

CITY COUNCIL
CITY OF NEW YORK

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TRANSCRIPT OF THE MINUTES

Of the

COMMITTEE ON PARKS AND RECREATION

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HELD AT: 250 Broadway- Committee Rm, 14th Fl.

B E F O R E:
MARK LEVINE
Chairperson

COUNCIL MEMBERS:

ALAN N. MAISEL
ANDREW COHEN
DARLENE MEALY
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JAMES G. VAN BRAMER
MARK TREYGER

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

Kate Spellman
Chief
Community Outreach

Sabina Saragoussi
Director
Partnerships for Parks

Seth Jones
Deputy Director
Partnerships for Parks

Heather Lubov
Executive Director
City Parks Foundation

Tupper Thomas
New Yorkers for Parks

Christina Taylor
Friends of Van Cortland Park

Kay Webster
Sara Roosevelt Park Community Coalition

Carol Somanawitz [sp?]
Sarah Roosevelt Park

Marlene Pantin
Founder
Red Hook Conservancy

Joe Mayock
Executive Director
Open Space Alliance

Maxine Wild
Executive Director
Friends of Kivlehan Park

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

Maria Roca
Founder
Friends of Sunset Park

[gavel]

CHAIR: Alright. Good morning everybody.

I'm Mark Levine, Chair of the City Council's Committee on Parks and Recreation. If folks can find a seat we will get underway with our very exciting hearing for today. I want to welcome my fellow council member Committee Member and representative of the northwest Bronx, Andy Cohen, Stallwork [phonetic] Committee Member. I want to welcome representatives of the administration who we'll be hearing from shortly and of course members of the public who've come to participate today. No arm of New York City government relies more on volunteers than our park system. From pruning trees to planting flowers to maintaining natural areas thousands of regular New Yorkers are performing vital work in every corner of the city. Volunteers multiply their impact when they join together to organize Friends of groups which invest in stewardship of their local parks. These vital groups organize service days, offer cultural programing, raise funds for their parks, and recruit and train additional volunteers. Friends of groups help ensure that neighborhoods develop deep

ties to the green spaces which are at the heart of healthy communities. The leaders that emerge from such organizations often become powerful advocates working directly with elected officials helping to secure public and private investment in guiding long term planning for their parks. In wealthier parts of our city these volunteer groups have often blossomed into full blown non-profits with large budgets raised from private sources. Some have graduated to become conservancies with operating agreements with the city and formal rolls in managing their parks. In low and moderate income parts of our city where private resources are scarce establishing successful friends of groups can be much more challenging. That's where Partnership for Parks comes in. Formed in 1989 and run jointly by the nonprofit city parks foundation in the New York City Parks Department. The partnership works to strengthen and support... groups helping them become active participants and caring for their respective parks and allowing them to connect with similar groups from communities around the city. The partnership offers workshops trainings and conferences for volunteer park

1 leaders. It assists with fundraising and marketing
2 and offers small dollar grants. It organizes
3 service days through the It's my Park program. It
4 helps local groups shape park design and
5 programming through the People Make Parks
6 Initiative and much more. The partnership has an
7 impressive impact on a relatively modest budget.
8 During the most recent year they worked with over
9 1,000 park community groups including approximately
10 700 established groups and 320 newly forming
11 groups. The partnership has also organized over
12 1,000 volunteer events throughout the city last
13 year engaging nearly 30,000 New Yorkers. Despite
14 this considerable effort only 35 percent of parks
15 in our city have active Friends Of groups. In low
16 and moderate income areas that figure is even
17 lower. If we're going to expand the number of Parks
18 served by local volunteer groups then we need to
19 expand the support services provided by Partnership
20 for Parks. I look forward to exploring in this
21 hearing the resource constraints faced by the
22 partnership that might limit its reach. In
23 particular I hope to learn about the role of their
24 outreach coordinators and to what extent increasing
25

their ranks would allow us to reach new local groups. Volunteerism and local leadership are essential elements of a thriving park system. I'm excited that today we're discussing strategies to nurture and cultivate to groups would serve as a vehicle for New Yorkers to connect at the deepest level to their local parks. I want to welcome Council Member Darlene Mealy from Brooklyn and fellow Parks Committee Member. And I'd like to turn it over to the administration for their testimony. If I could just ask you to do the affirmation with our committee counsel Chris Artori [sp?].

COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Do you affirm to tell the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth in your testimony before this committee today?

KATE SPELLMAN: That good? Great. Good morning Chair Levine and members of the Committee on Parks and Recreation. My name is Kate Spellman and I oversee community outreach for New York City Parks including the Partnership for Parks program which is a joint program of NYC Parks and the City Parks Foundation. Robust Community Engagement is central to this administration's efforts to create

thriving public spaces for all New Yorkers and the work Partnerships for Parks does every day to connect New Yorkers to their parks is critical to the success of our key programs from the community parks initiative to anchor parks and parks without boarders. We believe that our parks are better designed when they're designed with input from broad groups of community stakeholders. We've seen our parks come to life when communities use them as spaces for their shared experiences. And we know that our parks are sustained in the long term by the dedication of thousands of volunteers and park leaders across the city who commit countless hours to their care. Partnerships for Parks has been at the forefront of connecting New Yorkers to their parks for almost two decades and their long term success in thanks in no small part to the dedication of our wonderful partners at the state park foundation.

HEATHER LUBOV: And I'm Heather Lubov. I'm the Executive Director of the City Parks Foundation. We are an independent nonprofit organization with a mission to provide free park based programs to all New Yorkers. Everything we do

is designed to bring people into parks. We present performing arts. We offer sports instruction and environmental education for youngsters, all free of charge in parks in all five boroughs with a strong emphasis on those communities in greatest need as a way to encourage all New Yorkers to use their parks. And we're a proud partner with NYC Parks in the Partnerships for Parks program by providing technical assistance to the thousands of volunteers, regular every day New Yorkers who want to take greater responsibility for the success of their neighborhood parks. So, it is my pleasure to introduce Sabina Saragoussi, Director of Partnerships for Parks.

SABINA SARAGOUSSI: Thank you. And good morning. For over 20 years Partnerships for Parks has been a public private effort supporting and championing an ever-growing network of leaders caring and advocating for their neighborhood parks and green spaces. We equip people and organizations with the skills and tools needed to transform public spaces into dynamic community assets. By developing occasional volunteers into community leaders we build long term investment in public

space and strengthen the fabric of our neighborhood. Ultimately, we envision parks and spaces where community members and civic leaders like yourselves work together to shape our city. The partnership for Parks model is based on a continuum of community building which we call build, connect, and sustain. The image on the screen demonstrates the community engagement process. We build relationships that community members and institutions by identifying pressing needs within communities and developing programs that bring people into their parks. We connect people, ideas, and initiatives with the resources they need to succeed and sustain local groups by creating diverse networks of skilled park leaders. The next slide on the screen showed the many partners that helped contribute to a successful and sustainable network. Using this model partnerships for Parks has helped build strong advocacy organization that care for, preserve, program, and fundraise for critical and New York City green space including the Bronx River Alliance, the High Ridge Coalition, and Green Shores NYC. Partnerships for Parks operates on an annual budget of nearly

4.4 million dollars, 2.9 million of which is provided by New York City Parks, and 1.5 million from City Parks Foundation including 712,000 from the New York City Council through the Parks Equity Initiative. We have a staff of 52 which includes 16 full time outreach coordinators. These coordinators all of whom are parks department employees serve as liaison between the Parks Department, City Parks Foundation, Local Institutions, and Community Stakeholders. They identify new volunteers and support existing stakeholders and volunteers by connecting them to projects, supplies, grants, and other resources. In the last year alone our outreach coordinators identified more than 320 new groups around the city interested in getting involved in their parks while also supporting and sustaining nearly 700 existing Park groups. Our signature is my parks program which is jointly supported by New York City Parks and City Parks Foundation provides a year round opportunity for community groups, nonprofit and corporate partners to support needed physical improvements in their parks. Projects take place in all 51 council districts and include painting, weeding, planting,

raking, litter removal and other activities that enhance and beautify these spaces. These projects are also important tools for groups to grow memberships and strengthen their ties to the surrounding neighborhoods. In 2015 Partnerships for Parks supported over 30,000 volunteers coordinated and worked on more than 1,000 It's my Park Projects. And we expect to exceed this in 2016 once the season is complete. Partnerships for Parks also includes an extensive technical assistance program, the majority of which is funded by City Parks Foundation resources. Providing and connecting neighborhood volunteers to a wide breadth of resources that help them realize their visions and ensure the long term sustainability of their groups. We offer skill building workshops on fundraising, event planning, organizational development, working with elected officials and more. We provide small grants to community park groups, offer tools for vision around park design and programming and support website and publication development. Our most intensive outreach effort is catalyst, a multi-year staff intensive program that focuses community development in historically

underserved communities. Through catalyst partnership supports local action in diverse neighborhoods empowering residents and organizations to respond to conditions that may be affecting their parks. Catalyst is also funded by city parks foundation resources with sites chosen using data on population density, poverty, and other demographic information. In 2016 our focused work continues in the three catalyst sites where we began in 2015. Thomas Jefferson Park in East Harlem in Manhattan, Faber Park in Staten Island, and Kaiser Park in Brooklyn. Thanks to the support of Mayor de Blasio New York City Park's Community Parks Initiative or CPI launched in 2015 has presented an incredible opportunity to bring capital investments, dedicated maintenance, free programming, and community building to support to some of the highest needs parks in the city. Partnership for Parks has led the effort to build community engagement in these CPI sites and to date 52 community input sessions have given over 2,100 New Yorkers the opportunity to re-envision their community parks. At the same time the city council launched the parks equity initiative which provided

critical funding for city parks foundation's contribution to partnerships and has enabled us to add three new staff members to the technical assistance program and grow our workshop offerings by 200 percent. The parks equity initiative has also allowed individual council members to identify parks within their districts that are in need of additional support by funding service projects and group development. The impact of this work is evident in the exciting and inspiring stories of park groups across the city working in collaboration with neighbors, local institutions, and decision makers to help make their parks thrive. The Friends of Mosholu Park Land is one great example. They have participated in our extensive training program, received capacity building grant, hosted numerous It's My Park projects and most recently hosted a community visioning event and service day which brought together over 100 participants to express their vision for the future of their park. After receiving information from this visioning event Council Member Cohen generously allocated additional capital improvements funds on top of the

significant funding that he and the borough president had already committed to the park. In Coney Island the importance of a well established network of park stewards went beyond Kaiser Park. In the aftermath of Superstorm Sandy Partnerships assisted the Friends of Kaiser Park and Coney Island Generation Gap with a preparation of applications for recovery grants and help them secure donations of food and clothing for those severely affected by this devastating storm. Together these partners and numerous other organizations organized for recovery projects with over 600 volunteers contributing over 13,000 hours of service and removing two tons of waste. In March of 2015 Partnership staff helped to form the making waves coalition dedicated to local waterfront discussions. On November 3rd the Coney Island Beautification Project in partnership with local organizations, schools, and city agencies led their third annual Sandy commemorative day of service to beautify the community and to continue to uplift and inspire the neighborhood. Today more than three years after welcoming a significant increase of funding for our program we have seen both the

number of supported park groups and the number of It's My Park Projects increase by over 40 percent with the greatest growth in grants and workshop participants in the CPI neighborhoods. Those communities that are in greatest need of a park, of park improvements. 60 percent of our grants awarded and 60 percent of our workshops attendees were from CPI zones. We are proud to report that we are directly addressing the administration's strong focus on equity. But this growth has also identified new challenges and we are making modifications to our service delivery to accommodate all of the new groups and new needs we've identified. The newest groups we've identified are at the most critical stage in their development and need extra time and attention. More than a single outreach coordinator may be able to provide to ensure that they grow and prosper. For this reason we are restructuring our catalyst program so that each staff member will provide intensive support to a hand full of parks over the course of a year or so after which we know that our outreach team will be able to help the group to continue to develop. At the other end of the

spectrum those groups that are more mature are facing different challenges. How to keep motivating their volunteers, how to develop a board or fundraise for a new program. We are adding more advanced workshop topics to our training program and we have added a new staff person with specific expertise in advanced leadership development to help council and guide these groups as they change and grow. Partnerships for Parks has played a critical role in helping New Yorkers create greener more vibrant parks and ultimately more livable neighborhoods. Our program has won national awards and we are called upon by cities around the country and around the world to share our model of community engagement and public private partnership. We would like to thank the city council for making this work possible and hope to continue this great partnership well into the future. Thank you for the opportunity to testify today. We would now be happy to answer any questions you might have.

CHAIR: Thank you very much. Your current budget's 4.4 million. Do I have that correct?

SABINA SARAGOUSSI: Yes, that's correct.
4.7, sorry.

CHAIR: It's gone up just in the last
few minutes. That's great news.

SABINA SARAGOUSSI: Look how that works.
And so, so we have a slide on the screen that
details the breakdown.

CHAIR: Okay. Any chance you have a
print out of that? How does that compare to your
historical funding? Is this an all time high?

SABINA SARAGOUSSI: I believe that it
is. And I would... so this is actually an all time
high which reflects a combination of things. Mayor
de Blasio made a significant investment in the
partnerships program with the launch of the
community parks initiative and to support one of
its core elements which is community engagement.
And the city parks foundation in partnership with
the city council has brought in additional funds to
support the technical assistance and, and other
elements of the program. So, we are at a, an all
time high.

CHAIR: And how does your private
funding today compare to historic numbers?

SABINA SARAGOUSSI: I, I would say that that is probably also at an all time high. About half, a little less than half, let's say a third of our budget comes from the corporate sector, through corporate service projects that are part of It's My Park. That program has doubled in the last three years in terms of revenue collected. And it's a direct result of our team being able to reach out to more groups and being able to plan more projects in Parks. So, that's just one example.

CHAIR: Got it. The number of outreach coordinators which is about 16, is that right today? Is that also an all time high?

SABINA SARAGOUSSI: Yes, that's correct. This is more staff for that part of our program than we've ever had.

CHAIR: Got it. Trying to do the math here. So we have 1900 parks. We have 5,000 total park properties if you count green streets and all of that. Now, most of the small park properties wouldn't have a friend of that group. But actually I know some that do that are very successful. So, on a per outreach coordinator basis this is over 100 traditional parks and, and hundreds if you

count every little green street. Am I doing the math roughly right?

SABINA SARAGOUSSI: Based on my, my quick calculations, yes.

CHAIR: Okay. That, that seems like a huge low. And I gather you gave up the city geographically, is that right?

SABINA SARAGOUSSI: Yes, that's correct. Our outreach coordinators are assigned districts, community board districts. And they range in covering anywhere from two to ten depending on the makeup of each community board and each neighborhood.

CHAIR: Got it. So as many as ten community boards for one outreach coordinator.

SABINA SARAGOUSSI: That's correct.

CHAIR: Seems like a lot of territory to cover and a lot of parks, no?

SABINA SARAGOUSSI: It is.

CHAIR: How many existing friends of groups would each coordinator manage as part of their portfolio?

SABINA SARAGOUSSI: Right now it ranges between 40 and 60. And that's considering the fact

that we are trying to move that group of a little over 300 new identified partners into what the existing set of partners which is over 700. And so it comes out to about on average of 60 park groups per outreach coordinator.

CHAIR: Got it. So we're at about 700 established groups today.

SABINA SARAGOUSSI: Yes.

CHAIR: Is that correct?

SABINA SARAGOUSSI: Yes.

CHAIR: How would that compare to ten years ago or again historical trends on that?

SABINA SARAGOUSSI: I can even tell you that within the last three years we've seen tremendous growth, close to 200 new partners that are existing and sustained through the work that we're doing. So, that's just in two years. We can certainly go back and look at the numbers and get back to you with more information of sort of the longer trajectory...

CHAIR: That, that is wonderful news. Sounds like about a 40 percent growth. Right? It went from 500 to 700. Did we see a 40 percent

growth in the number of outreach coordinators in that time as well?

SABINA SARAGOUSSI: Yes, so we went from 10 to 16... like that, but yes, yes.

CHAIR: What's driving the growth? 200 groups in, in such a short time is wonderful. What's, what's the source of that growth?

SABINA SARAGOUSSI: So, I think you know an important shift that the Partnership for Parks program made three years ago is that with the onset again of the community parks initiative we took a much more proactive strategy in terms of going into parts of the city that have been historically underserved by parks resources and proactively looking for and cultivating park stewards. Traditionally the Partnerships for Parks program had, had more of a responsive strategy so they, they were managing a lot of the, the incoming from groups that sort of figured out how to access resources. What we shifted to was really going out to the places that didn't know how to access resources and beginning to pull together groups neighbor by neighbor and sort of community group by community group to try to from the ground up build

those... those park support groups. So, it's a major shift in, in the approach tied to, to CPI and sort of the focus on park equity.

CHAIR: Can you make any statements either quantitatively on the comparative number of parks with stewardship groups in a neighborhood like lower Manhattan for example versus the South Bronx.

SABINA SARAGOUSSI: We don't have the, the data in front of us so I wouldn't want to you know give you a totally anecdotal response. You know I think it's important to point out that there's such a range of park groups. So, while a park might not benefit from the support of an established friends of group they do benefit from a handful of active or engaged neighbors who may not come together as a, as a established organization but who do work really hard to, to activate their parts whether that's once a year coming together to host an event at the park or you know coming out on the weekends to plant some bulbs. You know so I think there's a, a huge range so I wouldn't just look at sort of those parks with an established

1 friends of group and maybe look more broadly at
2 parks that have a, an engaged constituency.

3 CHAIR: Would... does this data exist?

4 Like if we wanted to know could you give us on a
5 community board by community board basis.

6 Certainly, based on what I've seen which is perhaps
7 not comprehensively citywide there are far fewer
8 parks... groups in low income and moderate income
9 areas. And there's a lot of understandable reasons
10 for that. There's not enough money in the
11 surrounding neighborhood. Residents might have to
12 work one or two jobs and don't have time to come
13 out and volunteer in a park. There's, there's a lot
14 of understandable explanations here. As I said in
15 my opening remarks I think part of the
16 justification for Partnerships for Parks is to help
17 overcome that and to inject resources and support
18 and trading and connections to other neighborhoods
19 that can really help these groups blossom which,
20 which you're doing and we want to see even more of.
21 I'm going to pause for a second and see whether my
22 colleague Andy Cohen has questions and then I'll
23 proceed so take it away.
24
25

CM COHEN: Thank you Chair. I want to, I do have to acknowledge that I think the collaboration between the Friends of Mosholu Parkland and the Partnership has really been productive. I think it is... I don't know what I can do about that squeak. Still... I think it's better. I think it really has been productive. It is really invigorated at community conversation and engagement in the parkland. So, for that I am grateful and I think that that's important that, that we acknowledge. You know what I don't understand and maybe you could just give me like an over... like if, if there was an organizational chart... I'm not really clear exactly on what the relationship is between the three entities, if there are three entities before... that's right...

SABINA SARAGOUSSI: So just two. You know Partnerships is a joint program of the Parks Department and the City Parks Foundation. There are really, to simplify a little bit, three major components to the program. One is the outreach program which is primarily funded by the Parks Department. So those are all of the on the ground outreach coordinators who are working to identify

and support either individual volunteers or park groups.

CM COHEN: Partnership though issues you were saying is, is, is ultimately under the umbrella of the Parks Department.

SABINA SARAGOUSSI: It is a joint program. So, so Heather and I co-manage the program. So there's the outreach program which is primarily funded. There is the technical assistance program which is all of the trainings and workshops and grants that are intended to support those volunteers once we bring them into the, the system. And there is the catalyst program which is a very specific model of sort of intensive, intensive community building support that's deployed particularly in, in high needs communities. And frankly catalyst was the model from which we developed the community parks initiative which is now being deployed much more broadly across the city.

CM COHEN: And, and the testimony before about the Partnership's budget being 4.7 apparently with a significant... more than half coming, or three-quarters coming from the Parks Department

itself. And then from the foundation which 712 you said come from the council and the... so approximately 100 thousand or 900 thousand raised privately.

SABINA SARAGOUSSI: A million, yes.

CM COHEN: A million dollars raised privately. And that's, and you testified that that was mostly corporate donations and...

SABINA SARAGOUSSI: It's a combination of corporate and foundation donations, some individuals as well but primarily in corporate and foundation. And what, to what Kate said the private support goes to the technical assistance program, to our corporate partners program which is what brings companies in to do service projects and to catalyst.

CM COHEN: So, the partnership itself though does not engage in fundraising?

SABINA SARAGOUSSI: CPF raises money for Partnerships for Parks.

CM COHEN: Okay. In the, the 700 parks groups I think a bright line indicator are those that raise money and those that don't. Do you know... of the 700 how many would you say raise money?

SABINA SARAGOUSSI: Again, we don't have the data but, but we could certainly let you know. I would say you know if it's fair to make that statement I think of those 700 a good number are raising small amounts of money to support planting projects or to support a one-off event. So, so I would say there is probably broad based fundraising but it's at a small level.

CM COHEN: How important do you think that is to those groups. That they... that they engage in fundraising like...

SABINA SARAGOUSSI: I would say it's hugely important and I think there are two ways of giving you a good example. One of the things that CPF funds is our capacity grant program where we are actually making grants to some of those groups. They're not big grants. We're talking like 900 dollars, 1,000 dollars a group. And they are equally important both to accomplish whatever it is the money is being used to pay for but also to build the capacity of that group so that it allows them to learn how to manage a budget, how to plan a project, how to see it from start to end, how to put a timeline together. And we've seen a 40

percent increase in the number of requests coming from groups particularly in community parks initiative zones. And that's just one example. You know I think small amounts of money can go a very long way. And it, and it, it brings resources that the community wouldn't necessarily have. And we're not expecting that there'll be a lot of ability to raise money all over the city. But to the extent that it can happen we're making sure that we provide the workshops and the tools matching grants that will make that possible.

CM COHEN: I would think that my, my own experience echoes that, that I do know groups that are incredibly excited to... you know a thousand dollar grant can be a very big deal. And, and can generate a lot more than a thousand dollars worth of work out of people who volunteer and are motivated by that. Thank you Chair.

CHAIR: Thank you Council Member Cohen. Another bright line indicator would be groups that have a 51C3 status incorporated. Do you know numbers on that?

CM COHEN: We can also get back to you with a percentage of the total number of groups

1 that we're supporting that have a... C3. I will say
2 that it is something that we not only fund for a
3 capacity fund grant but it's also something that we
4 support in terms of process and really helping
5 groups understand if that's the right decision for
6 what they're looking to achieve by way of workshops
7 and our extensive six month fellowship training
8 program. So it'd definitely something that we
9 encourage depending on what the group's schools are
10 and if they feel that that's a commitment that they
11 can take on given their own individual capacity.
12 But we can certainly follow up with specific
13 numbers.
14

15 CHAIR: If you had to guess, more than
16 half?

17 SABINA SARAGOUSSI: I would say probably
18 less than half.

19 CHAIR: Less than a quarter?

20 [background comments]

21 CHAIR: Okay.

22 [background comments]

23 CHAIR: Okay, got it.

24 SABINA SARAGOUSSI: And I would actually
25 add to that for the groups that either want to

1
2 accept money but are not at the point of getting a
3 501C3 or groups that don't want a 501C3 filing at
4 all CPF provides fiscal sponsorship support so we
5 will accept money on their behalf and, and write
6 checks for them so that they are able to accept
7 dollars without actually having a 501C3.

8 CHAIR: I'm told that we didn't catch
9 your very helpful off mic comment so maybe one of
10 you could just repeat in the mic... you could, if you
11 could identify yourself and repeat...

12 SETH JONES: I'm Seth Jones, I'm the
13 Deputy Director of Partnerships. And I'd say about
14 less than 30 percent. I could get the exact figure
15 have 501C3 status.

16 CHAIR: Thank you. Very helpful. You
17 mentioned you have, you have 16 outreach
18 coordinator lines. Are they all currently filled?

19 SABINA SARAGOUSSI: We have four
20 vacancies currently. However, we're actively hiring
21 so we have some recent shifts with staff being
22 promoted actually to other parts of the Parks
23 Department which is exciting and, and we're
24 actively working on hiring. So, we expect that they
25 will be filled within the next several months.

CHAIR: Is there a significant turnover?
What's the average tenor of someone in those jobs?

SABINA SARAGOUSSI: It's interesting.
It, it actually varies quite significantly. We have
staff that I would say the majority of staff stay
in those positions for approximately two years or
so and then look for other career opportunities
either within the agency or doing similar work in
other organizations within the city. Then we have
also sort of a smaller subset of staff that have
stayed for much longer and are very invested in the
work. So, I would say up, upwards of six years. But
the majority I think, I would say between two and
three years.

CHAIR: What is their work day or week
like? How often are they out in the field?

SABINA SARAGOUSSI: It's a significant
percentage particularly in the warmer months as you
can imagine. So, when we have partners that are out
in the field running projects and events and
meeting regularly our staff are at those projects
and events and meetings. So, that includes
weekdays, it includes week night evenings, week
nights. And then of course on the weekend as well.

1 So, I would say that it depends on the time of
2 year. Certainly, in the winter we're spending a
3 more significant amount of time in the office or
4 indoors having planning meetings with partners. So,
5 there's still that activity in the, in the off
6 season to really envision what our plan is for the
7 coming spring, summer, and fall months in terms of
8 programs, in terms of fundraising, in terms of
9 group development work. So, it could range anywhere
10 from in, in the cooler months when we're indoors a
11 little bit more to you know 60 percent desk time 40
12 percent field time and then it swings in the
13 opposite direction in the warmer months when we
14 really want to be out on site with our partners
15 engaging and supporting the work that they're
16 doing.
17

18 CHAIR: Right. Given a load of 40 to 60
19 existing groups per outreach worker and then I
20 guess about 20... groups just based on your total
21 numbers how often would any one group get a contact
22 in person for example, a visit, or some other
23 contact from an outreach coordinator?

24 SABINA SARAGOUSSI: I think it varies
25 again pretty significantly depending on the group

1 itself. So, we have groups that are just starting
2 out and require a significant amount of attention
3 and support in order to get off the ground with
4 what they're trying to do. And so especially in, in
5 the earlier stages of group development I would say
6 that an outreach coordinator could be emailing,
7 calling, or meeting with a group at least several
8 times a week, sometimes several times a day
9 especially depending on if the group is, is
10 actively planning something. So, the closer you get
11 to an event or the closer it is to a grant deadline
12 where the, the support increases you're going to
13 hear much more frequently from that outreach
14 coordinator throughout the course of the week. I
15 think there are also groups that we support ongoing
16 that need a lot less attention and so maybe the
17 communication is a little less frequent where it's
18 you know a touch point once a week or once every
19 few weeks for us to check in with them and to see
20 how they're doing and what they're working on and
21 sort of then to check in with us and let us know
22 what their needs are and sort of how we can support
23 them moving forward. So again I think it, it really
24 varies depending on the level of engagement and
25

support that's necessary for each group which we really do try to tailor and customize to specific needs of the, of the park partner.

CHAIR: Can you tell us more about what your role is with the community parks initiative parks?

SABINA SARAGOUSSI: Sure. So, as part of the community parks initiative one of the major components is, is the community building piece. And really you know back to what Kate was referencing before in terms of the catalyst model that was sort of looked at as, as a successful way to really develop these parks not only physically but in terms of the community engagement that community building is an important pillar of, of a successful initiative along with capital investment made in some programing. And so partnerships for parks was tapped by the Parks Department to really lead the community building piece of this initiative. And so what that amounts to is a few things. We are, have been incredibly active in bringing people literally into the room to discuss park improvements both around physical design and, and programming. So, I think I referenced earlier that there were over 50

community input sessions around CPI parks to date where we had several thousand attendees that could come and really talk through with members of our capital team, of our planning team, and of partnerships for parks to really imagine what, and reimagine in a lot of ways what these parks could be for their neighborhoods in the future. And so, doing the outreach and bringing people into the room has been a, has been a major role of ours to play. The next sort of important step beyond that is the communication and the follow-up. So, if we're talking about neighborhoods where we don't have active groups already it's really about cultivating those relationships. The people that are coming into that room clearly have an interest. They want to see good things for their park and their community and that's really an opportunity for our outreach coordinators particularly to figure out how we can engage them moving forward. And so that's been a really important launch point for us to really continue to bring people together to have these discussions and figure out how we can really support them and their vision. So, that could be a follow-up within It's My Park project.

1 That could be a follow-up with a, maybe a really
2 fun kids program in the park, to invite more
3 neighbors in and continue to sort of grow the
4 network from there. So, I would say that those are
5 two primary roles that we played with the community
6 park initiative.
7

8 CHAIR: And what is your role in
9 traditional capital projects in non CPI parks?

10 SABINA SARAGOUSSI: Again, similar. So,
11 one of the roles that we play is communicating
12 information to, to the public and particularly to
13 the engaged park groups about developments in parks
14 that are under construction in their neighborhoods
15 helping them to understand what the timeline is.
16 What are the opportunities while the park is under
17 construction to not only continue to develop their
18 group so that they're better positioned once the
19 park reopens to do programming and to, to conduct
20 events and so on. But you know also again kind of
21 thinking about once that park reopens what are they
22 planning towards? What kinds of tools and resources
23 can we provide in the interim? So, I would say that
24 it's a combination of both sharing information and
25 communication, connecting people back to the agency

so that people understand where the decision of being made, when they're being made, and how and what those decisions will ultimately look like. And, and again trying to help steward those groups during the interim while their park is closed.

CHAIR: Okay, very good. Go, go ahead.

CM COHEN: Thank you. This is sort of, sort of getting in the weeds no pun intended but when small groups who don't have a 501C3 like if they got a grant. How do they, how do you administer that, or how do they administer that? Like if they, if the group doesn't really have a, a vehicle for dealing with funds is that something that you...

HEATHER LUBOV: That's... we serve as a fiscal sponsor for groups like that. There are other organizations that can do that as well. We're working with about 50 groups now where we are their fiscal sponsor. We'll accept the money. They'll spend, they'll spend the money. We'll manage the invoicing and the payments.

CM COHEN: Okay, thank you.

CHAIR: Well I think we'll, we'll wrap up this portion. I, I am impressed by the work

you're doing and the impact it's having and as I mentioned I think it's so important that we cultivate these groups. My goal would be to reach even more groups so that we get to the dream of everyday one, every single park in the city would have a neighborhood Friends Of group. And also... be advocating to get you guys the resources to do that. Thank you very much for your testimony.

Alright. Our first panel consist of Tupper Thomas from New Yorkers for Parks, Christina Taylor from Friends of Van Cortland Park, and Kay Webster from Sarah Roosevelt Park Community Coalition. Whenever you're ready.

TUPPER THOMAS: Okay. Hi, Tupper Thomas, New Yorkers for Parks. Hi. And I want to just say that we also have included in your packet a wonderful map that actually shows how it then means that these partnerships coordinators are divvied up. Because it really... it, it is much more dramatic I think if you look at your own district and know how many parks you have and then see that your coordinator has you know whatever. You know your district but maybe has community board 3, 10, 11, and 12 in there in their district. So I think this

is very important to understand that the, the Partnerships program has grown dramatically in being able to show what it can do and what it can mean to a neighborhood to have a Partnerships person there who's strong and who can make all of these things happen. And at this point they are so essential to the capital program which has never been true in past years. They are now so significant because if you move into a brand new neighborhood let's say with the anchor parks that we are, that are now being looked at. And you go to Brownsville to look about Betsy Head Park. Then suddenly there isn't a, necessarily a friends group. There is, there happens to be a small... one starting. They have to actually do the research on who needs to be at that meeting. They have to find the full people of that community and make them available to think about parks. So, you have to develop a whole community outreach that's very, very different from helping a friends group out with a clean up. So, there's two very different parts of a job. And somebody has to really know the neighborhood. They have to know the community. They have to really be able to reach out in that

community to do the work that is essential to first forming a friends group and then also to really work with the capital program. And I think one of the complaints that we addressed a few years ago on how slow the capital process is. And then often people feel that they still weren't even heard and that this use of being able to use these cat, these outreach people is going to be a huge difference to making the program move more quickly. It's going to mean that the program can be very effective. That they can actually get the right people in the room at the beginning of the process and move it more quickly along. So, in my mind this is so significant in terms of really adding to we really think there should be one coordinator for every district, for every community board, that that is the only way that you're going to be able to make a significant kind of impact on parks and getting the parks as a priority in that neighborhood. Because each neighborhood, each community board needs to feel more strongly about their parks. And that coordinator can be a person who really helps to create that sense of how important the park is, how important all their parks are. And then in the long

term from our personal needs of, of New York Friends for Parks it can mean then that you have a strong advocacy for parks citywide. Because you have somebody who is, is really reaching out and talking about parks, working in parks in every community board. So, you know the, the stuff that has happened so far is fabulous. It's just not going to be nearly enough. The increase in the amount that it's expected to have for each one of those people. When you look at this map and you think about those neighborhoods you know look at Coney Island and what, who does Coney Island. And how many other districts they also have to cover and how many parks have to be done. And I think you know turnover, I, I actually see the, the partnerships program as being what the ranger program was in the 80s. That this is the group that could be bringing in the new young people, the excited people, moving their way up in the parks department and in other fields. And I also think that one of the most important things about parks and parks organizing is this whole, this whole way that people who have never done any community organizing and find they can actually do something

1 about their park. They get involved, they do that.
2 And then they move on. We just did a webinar and
3 maybe 20 people signed up for it in all on how to
4 testify in the city council. And it's, you know
5 it's just amazing. Because then if they've learned
6 that on their little parks issues they can also
7 learn it on education and other things. So I think
8 Parks is a great organizing force for communities
9 anyway so that this really could be a very
10 strengthening effort that, that could happen here.
11 So we really, really, really believe that there
12 should be one for every community board.
13

14 CHAIR: I love that idea. And I'm trying
15 to look at the current setup. So you have one
16 coordinator for up to the upper west side, east
17 Harlem, central Harlem, Washington Heights, and
18 Inwood.

19 TUPPER THOMAS: Yeah, yeah.

20 CHAIR: That is a...

21 TUPPER THOMAS: A small...

22 CHAIR: ...heck of a lot of terrain.

23 TUPPER THOMAS: ...a small number of
24 people. You know what each community board is
25 250,000 people.

CHAIR: That... those four neighborhoods could be over 100 parks. And if you throw in community gardens...

TUPPER THOMAS: Yeah.

CHAIR: ...green streets...

TUPPER THOMAS: And also outreach for a park's capital project. So, I think... which involves so many people more than just who our Friends group is. That means people who have youth programs, people who... schools, other groups that... you have to get, business districts. So, you have to actually know your community. You have to know it and be able to do that kind of significant outreach. And I think if, if this is what we expect from these folks we know we're going to get a better capital program. We're going to get a, a much better maintenance program because there'll be people out there who are the eyes and ears of the parks department, who are friends groups, who are really helping not just to do volunteer work but to advocate for their park. And I think you know all of that stuff is why this is to me one of the most, most important things that the parks department could be adding in now.

CHAIR: Do you know what the salary... I should have asked the administration this. The salary...

TUPPER THOMAS: I'm sure somebody could tell us.

CHAIR: ...of a Parks, of a average coordinator is and what... it's a break of protocol but go ahead tell us... [cross-talk]

SETH JONES: Yeah, the starting salary is 52.

CHAIR: Okay, got it. So if, if we wanted about 40 more parks coordinators then we're talking... that's about two million dollars which is...

TUPPER THOMAS: Yeah.

CHAIR: ...such a citywide reach...

TUPPER THOMAS: Yeah.

CHAIR: ...it really would be a game change.

TUPPER THOMAS: Right. And I think for people... you know this is the parks committee. But all of you are people who, who know how your neighborhood needs to be developing. And to have a person that you know you could go to and say we have these other issues to you know could your park

group come be involved. I mean it just it's just could create as much stronger neighborhood and a much stronger ability for you all to get your job done.

CHAIR: Council Member.

CM COHEN: Do we want to take the whole panel or do you want to...

CHAIR: Sure...

TUPPER THOMAS: Oh, oh and, and...

CHAIR: What?

TUPPER THOMAS: I'm sorry, I also have this list of 163 groups and others. 163, yep, that just in a week signed onto the testimony that I just did not read.

CHAIR: I, I read it and it's a compelling read. And we'll enter it into the record.

TUPPER THOMAS: Great.

CHAIR: Thank you so much Tupper. We'll be back with some more Q&A for you momentarily and I'll ask Christine to the takeaway. Thank you.

CRHISTINE: Oh, thank you. Good morning.

CHAIR: Sorry, can I just interrupt you to acknowledge that we've been joined by our

colleague from Brooklyn, Mark Treyger, member of the Parks Committee. Please take it away.

CHRISTINA TAYLOR: Thank you. I'm Christina Taylor, Executive Director for the Friends of Van Cortland Park. Just really quick, I do want to thank both our Councilman Andrew Cohen and Council Member Mark Levine for your ongoing support of our efforts. So the Friends are an independent community based organization that actively promotes the conservation improvement of Van Cortland Park through education and restoration. And we've grown over the years to serve over 65 hundred people each year through our programs. We are excited to be celebrating our 25th anniversary next year. A large part of our success I believe is over the last 24 years has been thanks to the wonderful partners we work with such as Partnerships for Parks. Over the years, we have reached out to Partnerships of Parks outreach coordinators for advice, help in promoting our events... to organize It's My Parks days and sometimes much needed financial support through their capacity grants. However, the support they provide for organizations like the Friends cannot

be compared to those, the support they provide for small park groups, especially those that are just beginning. I often receive phone calls asking for advice when new park groups are forming. And the first thing I tell them is to call Partnerships for Parks as they're the main source for information and provide much needed guidance to new park groups. Partnership for Parks plays a vital role in supporting all of our parks. Personally, I think the support that Partnership for Parks provides to the Park groups throughout the city is the most valuable aspect of the work they do. Now I'm going to put on a slightly different hat as the co-chair for the Bronx Coalition for Parks and Green Spaces. I've also worked with the outreach coordinators over the years in the planning of our annual Bronx Parks speak up and we'll be holding our 23 annual speak up in February. In the past Partnerships for Parks has provided various types of support but has always been involved and we hope that they are at the planning table once again this year. And now I'm going to put on my third and final hat as board member of the Bronx Council for Environmental Quality who are very grateful for what Partnerships

for Parks does for Bronx Parks and would like to once again state that we need to bring the catalyst program to the Harlem River. There is a need for their expertise, for all the parks and green spaces along the Harlem River and for the river itself. And I want to use this as an opportunity to personally thank all of those at Partnerships for Parks who I've had the pleasure of working with over the years. Partnerships for Parks has provided vital support to the Friends of Van Cortland Park and numerous other park groups and for what, that I am truly grateful. And I want to second Tupper's request for an outreach coordinator for each community board. I think it's a great idea.

CHAIR: You sure you don't have a fourth hat?

CHRISTINA TAYLOR: [off mic] I can find one if you want.

CHAIR: Kay, please take it away.

KAY WEBSTER: Hi. I'm Kay Webster. I'm the President of the Sarah Roosevelt Park Community Coalition and we've been around since the early 80s when a group of neighbors decided that they wanted to get rid of the pimps and the drug dealers in the

park. And it was actually during a time when the Parks Department wouldn't come into our park which I don't blame them. But it left the community to really have to build a parks organization that created that safety. So since then we've created five community gardens, maintained a bird sanctuary, a turtle pond, chicken coop, lady bug releases, firefly, advocated for funding and held community visioning for sports fields, playgrounds, and several park houses. We've held countless festivals to honor our diverse community, held film screenings run by teenagers, coalition meetings together, neighborhood input, and together we have been fighting for the return of a beloved nursing home, Irvington House. With Partnerships for Parks health, whether financial, logistical, material, we've always felt we had a partner who cared about what we're doing. And not just us but they actually create, offer a personal relationship to everyone's park throughout the city through the dedication of individual outreach coordinators, in our case Kirstie Bambridge [sp?] is all you ever want in an ally. She's sharp, diplomatic, direct, and a hard worker. She understands race and classism. She

understands sexism. She listens to and honors the local smarts of all her park stewards and she has a sense of humor which is pretty vital. But it's harder to keep that sense of humor if you're... because you can't provide the level of contact required to keep volunteers going. I recently attended one of Partnerships for Parks mentoring programs and met and formed a fast relationship with one of the smartest organizers I've ever met and I was supposed to be the mentor. But in Partnerships for Parks settings it's always exchange of information and we're always learning from one another. In these coming times more than ever we need to invest in advocates who know that they are not only helping people to value their parks but they're helping people fight for the kind of society that values them. Let's invest in our future as we build an electorate that's willing to make common cause with everyone in their neighborhood. And one of the great things about being a park advocate is you, you make common cause with people who do not agree with you politically and it's a learning. And we want an electorate who will respond to problems with solutions who will

stand up for their neighbors and those in need of help because they will feel entitled to do so and will have already been practicing in their local park. Thanks so much for holding this hearing.

CHAIR: Thank you Kay. Christina I want to take advantage of having you hear to ask you a somewhat off topic question but one that will be of interest to many folks here. So there, there is a project that you have explored which is daylighting the Tibbets Brook. Could you... could you explain what that is? That term daylighting might be foreign to many people and where it's headed, what, what the barriers are?

CHRISTINA TAYLOR: So right now Van Cortland Lake is fed by Tibbetts Brook which comes down from Yonkers. At the southern end of the lake all that water is now forced into the city's sewer. So I don't know how much detail you want me to go into but basically daylighting is to get the water out of the sewer, bring it back to the surface. So what we would like to do is south of the park from Van Cortland Park south all the way down to the Harlem River using an old abandoned railroad that is owned by CSX we want to use that land to

1 daylight it. So that's a project we're advocating
2 for right now. Right now Parks Department is
3 looking at a project to start working with in Van
4 Cortland Park. It won't be true daylighting, it
5 will be wetland restoration to start observing some
6 of the extra water. And the main obstacle we have
7 right now is that the property is owned by CSX and
8 this city cannot purchase it for the amount of
9 money they want for it.
10

11 CHAIR: They asking?

12 CHRISTINA TAYLOR: My understanding is
13 they're asking for... there's a 10 million dollar gap
14 is my understanding so they're asking for around 12
15 or so and Parks has a couple million.

16 CHAIR: And are, are there negotiations
17 underway or is it at a deadlock?

18 CHRISTINA TAYLOR: My understanding they
19 are still going on.

20 CHAIR: Alright well please keep us
21 posted on that, something that, that... it's a pretty
22 inspiring project.

23 CHRISTINA TAYLOR: I think Council
24 Member Cohen has a question?
25

CM COHEN: I'm not really sure who's the right person to answer this but do you think that there's a difference between parks where their, their, their core mission sort of is more passive versus active. Like I know from my office I get a... you know in the Spring, I know they're coming, that my ballfields aren't ready, that they don't have enough clay, that you know my tennis courts are cracked. That... like those are the calls that I get, that, that's what motivates people to be concerned about their parks but I have a lot of parks, Riverdale Parks, and, and park... you know Van Cortland is both. You know I have parts of Van Cortland that are the forest primeval and that are also... so like I... do you think that that plays a role in people's engagement in terms of these, these groups?

TUPPER THOMAS: I think it, the sports group is a whole different issue. And I, I don't even know how closely Partnerships works with the sports groups. They tend to be pretty strong and know how to get things done. So they know when to call you. It is, it's more the playgrounds and the passive... [cross-talk]

CM COHEN: The dog walkers know how to call too.

TUPPER THOMAS: Oh they, they're very good. But I, I think the, the ball field people tend to be very strong and they know just what they need and they know to get a council member to call the parks... and get the lawns mowed or whatever needed to be done. But I don't know if you guys have a different...

KAY WEBSTER: Well our coalition consists of a, of a coalition so we have the, the ball... the people who used the courts. And one of the things we found is that they come in when they need something. And it's a little harder for them to actually stay a part of the group. But that's part of our work you know, it's to get them engaged in the entire park and then every park issue and slowly, slowly they have been coming to do that. But I agree with Tupper, they know how to ask for what they want. Usually. Unless they're a small community group. We have one park, part of our park that's just a mess. And frankly I think it goes a lot by income and entitlement.

TUPPER THOMAS: I, I think that ball fields issue is a whole different and fascinating issue. Because certainly in our rounds that we did last year in each community there are a lot of people who are left out of those permits now. And... who are new groups who come from other places and the ball field permits are pretty much grandfathered or grandmothere in depending. And so it's, it's a very tough situation in lower income communities where they're in more and more different immigrant group has arrived and they want permits and they can't get permits because those have already been done. So if you ever want to get into another really complicated issue that's...

CM COHEN: I, I, I hear you but I wouldn't... You, I wonder if though, if there isn't a, like a role sort of maybe to try to further...

TUPPER THOMAS: Right.

CM COHEN: ...integrate the, the sport activity users into the you know...

TUPPER THOMAS: Yes. And I think that's something that could be done. If you had, if, if every community board had...

CM COHEN: ...had their own...

TUPPER THOMAS: If every... one for every
pot. So...

CM COHEN: Sticking to the talking
points huh? Very good.

TUPPER THOMAS: Exactly. But I think
then in fact you could. Certainly in prospect park
with the, the, the permits and things that we had
at the... it, it, it was much easier for us to do it
because we had so much more outreach staff and you
know we could talk to people and we could convince
some groups to give up some time here and sometimes
there. And I think if you had somebody from parks
who could get into that issue it, it would be much
easier. Certainly easier on the Parks Department
and the permit staff which is very complicated.

CM COHEN: Thank you.

CHAIR: Alright thank you Council Member
Cohen. Council Member Treyger do you have comment
or question?

CM TREYGER: Just a... thank you Chair for
holding this actually very timely hearing. And I
want to thank the outstanding advocates who have
really put this issue I think really of, of equity
to the forefront. I, I, I just... I'm just someone

that represents a part of New York that doesn't have the big conservancies. And that's where Partnership for Parks really has step, has stepped in. Because there are enormous capacity issues in communities I represent. No fault of our own but I have been present and, and active in many events in my district, in Kaiser Parks for example. And I, I've, I've seen the work firsthand of Partnership for Parks, the Partnerships that you built beyond the park in the community. We do clean ups in the community. Partners for Parks is there too. And I, I truly, truly appreciate that. One of the, the goals that we had with, with the chair, Chair and I worked together on the Parks equity initiative in the city council. And that was really designed to support partnership for parks but also to really activate spaces that historically have not been so activated. You know for many years you had to go to central park or prospect park or Bryan Park and some beautiful parks to go for some, some nice programs particularly in the summer time. And being from South Brooklyn it's, it's quite a commute for some of us. And not everybody has, has time to go out there. But I, I wanted to see that activation

1 in, in our own neighborhood. People could walk five
2 minutes, a couple minutes down, down to their local
3 park and see the great programs happening. So just
4 to ask a quick question and again I appreciate all
5 the great work and the advocacy from those here.
6

7 How can, how can the council and I guess with the
8 administration strengthen the equity initiative or
9 maybe expand it further to maybe kind of tap into
10 what, what your goals are to have these
11 coordinators around, around the five boroughs.

12 Because I, I do think that capacity building begins
13 with having some people with the skills to organize
14 and knowing how to really put this together. This
15 is not easy work. Doesn't happen by osmosis. So if,
16 if you could just kind of give us some, some
17 feedback on that I, I really appreciate it. Thank
18 you.

19 TUPPER THOMAS: Yeah. I... so I think,
20 first of all just to give them credit for all the
21 work they did. They actually mentioned your project
22 when they made their presentation. But I think this
23 is the reason we really believe there has to be at
24 least one person. And that, that we would like to
25 see it funded by the administration so that it's

1 permanent and it's there and they know they have
2 those jobs. Obviously we love it when you had to do
3 it but it would be very nice to have that be a
4 permanent situation. And I think the training that
5 they already work on so well in Partnerships. They
6 have, they have training programs for their own
7 staff, training programs for the community and the,
8 the work that they already do is excellent. This is
9 not saying it isn't, it is fabulous. If it weren't
10 so fabulous I don't think we would see the great
11 potential of that, this program could be. And, and
12 to me what's always been missing at the community
13 level is really that person that knows everybody,
14 knows everyone in your office but also knows all
15 the people doing small business and this and that
16 and the other thing. And they really can make a
17 difference. And I think with the, the help of the
18 capital program I just can't emphasize that enough
19 that if your projects can move quickly through the
20 community part of it and come out of the other end
21 with the community still happy. That only can
22 happen if you have a strong organization out there
23 that brings the community together for those
24 projects. And then they can move quickly. But if
25

you don't have that it isn't going to matter how everything else works. I think that's going to be the key. And it's the key to after it opens you've got people in place who already wanted that and can be working on it. So in, in my mind this is like what, this is sort of the package that would make both the capital program that we're also concerned about and the community process and community building happen.

CM TREYGER: And Chair if, if I may just...

CHAIR: Please.

CM TREYGER: ...to kind of elaborate on that. That's very well put because I think like, like many of my colleagues I also undertake the participatory budgeting process in, in my district and you know when you ask the question to residents what would you do with a million dollars. And when someone asks for a comfort station and I have to say I'm sorry we can't build you a comfort station with a million dollars it's mind boggling to some...

TUPPER THOMAS: Yeah.

CM TREYGER: ...folks.

TUPPER THOMAS: It is.

CM TREYGER: And so yes it, it is an issue with regards to the capital program and also time.

TUPPER THOMAS: Yeah.

CM TREYGER: It's not just expensive but it also takes forever to get these things done. And that affects the relationship people have with their parks especially if you want them to come back and stay active.

TUPPER THOMAS: Yes.

CM TREYGER: Thank goodness programs happen much faster than building comfort stations. But it, it is an issue. I mean if we're... and I, and I really applaud the chair for... he's had a number of hearings on this topic and he's been very vocal and I appreciate that but the administration really has to, we have to really get this together. That we, we, we have to fund the capital program but we also have to make sure it happens in a cost effective timely manner.

TUPPER THOMAS: Right.

CM TREYGER: And, and that's why we looked to conservancies and others to see how they're able to do it. I see that you're...

TUPPER THOMAS: Yes.

CM TREYGER: ...agreeing with me on this.

It is, it's, it's painful because people in my community when they hear about the cost of parks projects and the timeline [phonetic] of projects they seem to shift away from Park's ideas for PB.

TUPPER THOMAS: Yeah.

CM TREYGER: And they go well what's faster, oh, buying computers for a school which I'll always do...

TUPPER THOMAS: Sure.

CM TREYGER: But they get discouraged when they hear about the cost and the time.

TUPPER THOMAS: Yeah.

KAY WEBSTER: Can I...

CM TREYGER: Yes.

KAY WEBSTER: Can I just add that... I just wanted to say that my coalition's budget is 4,000 dollars. So it isn't always about the money and it is with you know Tupper and I think all of us know it's the person who's going to organize people. I mean my park has gorgeous little oasis and then it has parts that look like shit frankly. And you know... But those oasis they bring people

back. And, and you know we have one of the most gorgeous community gardens I think in this city and... So it isn't always about the money. It's absolutely about the person who everybody knows. And everybody knows they're on it.

CHAIR: So Council Member I have a question for you. What is the community board for Coney Island?

CM TREYGER: 13.

CHAIR: Okay. So, it turns out that community boards 6, 7, 10, 13, 17, and 18 collectively share one outreach coordinator.

KAY WEBSTER: Right.

CHAIR: So, this idea that Tupper has is giving every community board its own outreach coordinator would be transformative in the, in the level of attention that we could give to every park in the city. So... thank you for that excellent line of questioning. And thank you very much panel for your testimony. Next up we're going to call Carol Somanawitz, Marlene Pantene [phonetic] or Pantin, and I believe this is Joe Mayocho.

[background comments]

CHAIR: Okay, so again that's Carol Somanawitz, Joe Mayock, and Marlene Pantin or Pantene [phonetic]. Okay. And would you be Marlene or Carol? You're Marlene okay. Alright we, we, we're actually not using a clock at the moment. We're being generous on time but we, we normally ask folks to keep their remarks to three minutes. So not going to be super super strict but just bear that in mind as you are giving your testimony. And Marlene will ask you to kick it off.

MARLENE PANTIN: [off mic] Okay so good morning...

CHAIR: If you could turn on the mic and speak into the mic, maybe pull up closer to your seat. Okay.

MARLENE PANTIN: Good morning. I'm Marlene Pantin, the founder and president of Red Hook Conservancy, formerly Friends of Red Hook Recreation Center. I first became involved with Partnerships for Parks and by extension the outreach coordinators in 2011 when after working to address pressing issues at the Red Hook Recreation Center I decided to start a Friends group. I did not know how to do this and so asked around for

1 assistance. Someone connected me to Partnerships
2 for Parks. And within a short time I had an
3 outreach coordinator visit me in Red Hook to
4 discuss the next steps. From that outreach
5 coordinator I was given guidance and hosting an
6 event information on volunteer recruitment and
7 loaned tools and painting supplies. In addition,
8 the outreach coordinator connected me to other
9 parks and community groups. And the assistance did
10 not end there. The outreach coordinator assisted me
11 in obtaining fiscal sponsorships through
12 Partnerships for Parks. Over time the outreach
13 coordinator connected me to training on capacity
14 building, event organizing, obtaining nonprofit
15 status, fundraising, and grant opportunities.
16 Currently Red Hook Conservancy is in transition as
17 we work to become a 501C3 organization. We now do
18 outdoor, outdoor projects all year long to preserve
19 and maintain nine ball fields, a few parks and
20 playgrounds in Red Hook, and we advocate for the
21 Red Hook Recreation Center and have strong
22 relationships now with corporations as we do
23 projects. We have developed a more robust volunteer
24 recruitment stream by partnering with our NGOs and
25

community groups and collaborate with community organizations to host events for children and youth. Our development and success is due to the hand holding that the outreach coordinator is provided when we were... group. But we are concerned that kind of support cannot occur if there is insufficient staffing among outreach coordinators which result in them being stretched thin. Their level of work will not decline, not with the fact that New York City parks are even more heavily utilized and the need for ongoing maintenance begs for the creation of more friends groups to support park. We would like other groups to have the same level of commitment we did, as we did from the outreach coordinator. Therefore we believe for this to occur it is important to have only one outreach coordinator for every community or district.

Thanks.

CHAIR: That's a great idea. What community board is Red Hook, what number?

MARLENE PANTIN: Six.

CHAIR: So your community outreach coordinator is shuttling between Red Hook and Coney

Island as well as four other community boards which are, are not even contiguous.

MARLENE PANTIN: [off mic] Right. And I believe at one point they did even more. You know they covered other districts a few years ago.

CHAIR: Oh, okay. So I think it makes your case pretty compellingly. Now are, are you on staff at the Red Hook Conservancy, or are you a volunteer?

MARLENE PANTIN: I am the founder of...

CHAIR: Oh you're a volunteer?

MARLENE PANTIN: Yeah, we're all volunteers. I'm the founder and...

CHAIR: Okay.

MARLENE PANTIN: ...board. And we do whatever we need to do outdoors all year during winter and we take care of the ball fields and the parks and the pier and the playgrounds.

CHAIR: Well I want to thank you and salute you for that, for your leadership in founding the conservancy and, and what you must be doing on an ongoing basis probably every day to keep it running. And that just impacts peoples' lives in a way that nothing else does. And I think

you're, you're an example of the kind of leadership we want to support and cultivate and, and replicate around the city. So thank you very much. Carol.

CAROL: I'm a public gardener in the community garden that is in community board 2. And this is just the second time I've ever spoken in this type of group so I hope it's on topic. I think it might be to the coordinator you eventually try to assign but... So for ten years I've been one of the major gardeners in Sarah Roosevelt Park and it's connected to a senior citizen. And I've mentored people and I've worked with your groups of citizens. There have been incredible input to our garden that Kay just complimented. Even as we speak there's a young woman doing a workshop for the seniors on ecosystem probably sent from you. But what I noticed is Sarah Roosevelt Park kind of gave up on their girl athletes so we get a lot of young women volunteers. We get high school students from horticultural for instance are coming this week. We get this young college age woman doing a workshop for the seniors but there are two basketball courts, two half basketball courts and two soccer courts from Houston to Canal Street. And the

1 soccer, soccer courts are permitted out so for the
2 local young women there's basically nothing unless
3 they play basketball which is a larger minority of
4 people. And that's all I wanted to represent is in
5 considering your outreach consider that some parks
6 do not fulfil their obligation to women. And we
7 used to... young women, girls, teenagers. Did I say I
8 taught girls and... I taught high school and
9 elementary for 30 years downtown. And we did have
10 it. We had a volleyball court that was heavily
11 used. My head gardener's been there since the 80s,
12 also a teacher. And he said it was heavily used and
13 now it's the two half basketball courts which
14 recently wonderful partnership with Nike. They
15 really you know resurfaced it but I just think we
16 need to keep young women in the agenda for sports
17 in our parks.

19 CHAIR: Thank you for making that point.
20 It, it's really important and one that I'd like to
21 work with you on in the future. I appreciate that.
22 Please.

23 JOE MAYOCH: Good morning. I'm Joe
24 Mayock. I'm the Executive Director of the Open
25 Space Alliance for North Brooklyn. So I did not

take Tupper's webinar so watch out folks. Chairman Levine thank you very much. I'm very glad to meet you. I appreciate all the leadership you've shown on the equity front for Parks. And I appreciate the opportunity to speak today. Thank you Council Member Treyger for attending council. I see the witness the success and tremendous power Partnership for Parks and a couple of hats on both sides of the East River. I'm the co-founder of Abingdon Square Conservancy in the West Village. And I have this now this paid role. I was once a volunteer receiving services from Partnership for Parks. Now I'm a partner with them in partnering to support Friends groups. OSA, the Open Space Alliance, supports about a half a dozen Friends groups. So, we're kind of a mini partnership for Parks. So, I want to thank, I think the Partnerships for Parks does a tremendous job. They, they have, they have fantastic people on the line. I was clapping for Kirstie Bambridge [sp?], the Partnership for Parks outreach coordinator I work with now is Emily Shared [sp?]. They showed tremendous skill. I think one of the things that we maybe couldn't tack but their response time is

1 outstanding. You know if I need Steve Simon or
2 Marty Mart to help us with something yesterday
3 they're there for it. I think the management's
4 outstanding. I work with Seth and with Mary Price
5 regularly and they're, they're on top of it. And I
6 think the strategy is excellent, so much so that
7 we're flattering them by copying their model. OSA
8 hired a parks outreach coordinator for Greenpoint
9 and is now seeking funding to hire a Parks outreach
10 coordinator for Williamsburg. So, I say two parks
11 outreach coordinators for every community board
12 because OSA covers community board 1 in Brooklyn,
13 Greenpoint and Williamsburg. So, thank you very
14 much. I want to thank... you know I've met Shawn here
15 today. My neighbor Sharlet Vins [sp?] here is from
16 Williamsburg, and a lot of people here today I know
17 are here in volunteer roles and, and I'm very glad
18 to be here today. Thanks.

19
20 CHAIR: Thank you Joe. You did great. No
21 webinar needed. Thank you very much panel. And
22 we're going to move on to the next panel which
23 Maxine Wild and Maria Roca, I think I have that
24 correct. Would, would you be...

25 MAXINE WILD: Maxine Wild.

CHAIR: Alright Maxine please take it away.

MAXINE WILD: I'm the Executive Director of Friends of Kivlehan Park in Staten Island. Good morning. As the founder of a new growing Friends of the Park group representing an underserved neighborhood park in a low to middle income neighborhood I'd just like to say that whatever level of funding is currently allocated to Partnerships for parks you could double that and join a bargain in terms of park stewardship, community building, and quality of life in the city. In just 15 months our group of grassroots volunteers have donated a thousand hours to stewardship. We've hosted 14 community building activities and successfully completed for advocacy efforts and gotten our 501C3. None of that would have been possible without our outreach coordinator from Partnerships for Parks. Without her we would not have had the knowledge or even the tools and supplies necessary to pull our first weed. Add to that your educational programs, their capacity fund grants, and the outreach coordinator system and you have an organization that is just worth its weight

in gold to our communities or perhaps better said for New York City where our parks provide our back yards they're worth their weight in our green spaces. Thank you.

CHAIR: Thank you for that very powerful statement. Who is your outreach coordinator?

MAXINE WILD: Stephanie Gutierrez.

CHAIR: Good to give her, her a shout out?

MAXINE WILD: Oh she's wonderful.

CHAIR: And Kivlehan Park [phonetic], did I say that correct?

MAXINE WILD: Yes.

CHAIR: It's in what part of Staten Island?

MAXINE WILD: New Dorf Beach District 50.

CHAIR: So what... so that would be sort of the middle of the island?

MAXINE WILD: Yes, on the beach.

CHAIR: And so would that be Council Member Matteo's district?

MAXINE WILD: Yes.

CHAIR: Okay, good to know. We'll, we'll let him know you were here representing. Thank you so much Maxine. And Maria, please.

MARIA ROCA: Good morning. And she stole half my, my speech. But probably... probably expressed it better than I could have so thank you for that. And I mean it, I don't... I'm not being sarcastic which I'm well... very well known for being. 21 years ago I returned to Sunset Park, the neighborhood, and resided, started residing north of the park so that the park was my front yard. I had grown up in Sunset Park as a teenager and many here have heard this story probably more times than they rather have heard it, have lift, came back on Sundays for Sunday dinner because my, my parents stayed. But really wasn't aware... All I heard was the negatives, the negatives, the negatives. And it for a good reason. But... so 21 years ago I walk into the park on the first sunny spring day with my then nine year old. And I find a playground area where there are used condoms and needles still. And this is 1995 so this is not the 1980s. And it was 11:00 a.m. in the morning and no one had swept the, the playground area, not the park, the playground area.

1 So I... asking people like I said yeah, that's just
2 business as usual. So that... maybe a day or two
3 later in the first business day I started calling
4 parks finding out you know why and nobody... so who
5 are you, you know that type of thing. And out of
6 that came Friends of Sunset Park, a group formed
7 originally of parents concerned about the safety of
8 their children. And so it was not, it was many
9 phone calls later. And not until I made contact
10 with the, city parks foundation that things began...
11 there was hope in the horizon. And, and
12 subsequently Partnerships for Parks, and I would be
13 remiss if I did not say this, New Yorkers for Parks
14 and things just began to move. From no programming
15 in that park for children or anyone in the previous
16 possibly 30 to 40 years there was what now is known
17 as Wednesday mornings on the hill for 21 years
18 consistently where hundreds and hundreds of
19 children and young families are hosted for quality
20 programming for children zero to 12. But I have to
21 tell you the teenagers have the most fun, teenagers
22 who have never had access to those childhood treats
23 that many of us take for granted. So the teenagers
24 in the back flaunting their colors and or six... 15,

16 year old who's not even in school because they're working a 12 hour shift overnight to feed us all and to deliver food to all of us gets to come into the park and quietly sort of hide behind a tree and has the broadest smile on their face because this, we are giving children back with the parks, to many children their stolen childhoods. So you know that alone is worth three times the money that Partnerships for Parks and the City Parks Foundation is able to... As outreach coordinators go they are the ones who always sort of push the envelope in, in our benefit to, or say you know you need to call this person to... and sort of show the roadway to how to engage government and, and how to engage the philanthropic community. We work with very little money directly because sometimes money ties your hands and your mouth from saying the things that you need to... that need to be said in a democratic society. So I will... needless to say I'm, I'm in love with Partnerships for Parks. They bring education, the education that maybe children and young people don't get in a school. They're a form of continuing education for the life... you know the life... so no matter what your age is, no matter what

your state, socio-economic station in life they're there to provide that knowledge that we all need to know to engage government and preserve oh my goodness democracy and certainly the last week and half are, is testing our, our medal here. So if there's anything that we need to do in the city. So I'm just going to end with a statement. And I know you're getting jittery about time but I, I thank you for your indulgence. Neglect by way of underfunding of our public parks is in our view one of the most democratic and regressive policies and practices, our city's leadership with a private philanthropic or public can express other than neglect of our public education. Neglect of our parks also whether in the capital of program areas discourages inclusivity and stabile communities because it robs communities of that opportunity to come together regardless of how you're dressed, regardless of what your color is or your age and rub elbows. And find out that other person may look kind of very different from you is not that different. So now more than ever we here in the city need to do whatever we can do to remain stabile for all. Thank you.

CHAIR: Thank you very much Maria. We have... we went from doubling the Partnership budget to tripling. I'm sorry there wasn't another panelist here. We would have went up to quadrupling it. Your community board at Sunset Park is which one?

MARIA ROCA: Seven.

CHAIR: Seven. Okay, so we didn't plan this but do you know that you share an outreach coordinator with Red Hook and Coney Island and not one but two... and Bay Ridge and several other community boards around the borough of Brooklyn which are not contiguous. So...

MARIA ROCA: ...should be given a, a Vespa as part of... [cross-talk]

CHAIR: Maybe, maybe we'll put that...

MARIA ROCA: ...you know in order to get around.

CHAIR: ...in the capital budget. What, what... do you know your coordinator's name?

MARIA ROCA: Oh my goodness I just...

CHAIR: Sorry...

MARIA ROCA: ...knew you were going to ask that. Give me a second. It's a senior moment. Emily Emily. No, no, Anna... too...

CHAIR: I hope Anna has an unlimited metro card.

MARIA ROCA: Also may I say that often from, not because anyone has told me this the turnover has a lot to do with this all... you know it is a huge portfolio to cover. And I don't... for many years I did, I developed low income housing when, when that was what it was called in the affordable housing across the city of New York. So Parks is that asset that is spread all over. And I know maybe more, better than many how challenging that is. And so that is such a burden... and how people... I'm, I'm surprised that people stay that long on the job because it's their dedication you know to, to our communities that has to be the... the... certainly is the money.

CHAIR: We, we, we appreciate all your comments. And I have to say we've now heard from five or six volunteer park leaders. What an inspiring bunch to hear from as some of you are still with us. I mean none of you have gotten paid

1 for this work. All of you clearly have such a love
2 for your park. I have no doubt that you have
3 inspired other people in your neighborhood to get
4 involved, to put hours of their time into
5 maintaining these parks. And it, it really yields
6 dividends for the city. And I'm glad that
7 Partnership is there to support you. And we need to
8 replicate your leadership in parks all over the
9 city and I know that Partnerships for Parks can
10 help do that. I'm just glad that we've been able to
11 hear directly from some of these leaders today.
12 Thank you all very much.

14 CM TREYGER: I, I just want to just echo
15 that as well. Because one of the things that when
16 you're listing all these neighborhoods chair
17 another thing that comes to mind I think about Red
18 Hook, Sunset Park, Coney Island, even Bay Ridge...
19 many of these are coastal communities. And I don't
20 think, I think I've... I think we made it very clear
21 that both recovery from Superstorm Sandy and
22 resiliency are critical, critical initiatives and
23 measures that we happen to take here in New York
24 City but you know we're undertaking... there's a lot
25 of studies underway on how to better protect our

city moving forward from climate change. I'm hopeful, hopeful... and through organizing that these items will not be impacted by, by this presidential election. But we, we have a lot of work to do. But the thing is, is that a good, a good chunk of our park land is, is coastal, is coastal. Even in your community in New Dorp Beach. So these studies will eventually produce some sort of a plan to better protect the area but also it will be green infrastructure, green space. And one of the things that we're not hearing from the federal government side is the maintenance of these green spaces. So they'll, they'll put up some money to help us build something. Who's going to maintain it. And so this is, this... this has to all connect here because we're going to need people on the ground to yes be our coordinators, activate green spaces but all through we just help maintain for the sake of our recreation but also even public safety. Parks are a part of our infrastructure. And that's how we even view our beach in Coney Island by the way. We don't just see it as, as a play land. We see it as a piece of defense against mother nature. So, I really, I want to applaud your work and your, your

2 volunteer spirit and your civic duties. But we need
3 you now more than ever. So I just want to say that.
4 Thank you very much for your time.

5 CHAIR: Inspiring note to conclude on.
6 Thank you Council Member Treyger. Thank you panel.
7 And this concludes our hearing.

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9 [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 December 14, 2016