. As Commissioner Silver
21 mentioned partnerships is about caring. And our job
22 is to engage New Yorkers from all walks of life to
23 help make their local green spaces thrive. You
24 heard from the commissioner that partnerships not
25 only help 650 existing friends' groups in the last

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2 year but identified more than 250 new groups
3 interested in supporting their local parks. These
4 groups are comprised of volunteers who have a
5 myriad of work and family obligations. So the
6 council's parks equity initiative funding is key to
7 making sure that these groups are successful and
8 that their work is sustainable in the long term.
9 Partnerships is a free expert consulting team that
10 helps volunteers obtain the skills they need to
11 support their communities and realize their
12 visions. Thanks to parks equity initiative funding
13 last year we trained 44 percent more volunteers in
14 the previous year. We provided visioning services
15 to double the number of groups and we provided
16 fiscal sponsorship to seven percent more groups.
17 Each year we provide 12 million dollars' worth of
18 programming to New Yorkers all funded with private
19 dollars. The council's public support through
20 renewed leadership funding and the parks equity
21 initiative will serve as a critical endorsement for
22 our work complimenting those private dollars and
23 allowing us to continue growing our community
24 engagement tools. We're also requesting capital
25 support for our flagship program summer stage which

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2 is the city's largest free performing arts
3 festival. Capital funds would allow us to replace
4 an outdated stage and roof structure in Central
5 Park's Rumsey Playfield and will significantly
6 improve the concert going experience for more than
7 300,000 New Yorkers each year. So we look forward
8 to working with the city on this project. Our free
9 programs are synchronized with the parks
10 department's work but we're a non-profit
11 organization and we need the council's assistance
12 to continue supporting the vision for an equitable
13 park system. So thank you for hearing my testimony
14 today and I look forward to working with you to
15 continue to offer free programming to all New
16 Yorkers.

17 CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: You timed it to the
18 second. I wish council members could do that. Thank
19 you Heather for the incredible work that City Park
20 Foundation does. You are a partner for every member
21 of the city council in critical ways, more than
22 ever now. And I really want to thank you for that
23 work and for your great leadership in your short
24 time as CPF. Thank you so much. Okay next panel is
25 going to be our good friends from local 983, the

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2 great Joe Puleo and Marlana Giga. What's that? I
3 have one.

4 JOE PULEO: That's fine. Thank you
5 Council Chair and remaining city council people.
6 Thanks for having me... us... us here. I'd like to
7 begin by talking about park security. I know that
8 there is additional funding for parks enforcement
9 officer on the new budget, that's great. But we
10 also have to deduct the officers that were removed
11 from Battery Park City. We had 40 officers that
12 lost the contract in Battery Park City. So we're
13 actually two and a half million dollars less you
14 know in this budget. Even though you'll see five
15 million dollars we're actually not going to be
16 seeing the headcount that we would have liked to
17 see if we would have still... if we would have still
18 had that contract.

19 CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: The battery park
20 city PEP officers were replaced by private
21 contractors.

22 JOE PULEO: Yeah Private contractors who
23 make \$12.50 again... again going against the
24 governor's initiative because that is state on land
25 for \$15.00 yep. So you know that's another issue in

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2 and of itself. As you know that is governed by a
3 panel of seven, not elected like ourselves here.
4 Unfortunately, they can do whatever they like to
5 that community. I know the residents are highly
6 upset what's going on there. And there's... I think
7 emotion in the works for them to come to the
8 squadron to possibly take back that land the city
9 owned. But in the interim you know even though
10 we're getting this additional funding we... we are
11 actually losing a good portion of those people due
12 to the loss of contract at Battery Park City. Now
13 we were fortunate enough okay to have those people
14 redeploy to other areas but that means less people
15 we're going to get in this future budget okay. So
16 we would like to see more people... we would like to
17 see city council to... if possible to fill in for
18 this deficit. I mean this goes against what the
19 parks would have been like if we had these
20 officers. You know even though the number 250 seems
21 like a lot it doesn't even scratch the service. And
22 once the beaches and pools open up they'll redeploy
23 to those areas, there's even less people to patrol
24 even the flagship parks like Flushing Meadow,
25 Forest Park in Queens which is... which are always

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2 you know problematic, you know parks in the Bronx
3 like Van Cortlandt, you know Central Park. All
4 these officers will pretty much be going to the
5 pools and beaches. So the other problem we have
6 with the parks enforcement officers is because like
7 what the commissioner said that they're so highly
8 qualified that they need the job, well why do they
9 need the job because they can get double their rate
10 of pay elsewhere. You know the... the union has made
11 every effort to get them as much as we feel they
12 deserve to get but as you know these negotiations
13 you know are... I would like to go on to say one are
14 the ways where we can keep these PEP officers on
15 for longer is to introduce them from a 35 hour
16 workweek to a 40 hour workweek. Okay that would...
17 that would actually save the city money because you
18 would get 15 percent more coverage from these PEP
19 officers without paying for additional bodies that
20 you would have to pay a health and securities pack
21 and pensions and so on and so forth. One of the
22 stumbling blocks we did have with the Office of
23 Labor relations on this is of course the funding
24 factor you know. So if... if we do get this
25 additional funding instead of possibly hiring you

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2 know all of these people maybe we could retain the
3 ones that we do have and have them work additional
4 hours. And that would... that would alleviate two
5 things. One it would save the city money. Two,
6 right, not only... not only... not only would this save
7 the city money but it would also re... keep the
8 retention of the officers. If the officers would
9 make 15 percent more because you know of the hours...
10 hours they work they would... there's a greater
11 likelihood that they would stay and not leave and
12 the we wouldn't have to continuously train these
13 people. Okay I'm sorry.

14 CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: Okay. ...that's...
15 that's a really important point. You've made such a
16 compelling case about this. It seems like a win win
17 to simply expand the work week to 40 hours. It's
18 probably what it should have been all along, I'm
19 not sure why it was ever set at a lower number. But
20 I certainly back you up in that... in that assertion
21 so...

22 JOE PULEO: Thanks.

23 CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: ...thank you.

24 JOE PULEO: And also too like on the
25 maintenance portion...

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2 CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: Very quickly
3 because I want to hear... get to Giga in a moment
4 but... But go ahead you can finish your thought.

5 JOE PULEO: Okay on the maintenance
6 issue I heard about these park houses and I know
7 it's incredible the amount of money that's being
8 spent to... to build these things and I forgot which
9 city council member made a good point and said that
10 if he had a constant crew, if we could in source
11 these thing and that basically have a bathroom
12 template where we build the same structure over and
13 over and over again and not have to have cost and
14 design. I know we have several engineers you know
15 what I mean that... that we could in source this
16 thing with. Our Commissioner, we're fortunate
17 enough to have a design person. I mean you can't
18 get better than that right?

19 CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: Yeah.

20 JOE PULEO: So why are we spending this
21 money when we can have our own people do it, career
22 and salary people that are union you know do this
23 work for far less you know.

24 CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: Excellent point.

25 JOE PULEO: Okay thanks so much.

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2 CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: Thank you. Ms.

3 Giga.

4 MOLINA: Hi, how you doing?

5 CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: Great.

6 MOLINA: My name is Marlena Giga. I've
7 been a PEP officer for 16 years. What's alarming is
8 the turnover rate of the PEP officers. They leave
9 within two years because of the pay. We're able to
10 do everything that the NYPD does on a daily basis
11 from emotionally disturbed people, people looking
12 to take their own life, to animal rescues, rescuing
13 anything from sheep to stray dogs and cats. The
14 Parks Department would be safer if there were at
15 least 100 officers in each borough. Every other
16 week the outer boroughs lose officers because
17 they're being deployed to Manhattan because of
18 complaints. We call Manhattan deep pockets because
19 you know they'll pay the overtime and the outer
20 boroughs always lose out okay. And some of the
21 highest crime rate statistics are in the outer
22 boroughs, particularly you know Bronx, Queens, and
23 Brooklyn. So we need to keep our officers in the
24 borough. I wanted to address the... the changes in
25 the summons. I know that things are changing. The

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2 PEP officers typically when we address quality of
3 life somebody urinating in public, drinking a beer
4 in public we typically did not arrest people for
5 that. We would just issue an environmental control
6 board summons which is typically a 25-dollar
7 summons. So we were not ever arresting people for
8 that. So really wouldn't affect the PEP officers
9 although we do address everything. And for most
10 violations you can't... Commissioner Silver kept on
11 stating that we educate. That is false. Okay, you
12 can't educate somebody for the most part if they're
13 committing a violation and it affects other people,
14 and there's a significant amount of complaints
15 coming in whatever the violation is. So that's it.
16 Thank you.

17 CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: Thank you Ms. Giga
18 for your testimony and for your 16 years of service
19 to our park system. Thank you so much. Okay our
20 next panel.

21 JOE PULEO: Thank you.

22 CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: Oh thank you Mr.
23 Puleo as well. Our next panel I'd like to call up
24 Donna Mazzella from Let's Rebuild Cromwell
25 Community Coalition, if I have that correct,

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2 Christina Taylor from Friends of Van Cortlandt
3 Park, and Mr. Peter Stein from Local 508. Come on
4 up. Okay Ms. Mazzella you can begin.

5 DONNA: Crowell Community Coalition on
6 Staten Island. Thank you for listening to me today
7 about the urgent need to form the rebuilding of
8 Cromwell Recreation Center in the 2017 capital
9 budget ever since Cromwell Recreation Center was
10 closed in 2010 there's been a slow death of our
11 Northshore community on Staten Island. There's been
12 an alarming rise in youth involving crimes, drug
13 abuse, dropping out of school, and others entering
14 special education programs in our community of
15 Cohler [sp?]. Some of these numbers are the highest
16 in the city. A recent study was done by Harvard
17 University which said and I quote the worst place
18 to be poor in New York City is Staten Island's
19 north shore. Our demographics parallel some of the
20 poorest communities of our city. Cromwell was the
21 largest recreation facility on Staten Island ever.
22 It sat on the peer and was about a football field
23 long with six basketball courts, running track,
24 weight room, boxing ring, and several multi-purpose
25 rooms. It provided community space for dances,

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2 cultural festivals, theatre productions and so much
3 more. There's a place for everyone. Cromwell was a
4 place that touched almost every lifelong Staten
5 Islander you speak to. It must be built now because
6 our community is undergoing the largest private
7 waterfront development Staten Island has seen in 30
8 years right next to where Cromwell once stood.
9 Ground has been broken for a Ferris Wheel for
10 tourists, high-end outlet stores, luxury hotels,
11 and condos while there has been not one
12 groundbreaking for anything related to the people
13 of this community. So we believe it's time for
14 Cromwell. Here's what's happening. We need 50
15 million dollars to start. A feasibility study by
16 the Parks Department has already been done. We met
17 with every elected official and community leaders
18 of concern related to this area and they say yes
19 rebuild Cromwell.

20 CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: Does that include...
21 [cross-talk]

22 DONNA: Staten Island...

23 CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: ...Council Member
24 Rose as well as supportive, Council Member Rose is
25

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2 supportive as well? Debbie Rose is your council
3 member correct?

4 DONNA: Yeah.

5 CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: And she's
6 supportive of the project? Sorry to interrupt,
7 didn't mean to throw you off, continue.

8 DONNA: And but lastly I wanted to say
9 Staten Islanders need you to fight for us to fully
10 fund the design in construction of the Cromwell
11 Recreation Center in the New York City capital
12 budget for fiscal year 2017. I thank you for your
13 time and consideration.

14 CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: Thank you Ms.
15 Mazzella. Sorry for the interruption but just to...
16 just to reiterate for the record I... I do believe
17 that the local council member Debbie Rose is
18 supportive of this project.

19 [background comments]

20 CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: Oh so she... not only
21 is she supportive but she's in the lead. While
22 that... that carries a lot of weight around here I'm
23 very happy to know that. Thank you for bringing
24 this project to our attention.
25

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2 DONNA: Yes we... we have been in contact
3 with Councilwoman Debbie Rose and she's indicated
4 her support.

5 CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: And I will follow
6 up with her to talk about how that can be helpful
7 as well. Thank you. Okay. Christina great to see
8 you.

9 CHRISTINA TAYLOR: You too, thank you.
10 Good afternoon I'm Christina Taylor. I'm the
11 Executive Director for the Friends of Van Cortlandt
12 Park. And I wanted to start by first thanking our
13 council member who unfortunately is not here right
14 now, Andrew Cohen for his vital role in securing
15 funding last year for a pedestrian bridge in Van
16 Cortlandt Park which will help to connect our
17 eastern and western halves of our 1,146 acre park.
18 But still much work needs to be done to secure
19 adequate capital maintenance funding for the park
20 and to secure full implementation of the park's 20
21 year master plan. They're friends of the
22 independent community based organization which
23 actively promotes conservation improvement of Van
24 Cortlandt Park. And we were founded in 1992 in
25 response to a New York Times article that was

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describing the impacts of declining budgets for the parks like Van Cortlandt Park that lacked wealthy benefactors. It's unfortunate that over 20 years later here we are still saying the same thing that the parks department is not adequately funded. And with the largest park in New York City Pelham Bay and the third largest park Van Cortlandt the Bronx has more parkland than any other borough. But we often wonder we're getting our fairer share of the budget to maintain these parks and keep them at the level we all deserve. Good friends would happily join you to urge the mayor to increase funding for New York City parks, especially those in the Bronx. Now that New York City parks has an approved comprehensive master plan for the first time in the Park's history the opportunity to solve the inequitable funding situation in the Bronx parks has never been greater. So for the upcoming fiscal year we have some requests for a capital project within Van Cortlandt Park we would like to see a new entrance at the park at West 246th Street currently from Mosholu to Yonkers boarder there's no official entrances to the park. And it really makes it unappealing to those who live across the

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2 street. They're not crossing the street and using
3 the park. So this would... this is one of the
4 priority projects in the master plan and an actual
5 entrance would allow the community to connect to
6 the park and encourage them to start using it in a
7 positive way. Another request is the Friends do
8 have a trails plan that we've been working on since
9 2009 to implement. It will turn the 20 plus miles
10 of trails in the park into a hiking destination in
11 New York City. Last year Senator Kline secured some
12 funding for one of the projects but there's still a
13 few larger capital projects that we can't do with
14 our staff and volunteers. They do need capital
15 dollars. And the final request is requesting it
16 every year which is for maintenance funding. We
17 strongly believe that New York City parks is not
18 funded at a level for the agency to properly
19 maintain and care for all of its parks. Each year
20 we receive funding for capital projects which
21 vastly improve our parks through building of new
22 playgrounds, repairing our sporting fields,
23 installing bathrooms, etcetera but we don't see an
24 increase in maintenance funding to keep the new
25 facilities in good shape. Instead after a few years

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2 they fall into disrepair and new... need new capital
3 funding to restore them. This can be avoided with
4 ongoing maintenance. The parks... the budget showed
5 allocate more funding to dedicated maintenance
6 staff, PEP officers, and other staff for the park.
7 The friends of Van Cortlandt Park fully support the
8 New York City Department of Parks and Recreation in
9 its efforts to maintain improve all parks in New
10 York City. And it's important to the future of our
11 city that we fund our parks.

12 CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: Thank you so much
13 Christina.

14 CHRISTINA TAYLOR: Thank you.

15 CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: Thanks for your
16 great work at that park. And our final witness
17 today will be Peter Stein from Local 508.

18 PETER STEIN: Good afternoon Council
19 people... person. It's always good to see you
20 Councilman Levine.

21 CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: Likewise, Peter.

22 PETER STEIN: Think you know why I'm
23 here. I guess I'll read the prepared text and then
24 speak a little... This is 50 years of working for the
25 city of New York and ultimately becoming president

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2 of a local which represents my colleagues. And I
3 guess we all wear more than one hat and a hat I
4 presently am wanting to speak about has to do with
5 a concern from water safety advocate. Last year I
6 guess it was at the behest of the council the Parks
7 Department saw fit to keep the beaches open an
8 extended period of time. However, it was unable to
9 accomplish keeping the pools open during that same
10 period of time. We believe both as a union and as a
11 water safety adequate that that is a grave mistake
12 and tends to put people's lives at risk if you
13 don't provide a safe environment for them to swim
14 and it's really hot they're going to find someplace
15 that's less safe. I'm going to read my prepared
16 testimony. I think you know the issue. The rest of
17 the esteemed council people I'm sure will learn
18 something from it. Good morning. And also my
19 colleague Mr. Paige could not make it this morning.
20 He had other commitments. We are testifying, or I
21 am testifying today regarding the city's decision
22 last year to extend the swimming season for one
23 week past the labor day at the city's beaches but
24 not the city's pools. We regard the family to
25 extend the summer season to all city pools as well

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2 as beaches as a grave mistake that risks public
3 health and safety as well as being demonstrably
4 unfair to the millions of New Yorkers for whom the
5 local pool is often the only available recreational
6 venue. Many of the city's pools are located far
7 from city beaches and are often in poor and largely
8 afro American and Latino neighborhoods. For these
9 New Yorkers the nearby pool is typically the only
10 safe supervised swimming venue within reasonable
11 distance of where they lived that they can visit to
12 seek recreation and relief from the summer heat.
13 When the local pool's closed and the weathers had
14 invariably some people who will swim in unsafe,
15 unsupervised bodies of water. The results can be
16 tragic as occurred in 2010 and 2013 when... when
17 teens seeking relief from searing summer heat swam
18 in the Bronx river resulting in two deaths by
19 drowning. Additionally, very hot days combined with
20 lack of access to pools mean fire hydrants are
21 opened specifically in minority areas resulting in
22 enormous waste of precious resource and lowering
23 the water pressure which raises the risk to
24 firefighters and the public in the event of a fire.
25 The city's extension by one week of summer beach

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2 season but only for beaches means literally
3 millions of people will be denied access to the
4 neighborhood pool while living close to the beach
5 or within access to a car would be able to cool
6 themselves off. This unequal allocation of funds
7 creates... cor... can... you know creates unequal fund...
8 creates unequal access and unequal treatment of
9 city residents. All New Yorkers regardless of where
10 they live in economic circumstance deserve access
11 to the city's beaches and pools and on an equal
12 basis. We recognize that funding the pools for an
13 extra week would likely have to come from parks
14 resource. But we believe the DPR has the funds to
15 do so. The parks department is short of lifeguards
16 during the entire summer yet that... those lines are
17 budgeted and that money is unspent. That savings
18 could be used to defray the cost of keeping the
19 pool open for one more week. Given the significant
20 issues of safety, fairness, and equity of access to
21 the city pools raised by the failure to extend the
22 summer season to include them we urge you to do all
23 in your power to rectify this blatant unfair and
24 potentially hazardous situation and extend the... the
25 pool season for one week as was done last year for

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2 the beaches. Thank you for your attention to this
3 matter. And I appreciate your affording us an
4 opportunity to bring this issue to your attention.

5 CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: Oh thank you. Thank
6 you Peter. It's always a pleasure and we always
7 benefit from your formidable expertise on the
8 topic. Thank you so much.

9 PETER STEIN: Absolutely.

10 CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: This concludes our
11 hearing. Thank you all.

12 [gavel]

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C E R T I F I C A T E

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



Date March 22, 2016