

CITY COUNCIL
CITY OF NEW YORK

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TRANSCRIPT OF THE MINUTES

Of the

COMMITTEE ON PARKS AND RECREATION

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HELD AT: Committee Room - City Hall

B E F O R E: MARK LEVINE
Chairperson

COUNCIL MEMBERS: Darlene Mealy
Fernando Cabrera
James G. Van Bramer
Andrew Cohen
Alan N. Maisel
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A P P E A R A N C E S (CONTINUED)

Mitchell Silver, Commissioner
New York City Parks and Recreation

Liam Kavanagh, First Deputy Commissioner
New York City Parks and Recreation

Matt Drury, Director of Government Relations
New York City Parks and Recreation

Heather Lubov, Executive
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Joe Puleo, President
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Love our Pool

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Love our Pool

Aziz Dehkan, Executive Director
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Marie Winfield, Community Board 11
Vice Chair, Environment, Open Space & Parks Committee

Kelly Vilar
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Paulette Spencer
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Bronx Community Health Network
Bronx REACH CHAMPS for Parks and Open Space

John Butler, Ecological Project Manager
Friends of Van Cortlandt Park

Judith Calamandre

Regina Clark

Fritz Mueller

Dr. Cary Goodman

Claudia DiSalvo, President
Community United to Protect Teddy Roosevelt Park

[sound check, pause]

CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: Good morning everybody. We're going to get started. Welcome, Commissioner Silver, and members of the Administration. This is a busy day around City Hall with multiple simultaneous committee hearings. So my colleagues will likely be streaming in and out, but we expect an exciting morning as we delve into our city's Parks Department budget, and I do want to welcome you to our hearing on the Fiscal Year 2018 Preliminary Budget and the Fiscal Year 2017 Mayor's Management Report for the Department of Parks and Recre--Recreation. My name is Mark Levine and I am, of course, the Chair of the Parks and Recreation Committee of the City Council. In keeping with the budget process mandated by the City Charter that will ultimately lead to the adoption of the Fiscal Year 2018 Budget, today, we will hear testimony from the Department of Parks and Recreation on its Expense and Capital Budgets for Fiscal Year 2018.

Park Use in New York City is surging. There are now 42 million per year in Central Park alone double the number who visit Disney World every year. Over seven million people visit the High Line

annually, five million visit Bryan Park every year, and on a peak summer weekend 127,000 people visit Brooklyn Bridge Park. These trends are repeated throughout every borough in parks large and small, but I'm sorry to say that our Parks Department budget is not keeping pace. After decades of decline relative to total city spending, the Parks Budget as currently proposed by the Administration is set to fall yet again in the coming year. It would fall to just 0.58% of the total budget in the Mayor's Proposed Plan with drop in dollar terms of \$19 million, and most worrisome of all a net drop in staff of 175 full-time employees. For the third year in a row, the Mayor's Budget fails to baseline \$9.7 million for critical park maintenance workers, which would lead to a loss of 50 gardeners and 100 CPWs who would be laid off as of June 30th depriving our parks of sorely needed staffing and depriving 150 hardworking New Yorkers of their livelihood. This situation is made all the more dire by the threat of the Trump Administration to totally eliminate Community Development Block Grants known as CDBGs, the federal—from the federal budget, a move translation to the loss of \$4.5 million in funding

for the Parks Department, which would deal a mere fatal blow for the Green Thumb Program, an initiative, which relies heavily on CDBG funding for its work to support the city's network of 600 wonderful community gardens. We simply cannot tolerate a reduction in Parks resources at a time of record levels of park usage and a growing city population. Rather, we need to make targeted investments to enhance key high impact initiatives within the department. For starters, we need to continue to grow the number of Parks Enforcement Patrol or PEP Officers since today their ranks are still so thin that most parks at most times have not even a single officer on duty. We need to expand funding for street tree pruning as rising costs have pushed us back to an unacceptable ten-year cycle for pruning. We need an additional \$2.7 million for this important work in order to return to the seven-year pruning cycle needed to keep trees healthy and streets safe. We need \$3 million to increase our Urban Park Rangers Program by adding 50 new positions on top of the paltry 30 that are in place today. This will not bring us anywhere near the historic high of 200 rangers, but it will provide critical new

personnel to support environmental education, outdoor recreation, wildlife management and active conserve-conservation. We need \$1 million for ten more outreach coordinators for Partnership for Parks. These are critical on-the-ground staff who are working to support Friends of groups around the city. Currently, on ten outreach workers service the entire park system giving each an impossibly large portfolio of groups for them to care for, and we need \$1.7 million to permanently expand the city's beach and pool season by a week beyond Labor Day. We also need to baseline \$1 million for Fiscal Year 18 for stump removal. This was money that was put in the budget by the Mayor last year, but not baselined and, in fact, we need to do much more than \$1 million to deal with the unacceptable large backlog, which is into the tens of thousands for stump removal.

Now, I would like to turn our attention to the capital side of the budget. Under Commissioner Silver, the department has launched three vital new capital initiatives that have done much to advance equity and access in our Parks system. Sadly, none of these programs receive additional rounds of funding in the Administration's

current Capital Budget proposal. First, is the Community Parks Initiative, and we're calling for a third round of investment in this program, which helps revitalize small neglected parks in low and moderate income neighborhoods. We're calling for an additional \$150 million to support approximately 40 more CPI parks. Second, is the Anchor Parks Initiative, which provides a major infusion of capital to renovate heavily used midsize parks. We're calling for an additional \$150 million to facilitate the renovation of five more anchor parks. Third is parks without borders, the brain child of Commissioner Silver, an initiative, which makes parks more open and welcoming by improving entrances and park adjacent spaces. We're calling for another round of investment of \$30 million in this successful and popular program. At a time with the city's population has now surpassed 8.5 million and appears headed to a staggering nine million residents, we also need to invest in the expansion of our Park system. Fortunately, there are many inspirational projects on the drawing board throughout the city that would give us the additional green space that we so desperately need in our growing city. Let's fill

the QueensWay a miles long linear park that would make use of an abandoned rail line to connect many unserved neighborhood in Central and Southeast Queens. Let's also bring some environmental justices to park starved Bushwick and deck over park of the BQE to create a new green space called BQ Green. Let's undo the damage done to nature in generations past by daylighting Tibbetts Brook in the Northwest Bronx, unearthing a long buried stream to realize major environmental benefits and create new recreational space. Let's build the world's first underground park by turning an abandoned trolley terminal into the low line on the rapidly developing Lower East Side, and let's build on recent city and state commitments to renovate the bath house at Orchard Beach in the Bronx by investing in desperately needed upgrades to the surrounding grounds as well. Let's think big. Let's ensure that every community in this city especially low and moderate income neighborhoods has a thriving green space. Let's bring spectacular new parks to life for a growing and ever more active population. Let's create a Parks budget worthy of this great city. I now want to acknowledge we've been joined by stalwart

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2 Parks Committee member from the Bronx Andy Cohen and
3 major advocate of Daylighting Tibbetts Brooks. I'm
4 sure we'll hear more about that, and I look forward
5 to hearing now from the Administration, and I'm gong
6 to ask our committee counsel Kris Sartori to please
7 administer the affirmation. Thank you.

8 LEGAL COUNSEL SARTORI: Do you affirm to
9 tell the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the
10 truth in your testimony before this committee today?

11 COMMISSIONER SILVER: I do. Well, good
12 morning Chair Levine and members of the Parks
13 Committee, and thank you for your strong support of
14 our parks, and also the other members of the City
15 Council who will be joining throughout this morning.
16 I'm Mitchell Silver, Commissioner of the New York
17 City Parks and Recreation, and I'm joined here today
18 a number of our senior staff including First Deputy
19 Commissioner Liam Kavanagh and Matt Drury our
20 Director of Government Relations. Thank you for
21 allowing me the opportunity to discuss the agency's
22 Preliminary Budget for Fiscal Year 2018. Thanks to
23 the strong leadership of the Mayor de Blasio and a
24 strong partnership with the City Council, I'm pleased
25 to report on the progress we've made over the past

year. Our testimony will be supplemented by our report for progress. I believe you all have a copy, which was released this morning. This report examines the status of strategic initiatives that have guided our agency's efforts since the beginning of this administration. As we gear up for the spring and hopefully some warmer weather, we can look back at 2016 as a particularly exciting year for NY Parks our dedicated employees working closely alongside elected officials and supported by thousands of volunteer groups and other Park partners continue to implement our vision creating and sustaining thriving parks and public spaces for all New Yorkers. These efforts reflect our agency's central mission: Caring for our parks and public spaces, planning parks that are resilient and sustainable and thoughtfully building a park system for the present and future generations to enjoy. As I think we can all agree, an outstanding city requires outstanding parks and public spaces, and I'm extraordinarily proud of the job we've done to provide those spaces to residents and visitors alike. Upon arriving to the agency almost three years ago, it's become innately clear to me that our employees were dedicated, creative and

hard working, but there were more opportunities to make our process more transparent, carefully coordinated and efficient. I made it my-my number one priority to look closely at the agency's capital process, and I'm extremely proud of our efforts to bring transparency and accountability to a process that many said was confusing and unwieldy. Today, any New Yorker who is curious about any of our city parks capital projects that is underway can get an update about that project status within seconds of using our Capital Projects Tracker, and the website has seen close to 300,000 visits since its creation. The average time to complete design on a capital projects in Fiscal Year 2016 was 54 days shorter compared to the Fiscal Year of 2016, nearly two months. The average construction project in Fiscal Year 2016 took 99 fewer days than in Fiscal Year 2015, and while I acknowledge that many of you faced frustrating delays on projects you funded, and you will inevitably be able to point to projects in your district that have take far too long, I would ask that you keep in mind that these process reforms will take time to make themselves felt as recently funding projects begin to benefit from a significantly

improved capital process. I have no doubt that you'll come to agree that we've made important strides towards delivering critical park improvements to your constituents more quickly. On the operations front, we pilot an exciting new model for trash management in our large parks even as we continue to increase the effectiveness and efficiency of our mobile cleaning crew citywide. It seemed clear early in my tenure that we're missing opportunities to directly engage New Yorkers in helping plan for the future of all of their parks. So we established new opportunities to community engagement across the board. With our design process communities now are telling us first hand the features and amenities they value most in their parks so our designs can better reflect their needs and priorities. Our community scoping sessions have included thousands of attendees all of whom feel invested in the future of their parks because they've help shape what those parks will become. And for the first time in the city's history, we have encouraged New Yorkers to directly nominate the parks they thought would benefit from our Parks Without Borders new design approach. We received over 6,000 submissions from the public from

which we were able to select eight signature projects to receive \$40 million in capital improvements. We launched a citywide conversation about how we can create a more seamless public ground with the Summit in 2016. That brought together experts and thought leaders, students and community activists to weigh in on the future of the park system. We have now enlisted over 2,200 New Yorkers in an effort to catalog every street tree in New York City using cutting-edge technology that now allows us to track the caretaking efforts impacting each and every tree. We recognize there's always more work to be done, and we continue to strive in every way to be responsible stewards of public dollars while implementing our innovative and inclusive approach to ensuring that our parks serve all New Yorkers. Thanks to the support of the Mayor and our partners at the City Council we have deployed additional cleaning staff during the times our parks are heavily used creating what we call a step-up program to replace staff that have been deployed to beaches and pools during the summer season. We hired additional gardeners to beautify parks through out Community Parks Initiative Neighborhoods, and have significantly increased the

rank of our Parks Enforcement Patrol in all five boroughs. At the same time, we're investing \$150 million to transform anchor parks in each of the five boroughs, and to date, the City Council—the City has invested over \$318 million mayoral capital funds through our Community Parks Initiative to re-envision parks and playgrounds that hadn't seen investment in decades. With an operating budget that has increased by 18% since 2014 and a new record level \$4.5 billion worth of investments in critical park infrastructure in our Capital Plan. Mayor de Blasio continues to demonstrate the city's commitment to building a more equitable park system for all of New Yorkers. And now, I'd like to introduce Matt Drury, our Director of Government Relations to help provide more context and detail about the agency's efforts as we head into Fiscal Year 2018.

MATT DRURY: Thank you, Commissioner Silver and thank you to the Council for the opportunity to testify today. I'd like to begin by outlining some key facts and figures that will help illustrate the scale and diversity of what we at NY Parks. We're the steward of over 29,000 acres, 14% of New York City's land mass including 10,000 acres

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of natural areas. We oversee nearly 4,500 individual properties ranging from parks and playgrounds to community gardens and green streets. There are currently 515 active Capital contracts for parks improvement projects, 190 of which are in design, 148 are in procurement, 177 are in construction. The Preliminary Budget for Fiscal Year 2018 reflects the agency's ongoing priorities providing for operating expenses of \$487.5 million, a significant increase over the Preliminary Budget for Fiscal Year 2017. The Preliminary Ten-Year Capital Plan in combination with the current fiscal year provides a total Parks Capital Budget of \$4.5 billion with \$657 million in mayoral funding for approved new capital needs. The Mayor's Preliminary Budget reflects a strong budget for NYC Parks as this administration continues to invest the resources we need to get the job done. In this budget there were several key additions to the Ten-Year Capital Plan including \$82 million in funding for street tree planting as well as significant investments in critical state of good repair items, retaining wall, boilers and HVAC systems, playgrounds and comfort station repair, park bridges, investment in our agency vehicle fleet and

safety upgrades for our recreation and nature centers. While these additions may not make headlines, they are critically important to sustaining our parks and recreational facilities into the future. The Mayor's Budget allows us to continue delivering on our Framework for an Equitable Future, released in October 2014, which has served as our guide in delivering meaningful improvements to our parks and public spaces. In Fiscal Year 2018, we will announce 11 new capital sites set to receive park improvement through the Community Parks Initiative, our agency's signature effort to distribute city resources in a fair and focused manner. Launched in 2014, the Community Parks Initiative has invested \$318 million to date in mayoral capital funding to strengthen parks and public space in under-resourced and high poverty neighborhoods transforming more than 67 sites citywide. The positive impact of CPI is already being felt in communities all over New York City. Since the launch of CPI, over 2,100 community representatives have participated in 45 design meetings allowing park users, neighborhood leaders, community board members, and elected officials to

provide input on the future design of their neighborhood park. Neighborhoods across the city have benefitted from immediate high impact improvements completed by our in-house crews, and we are pleased to report that we expect to cut the first ribbon at some of our CPI sites this summer. In the meantime, our Partnership for Parks outreach coordinators have engaged with 50 park groups and enlisted over 12,000 volunteers for park cleanup projects in our CPI neighborhoods. Younger park visitors have benefitted from new programming thanks to the Playground Associates and Urban Park Rangers we've deployed to these neighborhoods. Last year we had over 500,000 visits to our programming sites. Our parks are an essential part of our urban fabric anchoring neighborhoods, enriching lives and supporting communities. Our newest initiatives focus on designing and building our parks with the entire public realm in mind. To that end, in 2016 we launched Parks Without Borders, a new approach to park design. It focuses on the accessibility and connectivity of three main areas within our parks: the entrances, edges and adjacent park spaces, which are the places where parks and the surrounding

neighborhoods interact most directly. We have applied this design approach in a few ways. We've allocated \$40 million of mayoral funding to construct a set of eight showcase projects receiving large scale capital redesigns. We dedicated an additional \$10 million to help the span the scope of existing capital projects already in process, and when and where appropriate, we're seeking to incorporate design philosophy into new everyday capital projects. Design on Me showcase projects should conclude by the end of this calendar year, and we look forward to introducing these re-imagined spaces to the public by early 2020. Given the needs of a fast growing city, the commitment to equity also means we need to continue improving our parks and playgrounds in all neighborhood by updating aging infrastructure and adding green space to areas most in need. [coughing] [siren]In August 2016, Mayor Bill de Blasio and members of the Council joined us in announcing the investment of \$150 million for major improvements at five large parks, one in each borough know as the new Anchor Parks Initiative. These parks act as anchors to their surrounding communities by providing large, diverse recreational resources. Through Anchor Parks

we will invest in new resources like soccer fields, comfort stations, running tracks and walking paths, transforming these parks for the 750,000 New Yorkers who live in the neighborhoods that surround them, and make these older parks feel new again. Each of the anchor parks is a key community asset and the \$30 million in mayoral funding for each site will make a major impact. We're happy to share with you today that all five of our anchor park projects are well into design for their initial phases, and have benefitted from well attended public input meetings so that the priority improvement of each park can be shaped by the local residents that know these parks best. We anticipate completing design by the end of 2017, and getting construction underway by later next year, but beyond making significant capital improvements to our parks and facilities, we're working to improve our management practices to ensure cleaner, safer and more enjoyable park experiences for all New Yorkers. Our dedicated maintenance and operation staff do their best to keep our parks in the best condition possible, and new programs are making their work more efficient everyday. You may recall that in recent years we expanded our

operations for the 21st Century pilot a/k/a Ops 21 to increase the effectiveness and efficiency of our mobile cleaning crews citywide. With new performance guidelines the pilot yielded 500 extra hours of cleaning time each day, the equivalent of an additional 63 full-time staff. Complementing these performance guidelines we launched a new playground repair and inspection program, deployed additional cleaning and horticulture staff at peak weekend times and recruited new seasonal step-in staff to make sure our parks and playgrounds stay clean while simultaneous—while we simultaneously expand our focus to our beaches and pool, but we continue to seek to innovate, and this past year through our successful partnership with the Central Park Conservancy Cratona Park in the Bronx was a site for a trash manage pilot program overseen by our Innovation and Performance Management team, which produced impressive results. We're also pleased to announce the creation of the new senior management position, the Deputy Commissioner serving as Chief Operating Officer to oversee our borough and citywide maintenance and operations teams, and to help us continue finding smarter ways to marshal our resources. Lastly, as

more and more people rely on Smart Phones to access information, we're working on the Mobile Optimization of our agency website to make sure that New Yorkers and visitors can have up-to-date information about parks and programs at their fingertips. At the same time, we use the technology to collect previously unavailable information that can help us make better decisions about our resources. In one pilot program, placed soofa benches, solar-powered smart benches throughout High Bridge Park in Manhattan and the Bronx to gather visitation data to better create maintenance schedules, programming opportunities and park designs. The use of technology and the exciting initiatives that support it can greatly improve our ability to care for our parks. With this data in hand, NYC Parks will be even stronger stewards of our thriving urban forest and natural areas. Our street trees create a tree canopy that reduces both air pollution and the heat island effect. Over 10,000 acres of natural areas throughout the city including forests, wetlands and dunes provide both protection from the elements and the unique opportunity for New Yorkers to connect to our natural environment, which also includes abundant wildlife over 600 species to

be exact. This past year NYC Parks helped launch Wildlife NYC, a campaign to increase public awareness about urban wildlife in the city from soaring hawks to curious coyotes, to help New Yorkers live safely and harmoniously with the wildlife that call New York City home.

In 2016, NYC Parks also completed our ambitious Trees Count program, which surveyed and catalogued street trees in all five boroughs. Over 2,000 trained volunteers participated in the survey using mobile devices to map 130,000 city blocks containing 666,134 street trees of 132 different species. Utilizing this data we launched an online Street Tree Map, which brings New York City's urban forest to your fingertips. The map allows every New Yorker to access information about every street tree in New York City and allows users to mark trees as favorites, share them with friends and record their caretaking and stewardship activities. The Street Tree Map tells a story behind every street tree in New York City encouraging more educational and stewardship opportunities. Furthermore, through a partnership with the City Council, we are exploring how to post more information about our street tree

maintenance efforts online, information such as tree pruning and tree planting schedules will help give New Yorkers greater transparency into our forestry operations, and will connect to our urban forests like never before. But a healthy tree canopy is a just one element of creating a strong and resilient New York City. The devastating impact of Hurricane Sandy illustrated the importance of our city's coastline including the 156 miles managed by NYC Parks, which accounts for 25% of the city's coastlines. Parks and green space absorb storm water. Dunes and wetlands protect our coastlines. Together, they create the critical infrastructure needed to keep our neighborhoods strong and resilient.

Since 2012, we've established new coastal dunes, rebuilt the Rockaway Boardwalk and continued to restore our wetlands, all of which helped to protect our communities. In collaboration with city, state and federal partners we replenish beaches, and are renovating facilities to better withstand the flood hazards. We're also collaborating on the design and implementation of integrated flood protection systems along the coast of Staten Island

as well as the 2.4 mile stretch of Manhattan's East River waterfront. NYC Parks is protecting inland communities with new green infrastructure, natural elements of engineered systems that manage storm water. Through a network of forests, wetlands, street trees, and green streets, we're encouraging storm water management that relies on plants and trees rather than sewers and rivers. In partnership with the Department of Environmental Protection and the Department of Transportation, NYC Parks is expanding bioswales and permeable paving in neighborhoods that experience flooding during rain storms.

As the Commissioner noted earlier, we remain laser focused on improving the efficiency of our capital process, and we saw tangible results in 2016. Comparing projects that completed designs— whoops. I'm sorry. In Fiscal Year 2015 to Fiscal Year 2016, we were able to reduce the average time period designed by 54 days, nearly two whole months. In past years, only 20% of our project designs were being approved by the Public Design Commission on their first submission, but that approval rate is now 83%. We automated and standardized the process to

compile our contract books. It used to take two weeks and now can be done in only two hours. In Fiscal Year 2015, the agency processed 407 change orders, which can delay construction considerably. After a dedicated effort, in Fiscal Year 2016, we reduced the number change orders by 78% from 407 down to 90, and nearly a quarter of our Fiscal Year 2016 construction projects were completed over 30 days earlier than their scheduled construction completion date. The average construction project in Fiscal Year 2016 took 99 days fewer than in Fiscal Year 2015. Keep in mind these improvements are all being made in the context of the highest volume of individual projects ever seen by the agency. As we mentioned earlier, over 500 separate capital projects currently underway.

As our agency wide efforts and initiatives to support sustainable and equitable park development on a day-to-day basis we rely on our expert staff and our partners to invigorate our parks and public spaces through our place making efforts, and creative programming thanks in large part to support from Council Members. Throughout 2016, our Shape Up NYC classes turned parks in all five boroughs into fitness studios. Park events like

Winter Jam, Fall Field Day and Street Games transformed our parks into winter wonderlands and playful destinations. In our playgrounds more 660,000 kids participated in our Kids in Motion program, and in our outdoor theaters, we screened almost 500,000 for thousands of New Yorkers.

COMMISSIONER SILVER: 500.

MATT DRURY: Five—sorry. We screened almost 500 movies for thousands of New Yorkers. Sorry. Our Urban Park Rangers led hiking, commuting and birding outings given nearly 45,000 New Yorkers the opportunity to explore the natural beauty of our city. Through our Public Park Program, 81 temporary installations were on view in our parks, and in partnership in Uniglo, \$200,000 in grants will allow local artists to showcase their work in park spaces that have been historically underserved by cultural programming. In addition, maintenance was performed at more than 500 park monument sites throughout the city, helping keep this historic and important assets in top form. In our pools almost 32,000 children and adults participated in learn to swim programs and at our public beaches. Our committed lifeguards help to protect New Yorkers as we again prevent any drowning

fatalities during our beach season. At our recreation centers veterans and people with disabilities can now purchase an annual membership for \$25 a year the same young adults and seniors. While we reduced the fees for tenant's permits in half. All of these efforts are driven by our commitment to robust community engagement, and we're grateful for the thousands of volunteers and dozens of non-profit partners who work side-by-side with our staff to care for our parks. We recognize thriving parks and open spaces require not only dedicated staff, but strong non-profit partners and enthusiastic volunteers to make our parks beautiful and active centers of community life. Partnership for Parks, a public-private program managed jointly with the City Parks Foundations supports a growing network of individual advocates and organizations dedicated to their local neighborhood parks and green spaces. Partnership for Parks equips local leaders with the skills and tools needed to transform neighborhood parks and green spaces into dynamic community assets. In 2016 alone Partnership for Parks supported over 700 community groups, encouraged

close to 25,000 volunteers to participate in stewardship projects in hundreds of parks.

Green Thumb, our community garden program, is the nation's largest urban gardening program assisting over 600 community gardens including 41 new community gardens in 2016. This expansion is thanked in large part to the permanent transfer of 34 previously temporary community gardens. It's the—it's going to be the largest single addition of permanent community garden space in more than a decade. Green Thumb works with nearly 20,000 garden members across New York City through education workshops and events. Thousands of member and volunteers and donate nearly one million hours every year to community gardens that provide New Yorkers with access to safe, open spaces and fresh healthy food. In fact, this Saturday, March 25th, Green Thumb will be holding its annual Grow Together Conference focusing on how to sustain our community gardens. We hope you're able to join us for what should be a wonderful day.

Our non-profit partners such as conservancies, cultural organizations, zoos, environmental centers, historic houses and community

based organizations help provide a diversity of activity and support for our parks. In 2016, several of these partners continued their efforts to enhance the Community Parks Initiative, and as of this date are on track to meet or exceed their initial commitments. A few examples: Prospect Park Alliance has led design and public engagement efforts on two CPI parks. The Randall's Island Park Alliance has helped improve and program Thomas Jefferson Park, and is now working to organize community stakeholders along the East River Esplanade, and the Central Park Conservancy has undertaken 25 renovations at 15 different parks, helped train 68 CPI gardeners, and provided expertise towards our new Waste Management Pilot for Crotona Park in the Bronx.

The progress we've made in recent years is a testament to the hard work and dedication of our parks employees and thousands of volunteers, partners and park users. In accordance with Mayor de Blasio's vision for parks equity, they've all played vital roles in making our parks and by extension our city greener, healthier and more beautiful. Now, I'll ask Commissioner Silver to offer some closing thoughts.

COMMISSIONER SILVER: Thank you and we understand that our parks are an essential part of our urban fabric anchoring neighborhoods, enriching lives and supporting communities. In nearly every measureable way, New York City Parks has thrived in these past three years. The parks are a Board's (sic) Initiative and the Summit set forth a new vision for Parks across our city and around the world. The community parks and Anchor Parks Initiatives are bringing hundreds of millions of dollars in capital investment to renew precious neighborhood assets. Our cultural resiliency work has brought beach goers back to our beaches in droves, the scores of target initiatives and improvement across our system brought a needed impact to everyday park users. These actions provide a deep and solid foundation upon which to grow. We are now able to bring greater equity and innovation to advance planning and place making, and a higher standard of care to every single one of our sites. Our park system is strong and growing stronger. Thank you for allowing us to testify before you today and for your dedication to providing great parks and open spaces to all New Yorkers. We look forward to

continuing work with the Mayor and the City and to create a bright green future with a more equitable and innovative park system. We value your participation, and thank you for support of our agency, and now we will be happy to answer any questions that you may have.

CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: Thank you, Commissioner Silver. Thank you Matt. I want to acknowledge we've been joined by a much beloved Parks Committee member Council Member Alan Maisel from Brooklyn. Commissioner, am I right that park use is surging in New York City, and if so, do you have numbers for total park usage relative to historical figures?

COMMISSIONER SILVER: We do know that Parks spaces are increasing. There are several parks that actually document the numbers. You've mentioned Central Park, 42 million. High Line actually is at 8 million; Prospect Park, 10 million; Flushing Meadows Corona Park, 10 million. We estimate that in terms of visits, not visitors, that now we're getting 130 millions to our—all of our parks each year. That includes beaches and pools. So, we have not compared it in past years, but based on what's happening in

the parks that do track numbers, we are seeing an increase in park usage in our city.

CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: Those big numbers and I that's impressive, and it bodes well for the future of our city I think. So in that context, how do you justify cutting 170 staff for the--do I have that number right?

COMMISSIONER SILVER: No, we actually have an increase of 55 staff from fiscal--from last year. We--our full headcount was at 4,188 and right now the Preliminary Budget has it 4,243.

CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: Okay, the--the 150 gardeners and maintenance workers worker, which are scheduled to be cut, correct?

COMMISSIONER SILVER: Right now just--

CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: [interposing] But what is--what's the logic there?

COMMISSIONER SILVER: As you know, we're still in the budget process. This is a conversation we have every year, and so we're very eager to continue a conversation between the Mayor's Office and City Council about those 150 positions.

CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: You know, the--the public doesn't always appreciate just how much work

it takes to maintain a heavily used urban park, but with 130 million people visiting our system, there is an--an incredible amount of work we have to do in maintaining these spaces, and even in this technology--this--this technological age, that requires men and women on the ground and gardeners and maintenance workers are critical components of our park system. It's tough work in hot weather and cold weather, but it--it must be done. What impact do you project the cut of 150 of these positions will have on the Park system?

COMMISSIONER SILVER: In all cases, we always sit down and figure out how to be as efficient as possible with the staff that we have. As was stated, we now brought on a new Deputy Commissioner for Operations. As you heard also by being a lot more efficient through our optimization of our mobile crews, we were able to save 500 hours, which the--the addition of 63 full-time employees. We also shifted toward placing our staff at high destination parks over the summer to make sure they're clean on the weekends. We hadn't done that before. So we're getting smarter about how to use our park resources and so if, in fact, the 150 is not continued, we're

always prepared to sit down and figure out how we could be more efficient and to use the existing staff that we have. But again, we know this is still an ongoing conversation. We're early in the budget process, and so we're eager through the Mayor's office to continue to engage the City Council on these 150 positions.

CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: Well, with the story of the Parks Department in recent years is that—that you've been ever more creative in how to stretch a dollar, but at a certain point you can't do more with less. You're going to do less with less. And in the case of these 150 workers, aren't they allocated to CPI parks? And you're saying that in their absence you'll find cuts elsewhere to maintain level in the CPI park—

COMMISSIONER SILVER: Well—

CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: --or efficiencies elsewhere, as you might put it?

COMMISSIONER SILVER: We continue to look how we optimize our mobile crews, and you had mentioned Partnership for Parks. In terms of the number of volunteers that are coming out now, those are one-shot events that happen throughout the year,

but we're seeing a lot more people coming out in the neighborhood to support their parks. We're seeing people obeying park rules, and just enjoying their parks a lot better as they recognize these open spaces are vital to living here in New York. But we continue to look at ways of being more efficient with the resources that we have, and again, we'll continue the ongoing conversation of what we can do with the 150 employees, CPWs and gardeners.

CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: Alright, understood.

You know, the--the Mayor has--has prided himself on moving beyond the era of the Budget Dance and we applaud him for that, but this would be the third year in a row where the Council has had to put money in for these workers, and in cases where it's of exclusive interest to the Council and the Mayor doesn't want to fund it, and there's some justification here, but these are workers which have become integral into one of your signature programs, which is CPI. So the fact that Mayor is not baselining it, and the we are left with a very heavy list of--of I think it's \$11 million or \$12 million roughly to-- \$8 million. Forgive me. It's still quite substantial. To me it's--it's--it's--it sure

feels a lot like a dance, and—and one that I—I regret we're—we're finding ourselves in again. You did mention that the people are obeying park rules more. I don't know if that's actually data on that. It's great to hear, but the data that we do have coming out of reports on crime in parks I believe shows that we are up this year relative to last year. Is that correct?

COMMISSIONER SILVER: That is correct.

CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: And—and what—what is the percentage increase?

COMMISSIONER SILVER: I believe it's about [background comments] I think it's 6%, 5%.

CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: So—so maybe my data is wrong or I have— I guess I'm looking at FY16 versus FY15 the number of felony crimes against persons in city parks rose from 488 to 612, which is a 28% increase, and I'm actually not seeing numbers for the first two months of this year, but I believe the trend has continued in my-- [background comments]

COMMISSIONER SILVER: So, the numbers I have that I'm reporting is that for the fourth

quarter of 2015 it was 230 and then from the fourth quarter of 2016 it went up to 243.

CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: Okay, ,you're—you're comparing quarter by quarter so maybe that's the issue, but again I have FY15 there 488 crimes against persons, felony crimes against persons. In FY16 there were 612 felony crimes against persons. So far the first four years (sic) of FY17 we're showing 219—245 felony crimes against persons versus 219. So, we're not counting Central Park in those stats. So that's a 28% increase last year, and working a 11.8% increase this year. Am I mistaken in those overall numbers?

COMMISSIONER SILVER: We—we can agree we have seen an increase in parks. We are sitting down on a regular basis with NYPD, and we are noticing we're getting more people in the parks. The weather is warmer, but we're just now sitting down to actually target those 12% of parks where crime does occur to figure out how we can work with NYPD to do—because again our park security is focused on park rules. NYPD is our partner in dealing with—with crime in our parks, and we're also looking at what they call set to that principle .(sic) It's

community—it's crime prevention through community design. Parks and our borders is one example. So for those parks that we are seeing higher levels that we now want to sit down with the commanding officers and determine where it's taking place in the park so (1) they can work on increasing their patrols, but we could also work on through planning purposes is it lighting? Is it shrubs? What is it about that place that is creating some of the crime? So we can use other strategies to determine how we can start with NYPD to address or make our parks safer.

CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: Alright, the—the—the striking context here is that crime in New York city is down, and that's a huge achievement for the city, for NYPD. Something the Mayor is very proud of. It's been down to record lows. So in that context the increase in parks crime raises red flags for me, and it's not only property crime. I didn't focus on that. One could understand that when you have more people coming into parks there might be more iPads that go missing, but we are talking about crimes against person, which seems hard to explain away merely by the increase in park usership. It—it is—

it—do you have any other theories for the cause of this increase?

COMMISSIONER SILVER: Again, we're working NYPD. We—certainly they take the lead on crime related matters. Clearly our PEP work with them very closely to determine how we jointly can address this issue as well as our borough commissioners. It something we take very seriously. What I was going to share with you was that we are seeing more people using our parks. The city is growing. While we recognize that there's a difference to the overall crime rate, it's still about one percent of all crimes within the city occur in parks, and it's cover 14% of the footprint. But we are looking at other strategies. Those parks, those 12% again, we have about—date on about 1,100 parks. We are beginning to focus on where they're occurring within the park and then if there's a specific location we want to see if there's another intervention through planning purposes, through what we call CPTED principle. (sic)

CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: You—you refer to [pause] Pep Officers as primarily focused on park rules, and—and that is the case. Obviously in part

we want them to prevent illegal barbecues, but they are police effectively. Not effectively. They are police. They have arrest powers. They carry handcuffs. They in many, many, cases they've intervened in incidents are more serious than illegal barbecuing. They often stop violent crime in action. They can—they can apprehend suspects when necessary. Clearly they are interfacing with the precincts and are—are in direct radio contact with them. That itself is a really, really important function. There have been many incidents where it was the PEP officer who made the—the quickest alert to the PD, and that—and that's just the power of having that person there. So to me the question of the budget for PEP officers is quite relevant now, and it's been really great that we have roughly doubled their ranks in the last three budget cycles, but let's not lose context of the numbers here. We're at I think at 360 PEP Officers. Do I have that roughly?

COMMISSIONER SILVER: Well, when fully—when we have everyone on board it's about 200-292.

CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: 292. So I was over stating it.

2 COMMISSIONER SILVER: And another 31 of
3 the Urban Park Rangers, which includes--

4 CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: [interposing] Right.

5 COMMISSIONER SILVER: --the same program.

6 CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: Right. So how many
7 PEP officers are currently on board?

8 COMMISSIONER SILVER: About 255.

9 CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: There are 255. So
10 this is a city of 1,9500 parks, 30,000 are acres and--
11 --and you don't need a degree in mathematics to
12 realize for most parks, most of the time on most days
13 throughout most of the year, there's not going to be
14 a PEP officer on patrol. That's the experience of
15 park users, one that--that I hear about in every
16 borough of the city as I--as I travel the parks. This
17 is a concern for people not only because they don't
18 want illegal barbecuing but also because of broader
19 concerns about safety, right? So--so, how do you
20 envision such a tiny force patrolling such a
21 sprawling park system?

22 COMMISSIONER SILVER: Well, first let me
23 just say that our Parks Enforcement Patrol are unsung
24 heroes. I agree with everything that you've said.
25 They save lives. They are providing education.

They're also enforcing park rules. So I agree they're a very critical asset to keeping our parks enjoyable and safe. As I stated before, we continue to with NYPD. They're our partners on addressing crime. We have deployed both taskforce and--and mobile patrols that can get to more parks, but we can continue to have the conversation, you know, in this budget process, but as you stated, we baselined an additional 67 PEP officers last year, and that was the Mayor's commitment to move forward to make sure we even have more of our Parks Enforcement Patrol out there in our parks.

CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: Understood. So I referenced fear of cuts by the Trump Administration in my opening remarks. There's been a lot written about this, and the--the two weeks since the Trump Administration offered a budget blueprint, and great alarms have raised and it's justifiable about the impact on public housing, on our Police Department, on our schools. But the public needs to understand that there is essentially no arm of New York City government is not vulnerable in an era of several federal budget cuts even the park system, and which you are well aware of, and that is in part because we

get Community—you know, the block grant money, which I believe, if I have the numbers correct is—it's 5.-- \$4.5 million a year for the Park system, and I think the single largest chunk of that, a million or more goes the Green Thumb. Could you confirm whether— could you confirm what the total amount of federal funding at the Parks Department receives a year is, and where that money goes and what kind of contingency plans you have in the face of such cuts?

COMMISSIONER SILVER: I know you mentioned the \$4.5 is the correct number, but right now, we believe it's still premature. The Mayor put out a proposed budget. We understand Congress is the one that will adopt that budget. We're in constant contact with both the Mayor's Office and OMB, but as we see this budget process move forward, we'll make some determinations at that time, but it is \$4.5 of our budget of close to half a billion dollars.

CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: So what—what happens to Green Thumb if they lose a million dollars?

COMMISSIONER SILVER: We'll have that conversation as the federal budget becomes a reality, and we'll be looking at what options that we can do,

but as you know, the--the Green Thumb Program is a very important program for the city, and those gardeners that--that use it as well as everyday New Yorkers that benefit from these treasured green spaces.

CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: There is probably not--there's probably not a dollar that we spend in city government that gets more mileage than the dollars we spend on Green Thumb just by the sheer number of parks properties they touch, and by the multiple air effect that it achieves because of the volunteer efforts that so many New Yorkers are placing in those parks. So while a million dollars in Green Thumb in the context of--of some of the billion dollar sums we're fighting over in the budget might not sound like a lot. It would really be felt in this city, and be felt in these--these really important parks properties. I know you value community gardens. I know you value Green Thumb and I--I would just urge the department to--to contemplate ways we can shield this important program if, indeed, we do face the kind of devastating cuts, which are not being proposed by the Trump Administration to--to my profound regret. I'll also mention, though it's

not officially your purview, there's been talk about cuts to the national Park Service including comments about privatizing the service. There's currently a hiring freeze in the National Park Service, which is really devastating when you have seasonal hires as they do. It calls in the question how they're going to hire up for the summer rush. People don't understand that there are no fewer than ten national park properties in the New York City including the beloved, beloved sites like Grants' Tomb, like the Hamilton Grange, like Castle Clinton and, of course, the Statue of Liberty. So, you know, in this context of budget cuts to the National Park Service for properties in the five boroughs, the potential for cuts to funding that is directly being deployed by your department to parks throughout the city, I want to make sure that we do not inflict any wounds on ourselves by cuts like the 150 parks and gardeners and maintenance workers, which are currently on the chopping block. So, I'm going to pause right now to see if my—I think my colleague Council Member Cohen has a question and then Council Member Maisel, do you have a question as well? Alright, wonderful.

Council Member Cohen.

COUNCIL MEMBER COHEN: Thank you. Good morning, Commissioner. How are you?

COMMISSIONER SILVER: I'm fine thank you.

COUNCIL MEMBER COHEN: Excellent. One of the topics crimes in parks. I'm very concerned about the Williams Bridge, although we've had kind of persistent low-level crimes, and I think we had a shooting there recently. I am concerned about what we could do to try to make that park, which--although it's not my biggest park, I think it is, you know, it's heavily used per square foot as any park in the city. So I don't know if you have thoughts on what we could do generally in terms of, you know, shortage of PEP and trying to make that park in particular a little safer.

COMMISSIONER SILVER: So, Council Member what I've mentioned earlier is that I've instructed both our Assistant Commissioner over our Urban Park Service Program as well as the Borough Commissioners to start working with NYPD and looking specifically at some of the places because NYPD is our partners in dealing with crime, to see if there is another approach through what we call CPTED Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design to see as we work with

1 NYPD to address some of those hot spots are there
2 other approaches we can take to address some of the
3 specific issues. That is the approach that we're
4 going to take. Because we have our patrols that
5 could--are very mobile in terms of our PEP, we're
6 trying to see exactly how we can focus on some of
7 these hot spots throughout the city. We get crime
8 data, but we don't get specifically where it's
9 occurring. So we want to meet with the commanding
10 officer and NYPD to see whether we can try some new
11 approaches to address what we see as a--a slight
12 increase in crime in our parks.
13

14 MATT DRURY: If I can just add, specific
15 to the overall, we obvious--it's a unique nature
16 because a lot of it is after school and we're aware.
17 We're actually working closely. Our borough
18 commissioner is working with our Public Programs
19 Division trying to think of some creative ways to
20 with recreational opportunities because I think to
21 some degree there is sort of a youth engagement
22 strategy that's also going to accompany the efforts
23 that the Commissioner took and spoke of as well.

24 COUNCIL MEMBER COHEN: I'd really
25 appreciate being kept in the loop on that because it--

it has been a concern and--and it's a growing concern. My Chair who has been also a--a Democratic partner on the--on the Daylighting at Tibbets Brook. I don't sit on the Environment and Sanitation so I can't complain about DEP's lack of involvement, but can you just a little bit about sort of the--the--the role ultimately, you know, how the two agencies are working together on--on this project because I do really think that DEP should be, you know, more of a partner. I know Parks advocates want to get the job done, but I do think that that it would be helpful and important if DEP stood up as--as partners.

COMMISSIONER SILVER: Well, we're engaging a consultant. We're actually working with DEP on the first phase of the Daylighting for Tibbetts Brook. Also, DEP is involved. Whether we want to sit down and have a meeting to talk more with both agencies, but it's something that we would not move forward with this project without DEP. There is a design projects. There's--there's no funding to actually do any capital work, but at least we're going through the design process to see how can daylight that first phase of Tibbetts Brook, but DEP

is actually involved. We are taking a lead with the consultant, but DEP is also involved.

COUNCIL MEMBER COHEN: I know there's a lot of multiple moving parts in order to get that project really to be meaningful in terms of water expansion. I'm sure my excellent Borough Commissioner reported on our meeting with our U.S. Senator's offices in trying to get some progress on the--the department trail, but it's sort of amended at the CSX property. (sic) I just--you know, I had a question about your testimony. When--when you mentioned that capital projects were 99 days ahead of schedule like in FY17, how--how do we--what does that represent? I mean if a project was started three years ago, is it 99 years or 99. [laughs] We have the back lights out. It's been 99 days ahead of schedule over the course of the three years. What--

COMMISSIONER SILVER: [interposing] Well, the 99 days was what we were able to compare from 2015 to 2016 for the construction phase. There are three phases of a capital project: Design, procurement, construction. So we're able to measure the period of time for the construction phase from

FY15 to 16, and that's where we saw an increase in the 99 days. There was another number--

COUNCIL MEMBER COHEN: [interposing] A decrease--a decrease in 99 days.

COMMISSIONER SILVER: A decrease, correct. There's a decrease of 99 days. The 30 days were the number of projects that actually were completed ahead of time, but the--that was an important measure that three months. We worked very closely with engineers. We do pre-site investigation, and so there have been some benefits of some of the things we've put in place to bring that construction phase down. So that's just the construction phase of the project.

COUNCIL MEMBER COHEN: I don't---I-I don't want to give you a hard time, but I'm just curious. Is it app--is it a true apples to apples comparison? I mean if you had a--a very substantial project in--in FY--?

COMMISSIONER SILVER: Yes, it is.

COUNCIL MEMBER COHEN: Okay.

COMMISSIONER SILVER: It's an apple to apples comparison.

2 COUNCIL MEMBER COHEN: Alright. I'm just
3 going to keep bouncing around a little bit if you
4 don't mind. [laughs] It's not my district but I-I
5 have a deep interest in-in the Rockaways, and I was
6 just curious. I see that-the Boardwalk is not
7 currently completed. It was my impression that it
8 was.

9 COMMISSIONER SILVER: It-it will be fully
10 opened. There's a partial.

11 COUNCIL MEMBER COHEN: [interposing] Oh,
12 I didn't see the partial.

13 COMMISSIONER SILVER: Okay.

14 COUNCIL MEMBER COHEN: I-I will-you know,
15 what, you know what, I care deeply, but I will
16 definitely-I didn't see you there. I'm going to move
17 on then.

18 COMMISSIONER SILVER: Okay.

19 COUNCIL MEMBER COHEN: How about Orchard
20 Beach?

21 COMMISSIONER SILVER: In terms of Orchard
22 Beach, as you know there was-there are-it's about a
23 \$50 million project. There was some money both from
24 the city and we expect from the state, but to do that
25 project and move forward we need approximately \$50

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2 million. So it's something we'd like to move
3 forward. We'd like to make sure that Governor's
4 commitment \$10 million--

5 COUNCIL MEMBER COHEN: [interposing]
6 Sorry, not to jump in. So you have \$50 million?

7 COMMISSIONER SILVER: No, no, no. The
8 budget to do the project would be \$50 million.

9 COUNCIL MEMBER COHEN: [off mic] And how
10 much is in place now?

11 MATT DRURY: [off mic] Thirty in the
12 State funds--

13 COMMISSIONER SILVER: I think we have--

14 MATT DRURY: [off mic] Thirty in the city
15 funds.

16 COMMISSIONER SILVER: --we have 30 in the
17 city funds--

18 CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: [interposing] But
19 there's also state funds, too.

20 COMMISSIONER SILVER: Correct.

21 MATT DRURY: [off mic] There's a \$10
22 million commitment--

23 COMMISSIONER SILVER: [off mic] There's
24 \$10 million from the Governor. [background comments]
25

CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: So even to do that bath house we're not fully funded?

COMMISSIONER SILVER: That's correct.

CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: So to renovate the bath house is how much?

COMMISSIONER SILVER: Our--our budget--

CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: Sorry, sorry Council Member.

COUNCIL MEMBER COHEN: Oh, no, please.

CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: We have to clarify this.

COMMISSIONER SILVER: So right now, the project cost is \$50 million [background comments] and there is \$30 million in city funding that's in place. I'm sorry, \$20 million is from the mayoral funds, \$10 million from the borough president, and we hear there's about another \$10 million coming from the Governor's Office That puts us at \$40 million.

CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: Well, well, well, I'm first trying to get over the fact that it takes \$50 million to renovate a bath house, which is--which is an extraordinary, extraordinary high number, but I was under the under--I was under--I understood that we were at full funding for the bath house, but you're

telling me that we're still \$10 million short on that?

COMMISSIONER SILVER: It is. The bath house and the plaza. The building has to be stabilized and restored, and then I believe there's going to be some access at the lower level where they use, primer use would be a concession, but also the plaza area.

CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: Got it. So you're not proceeding on this project because you're still \$10 million short or you can--?

COMMISSIONER SILVER: We're looking to see what we can pursue. We also have to make sure it's ADA compliant. So we're going to see what we can do with the \$40 million or if we have to wait before it's fully funded, but it's a project we're committed to going forward by virtue of the Mayor giving this capital project \$20 million.

CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: Okay, we—we have a disconnect between what I'm hearing from some of the leadership in the Bronx, which you told me we had the \$50 million. We'll—we'll—we'll square that, but when—when, assuming that it is only 40 which would be

unfortunate, when do you hope to clarify whether you can proceed on that basis?

COMMISSIONER SILVER: Well, we'll have to meet with staff because we can't proceed with a project unless it's fully funded. So either we have to change the scope, but it's something that we can certainly meet and get back to--to get back to you on exactly a better estimate of how we believe we can--

CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: [interposing] And the--the--the broader grounds, this is a large--a large park, it's a large property. None of that would be touched even if you had \$50 million, right, except for the plaza right in front, but is there a price tag for a broader scope that would include the grounds and the pass an access way--

COMMISSIONER SILVER: [interposing] I believe there was a study. I'd have to get back to you on what the larger budget would be. I'm just right now focused on the bath house in the immediate area, but we could certainly get you that number.

CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: Alright, I'm going to pass it back to our colleague from the Bronx. I'll just make the point that this an unbelievably heavily used beach. It is the only beach for a huge

part of the city, and -and communities that are not going to the Hamptons on the weekend. They are—they don't have that access. They don't have the economic ability to do that. So Orchard Beach is just hugely important, hugely used and vital to millions of people, and so while the price tag is considerable, if you look at the impact, it's actually a fairly modest amount per user, and—and one that I would certainly support. So I'm going to pass it now back to Council Member Cohen.

COUNCIL MEMBER COHEN: Alright, thank you, Chair. I really do appreciate your advocacy on this issue and—and the \$50 million just to be clear, you know, calling it a bath house, but it involves the whole colonnade and it is, and unfortunately we've—we've not been as good a stewards of that facility as we should have been because it is in—in very, very deteriorated condition. So although that does like a staggering amount of money, I'm—I'm sure it's—it will, you know, all be used. So I do appreciate, and I—and I also do believe that as a delegation at one point we did a briefing, a budget presentation of the whole—of the whole multi-multi-phase project and it might have been—it was well over

\$100 million I believe, but I think I've covered all my territory. So thank you, Chair.

CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: Thank you, Council Member Cohen. Council Member Maisel.

COUNCIL MEMBER MAISEL: Good morning, Commissioner. As you may know, I represent Marine Park both the community and the park, and my-my predecessor and myself have put a lot of money into Marine Park I think up to maybe \$12 million plus. Last year I asked that the oval in the Marine Park be repaved and the kiddie park, which is adjacent to the Carmine Carol House because be rehabilitated. It didn't happen last year. I-I'm not sure if my letter for this year was sent out yet, but we're seeking again to renovate the oval. It's a huge amount of money, \$8 million for the bicycle path and the Oval plus a couple million dollars for the kiddie park, and because Marine Park is a regional park, thousands of people use Marine Park during the summer every week. I'm happy to put a lot of my capital money into parks. Maybe two-thirds of my capital money goes into parks, but I don't have the kind of resources to-to keep up with the demands, and the wear and tear in Marine Park that we have every year.

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2 So I urge you to take a look at those--those projects
3 and I'm willing to settle for one of them.

4 COMMISSIONER SILVER: So I'm sure you
5 could certainly follow up with our newest Borough
6 Commissioner Maher and I'm pretty sure he's up to
7 date on your request. If not, he should schedule a
8 meeting very soon. So we get the full breadth of--of
9 some the projects.

10 COUNCIL MEMBER MAISEL: Well, I'm going
11 to actually meeting with Commissioner Maher very,
12 very soon like tomorrow. [laughter] But I want to
13 just make sure that you know my feelings about how
14 important Marine Park is to the entire borough. The
15 largest park in--in Brooklyn--

16 COMMISSIONER SILVER: [interposing] It is
17 the largest park in Brooklyn.

18 COUNCIL MEMBER MAISEL: --as-as-as you
19 know.

20 COMMISSIONER SILVER: Yes.

21 COUNCIL MEMBER MAISEL: Thank you very
22 much Commissioner.

23 CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: Thank you very much
24 Council Member Maisel, and we're going to pass it off
25

to our colleague here in Manhattan, Council Member Kallos.

COUNCIL MEMBER KALLOS: Thank you, Chair Levine for your leadership and thank you, Parks Commissioner Silver. In 2014, I came to this budget hearing and noted that these East River Esplanade was literally falling into the river, and that if we let it fall into river, it would be \$430 million to rebuild it, or it would cost us \$115 million to not make it as great as the West Side, and I do demand that we make the East River Esplanade better than the West Side, but just that it would take \$115 million to shore it up. In that year, we were able to secure \$35 million. We have finished phase 1 and 2 of the at \$35 million, and we now instead of \$115 million, which I asked for previously, we are now requesting \$169 million to keep that work on track. And so, Commissioner Silver, I want to thank your team for their great work, and ask if you will continue to fund the shoring up of the East River Esplanade so that it does not fall into the river.

COMMISSIONER SILVER: Well, all I can say is that we do agree with you that we're very pleased. We actually have \$42 million from phase 1 and 2 that

went into stabilizing the Esplanade, and we recognize that more work—work needs to be done. We will continue to have conversations with the administration about getting additional capital dollars to improve the Esplanade.

COUNCIL MEMBER KALLOS: And—and thank you and this is an issue of importance to Council District 5 as well as my—my neighbor to the north. We actually split the Esplanade, which runs from 60th to 125th Street, and a lot of the work that we've already secured has been benefitting both the Upper East Side and East Harlem. So, again, thank you for the work. On a separate note, the East Side, my Council District, District 5 actually ranks fourth from the last for open space, and so we're looking for it anywhere we can. I want to thank you for opening 2,000 square feet and doing a ribbon cutting and the community is still excited about it because we now have pier space that can be used as park space. However, we have about 50,000 square feet, an acre and a quarter that's under the Queens Borough Bridge. It's called Queens Borough Oval, and in my lifetime I—I've never actually been able to be there because there has been a private lease for the entire

park for the better part of 40 years and I—Even on a City Council Member's salary, I can't afford the \$180 to \$225 an hour to play tennis there. I've asked other folks from the Parks Department if they would play tennis with there, but none of us seem be able to—to—to part with that \$180 to play. And so I understand that certain members of the public may have \$180 to play tennis there, but they certainly don't live in my district, and they don't live in the surrounding area because I haven't actually heard from anyone in my community other than asking to return the space. And so we've worked with Community Board 8 for the better part of my entire first term. We passed—we've had 14 meetings. We've passed four resolutions. The Borough President, our Congress Member, our State Senator, and—and I—and our Assembly Member have all asked to please not renew the lease, and to open it back to the public. I for one am willing to put capital fund, but can we please de-privatize a park in the city, and add public space and a brand new public park.

COMMISSIONER SILVER: For clarification purposes, the space underneath the Queens Borough Bridge is a Department of Transportation property. A

lot of people affectionately call it a park, but actually it is a Department of Transportation property, which is being used as a concession. We know that about--

COUNCIL MEMBER KALLOS: [interposing] But before that, it was—it was a park before it was a concession because we've had people at Community Board meetings testify that they played softball there that they ran on track there. So it has historically been used for parks purposes and even now is being licensed through Parks.

COMMISSIONER SILVER: It's being licensed through Parks, but it is a property—it's a city-owned property that is now under the jurisdiction of Department of Transportation. I can't answer what happened prior to the concession. It's been I'm told some 30, 40 years. But as you know, going forward, we have met with many stakeholders including our elected officials. We have both a short-term and a long-term plan. The short-term is to continue—to make a recommendation to continue the lease, and on a year-to-year basis while we explore several long-term options. We have not come up with a determination yet of what that long-term-long-term option is, but

we'll continue those conversations with both you, your colleagues, elected officials as well as other stakeholders until we can come up with a resolution. But for the time being we are recommending, which we did share with the committee when we met with them, depending on how long the conversation would occur that we would have to extend that license agreement until we come to a long-term solution.

COUNCIL MEMBER KALLOS: I think there's an overwhelming concern at least by me as Chair of Governmental Operations having overseen Rivington and now Waters Edge and others. Any time we see a private vendor who's paying I believe just over \$2 million for an acre and a half-and a quarter of city space, which is far below market, and making several million dollars a year, and not having to compete against a free market or compete against other providers. We-we have similar arrangements not quite with groups like Asphalt Green where over 40,000 children play, but we're not seeing anywhere near the number of people there, and we're not seeing access to this space for low-income families and the community as a whole. So I guess the concern for myself all the elected officials and the Community

Board is just that allowing it to lapse into yearly renewals is not responding to the community, and-and I believe that I work for the voters, and Parks should also be working for the residents of the community.

COMMISSIONER SILVER: We continue to listen to stakeholders on both sides of the issues, or those that would like it to continue and those that would like it to somehow become a--an open space. As I stated we have both a short-term recommendation as we explore some of the long-term options and that is the process that we're continuing. But we're always willing to sit down to talk to anyone that wants to talk about this further, but that is what we've shared with the community, with the elected officials, but we don't have a final recommendation of what the long-term use should be.

COUNCIL MEMBER KALLOS: I-I guess the-the last piece, and I believe the Riverside Park Tennis Association is in Council Member Levine's district, but that's a tremendous model where Parks property with clay courts on it, is maintained by the Riverside Park Conservancy and this sub-entity, and we've got these great clay parks, and if we could

replicate that model and have—work with them to be custodians of this, we could tomorrow cancel the license and still have a tennis use there. But we could replicate the success that you've had on Riverside. So, once again, we're slightly envious of the West Side on the East Side, and hope for similar services.

CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: Well, you don't have to be envious of me on that one because those are in Council Member Rosenthal's district, but the—the truth is that we do have a model for a public run tennis court, and—and I don't thin that Council Member Kallos is against tennis. I gather he has a pretty good game, but that under the public managed model it's—it's a \$100 annual fee, and thank you for reducing that. That's certainly increased usage. There is clearly budgetary impact if it's going to be a publicly run entity with the lower fees, but I think what you heard Council Member Kallos say, and I would echo is that let's have the conversation about what the budget would need to be. On the capital side probably there is millions of dollars of backlogged needs there, and on the operating side, and ultimately I would that it's—there's a public

benefit served by that investment, and I would—I would add my voice to—the Council Members in—in—in pushing for those kind of creative solutions for public access in this public space no matter what agency has jurisdiction. I want to acknowledge we’ve been joined by many of our wonderful colleagues including Council Member Ulrich, our Majority Leader Jimmy Van Bramer, Parks Committee members from Brooklyn Council Member Mark Treyger and Darlene Mealy, and I believe that Councilman Treyger you have a question, is that right, sir? Okay, we’ll—we’ll do you next and then we’ll have Council Member Ulrich, and—and the others as well—

MALE SPEAKER: [off mic] Van Bramer.

CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: --and Van Bramer and then Mealy. Okay, take it away Council Member Treyger.

COUNCIL MEMBER TREYGER: Thank you, Chair Levine and welcome Commissioner. I just want to begin by again just saying that it was definitely tough to fill the shoes of Brooklyn Commissioner—former Commissioner Jeffries, but we—we are thrilled, and we applaud you on the appointments of Commissioner Marty Maher. It’s good to call you

commissioner now, Marty. [coughing] I—I just want to begin by reading through your comments the issue of the investments in anchor parks throughout the boroughs and—and the Community Park Initiative, which I do appreciate and I mentioned this at a—a previous parks hearing, but I believe it's important for the Commissioner to—to also I think hear this is that we're still concerns about the issue of not just recovery, but resiliency neighborhoods that I represent, and there are certain—there are certain parks that have not gotten the love and the attention, which they needed for quite time particularly in areas that are prone to flooding and emergencies. There are still parks, for example, in Coney Island that are called parks, but are completely concrete, and we've heard, you know, DEP and other sister agencies the importance of trying to green up these parks. And so forgive me if this was asked before. I was in the Education Committee hearing, but is there a plan to continue the Community Parks Initiative this year, and is there a way to loop in resiliency initiatives and goals. For example, there's a park in Coney Island called Surf—Surf Playground that is not—is near a school and just

predominantly, you know, concrete and that's something that that should be an example of a park that's being converted to green space for—for more than one reason. So I just want to hear your thoughts first on that.

COMMISSIONER SILVER: Okay, in terms of the Community Parks Initiative our focus for this budget and the Capital Budget is really state of good repair, and -and making sure we're holding the assets that we have, and if we look at all the major capital items, it's really state of good repair. Having said that, for all or Community Parks Initiative projects DEP is heavily involved in resiliency as part of each project. I believe a majority of the Community Parks Initiative has some element of sustainability working with DEP where there's storm water retention on site. So the answer is yes. In addition to that we always look very carefully on how we plan and build all of our parks within flood plains. It's something that is the first step we take when we're designing a park. So to answer your question on the Community Parks Initiative yes, and parks in general yes, but in terms of the CPI for this budget, right now we're

now seeing another round this fall, but this budget is now focused on state of good repair.

COUNCIL MEMBER TREYGER: But so there will be an announcement of more parks as part of this initiative is that correct?

COMMISSIONER SILVER: These are eleven sites this fall.

COUNCIL MEMBER TREYGER: And have you picked those sites already or are they--?

COMMISSIONER SILVER: Right now we have a general list when we did our analysis a few years ago, so we'll be looking at that list to make the determination. So right now it's still a conversation and analysis.

COUNCIL MEMBER TREYGER: [interposing]
And I'm not just advocating just for my district. I--
I think that all of the communities that are vulnerable and--and prone to flooding, and also that have not been--they have been really neglected for quite some time. One thing about Sandy, it hit areas that were historically neglected period. Coney Island, Red Hook, Canarsie, you name it. These are the areas that needed some help for quite some time.

So I would really like to work with your—with your departments on making sure that we loop in these resiliency goals as well. I also saw that the—the allocation of that. One thing about Sandy, it hit areas that were historically neglected period. Coney Island, Red Hook, Canarsie, you name it. These are the areas that needed some help for quite some time. So I would really like to work with your—with your departments on making sure that we loop in these resiliency goals as well. I also saw that the—the allocation of that \$150 million to transform anchor parks in each of the five boroughs, and I remember—I remember reading there was recently an announcement that the Mayor I think—I believe with your agency and—and with Deputy Mayor Shagin (sic) a big investment in Bushwick Inlet Park to keep a promise that was made by the previous administration to purchase land to convert it into a future park. And I—I'm all for increasing green space, but I just want to again remind the Parks Department that there was a promise made by the last administration to a really big space in Southern Brooklyn, and Commissioner Mark gave me the right pronunciation Calvert Vaux Park. Is that correct, Commissioner?

COMMISSIONER SILVER: That's correct.

COUNCIL MEMBER TREYGER: Alright. Thank you. Where they had promised I think over \$70 million or somewhere around that figure of \$40--\$70 million, a huge investment that was made to transform it into regional park. All that was really done was a--a parking lot and a few soccer fields. I don't know the last time you've been to--to this physical space, but it has such enormous potential. It's also tied into EDC's study for resiliency in that region. My full EDC point blank (sic) that in addition to the protection of life and property and--and resiliency, we need to enhance our public asset, which is Calvert Vaux. It--it is just crying and dying for investments and resources, and I'm going to demand Brooklyn--Southern Brooklyn's fair share. It's not physically in my district but it serves the entire Southern Brooklyn region. So I just want to hear thoughts on Calver Vaux.

COMMISSIONER SILVER: Well, Council Member I listed to you because you mentioned Bensonhurst Park and I went out there for a visit--

COUNCIL MEMBER TREYGER: [interposing]
Yes you did.

COMMISSIONER SILVER: --and documented it and so you do know there is some intervention there, and I also went out to Calvert Vaux as well. There is a comfort station that's on its way in addition to the ball fields or soccer fields, which are actually some of the best that I've seen. And I also took a walk through the other area of the area until I got to the waterfront, and I do agree it is a park that needs investment. So it's one that I'll continue conversations with the administration, but I have heard before—I did not know the number was \$70 million. I thought the number was lot smaller, but it's certainly something we'll take into consideration as we continue our conversations.

COUNCIL MEMBER TREYGER: Well, I—I appreciate that. I believe it was originally somewhere in the—in the 40 to 50 range. Then they—the estimates increased, but it's going to take about at least \$70 to \$80 million I think, somewhere in that region to—to actualize that vision of a great lawn—and really things that the community does truly deserve. So I—I would really just like to work with you, and the last point I'll make because I want to be mindful of my colleagues' time. The Chair and I

are proud to work together on the Parks Equity Initiative in the City Council, and this was about making sure that we are, you know, activating spaces that historically have not been activated throughout the entire year, and building up capacity in neighborhoods. I just wanted to hear your thoughts on how that program is going from your end whether there are additional needs. We need—we need funding to—to kind of—I—we really want to make this not just a part of a budget dance, but a part of the norm here in the City of New York that we are creating fair equitable opportunities across all regions of the city. I just want to hear your thoughts on that.

COMMISSIONER SILVER: Well, I think you and the Council for that funding. Let me just share with you from the City Parks Founding that where the money went it was able to either partially or fully fund eight staff members that Partnership for Parks who really worked to provide technical assistance to communities. So all those communities have benefitted from those funds. In addition, there was about another \$667,000 that went direction to parks. We've used that to activate a lot of our parks. That

included community events, movie nights. As we stated, we had over 500 this year additional program associates and improvements to a number of community gardens. So all of the—the funds that the Council provided actually did go to work, and there was another \$775 million that was also given out to various groups to put their own projects in. So the initiative itself was highly effective and—and we thank you for it, and again I heard your concern about how we can continue this going forward. We'll certainly make a note of that as we continue our conversations with the Mayor's Office as the process continues.

COUNCIL MEMBER TREYGER: And please let us know if there are capacity issues. Let us know now so we keep this program afloat and strong and make it a part of the normal in—in our city, and just the last point. I know that we're not in beach season, but always keeping our eye on—on staffing levels and— and staffing outreach. Are there any concerns or any thoughts of where we're at? I'm not sure if this question was asked about—has staffing recruitment begun for—for the seasons ahead or anything?

2 COMMISSIONER SILVER: I think the regular
3 staffing this--believe it or not during the snow storm
4 last week we already started working on the staffing
5 plans--

6 COUNCIL MEMBER TREYGER: [interposing]
7 Okay.

8 COMMISSIONER SILVER: --of the beaches.
9 So we start early. It was nice. As we're talking
10 about beaches the snow was falling but it is what it
11 is. It is spring officially. I don't know if
12 Commissioner Kavanagh if you want to want to add
13 anything else.

14 COMMISSIONER KAVANAGH: As-as
15 Commissioner Silver mentioned, we began our formal
16 beach preparation process last week. All things are
17 in place or working towards being in place for
18 Memorial Day Weekend especially with lifeguards. We
19 have a-a really strong class in training right now
20 over 300 applicants. We think we're going to match
21 last year's numbers of almost 1,500 lifeguards
22 working in New York City beaches and pools next
23 summer.

24 COUNCIL MEMBER TREYGER: So no concerns
25 at this point?

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2 COMMISSIONER KAVANAGH: No.

3 COUNCIL MEMBER TREYGER: Very good.

4 Thank you. Thank you, Chair.

5 CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: Thank you very much,
6 Council Member Treyger. Next up we have Council
7 Member Ulrich.

8 COUNCIL MEMBER ULRICH: Thank you, Mr.
9 Chairman and I realize I'm a guest of this committee.
10 I'm not a member. So I'll be prudent with my time
11 and Commissioner, I want to apologize for being late
12 today, but I did get a chance to review your
13 testimony, and I just want to let you know how
14 pleased I am to work with Commissioner Lewandowski in
15 Queens, and her fine staff at the Queens Office.
16 [sirens] They do a phenomenal job helping my
17 district, and before and after Hurricane Sandy and I
18 know that you know that already, but some of those
19 events and things that they were able to help us
20 accomplish before you taking over the department. And
21 it's always good to see Commission Kavanagh. He was
22 a big presence in the Rockaways last year. So I have
23 a few questions about the Rockaways in particular and
24 I know that my summer constituent here with me.
25 [laughter] I won't—I won't tell the people in his

district that in the summertime Council Member Cohen spends an awful lot of time in the La Ponza, but anyway. So, a few questions. First about capital projects. So we—we've seen and we are very grateful for the extraordinary investment that Parks has made, and with respect to capital projects on the Peninsula both in my district and I know Council Member Richards. I don't think he's here with us, but I know he certainly appreciates all the capital money that the city was able to put forward while we waited for FEMA to give us our allotment, if you will. The Boardwalk is 99% done I think we'd say. I mean it's almost there. I mean we're very--

COMMISSIONER SILVER: [interposing] By Memorial Day it will be there.

COUNCIL MEMBER ULRICH: We are very pleased by that. We were very pleased that our federal partners were able to secure more money than I think the city even anticipated to be quite honest, and we're very grateful that the administration has agreed to reinvest a lot of the money in the community. But one of the concerns that I hear from folks on the community board and in the community is that they are concerned that Parks might be using

some of the FEMA allotment that we're receiving, or reimbursement money that we're receiving for other Parks projects that are sort of related to resiliency but not quite rebuilding parks and doing things. For instance, this Parks facility is a \$39 garage. That's what it's being coined and referred locally. But people in the community are saying hey, Shorefront Parkway is not fully rebuilt yet. We don't have all of our park space up and running and you know, Parks Department gets more money than we've even asked for, and they want to take \$30 million of that money and build a garage. So maybe you want to address some of those points.

COMMISSIONER SILVER: First, in terms of total costs, when the recommendation was submitted to FEMA, we split the cost. So the full \$30 million was not submitted. It was about half of that amount with the other half would be coming from the city. So that was the first item. Secondly, we communicated and Commissioner and Lewdick-Lewandowski was very clear that this is a hub. This is the first line of defense. When a storm is coming both to prep for it. That is not elevated. It was damaged during Sandy. So it is eligible. Right now, they're operating out

of temporary trailers, and if a storm is coming they have to move all their vehicles further away which reduces their ability to do storm prep. So this hub, transit—this hub would take care of not only the Rockaway but 130 other sites in a peninsula. It is vital to the operations. The boots on the ground. The same as having a precinct in the neighborhood. It's the same as having this. You don't want to just have police deployed in other areas. You need that location on site. So we see this vitally important to resiliency with boots on the ground, where they would have their operations in an elevated structure that would not get flooded. The last time it was flooded and hurt the ability for a storm recovery. So we agreed not to put the full amount forward. It's only partial funding, and so—and we also included seven items in total. We heard the community and so we made sure that it was evenly distributed throughout the peninsula.

COUNCIL MEMBER ULRICH: That's great.

With respect to the Capital Budget process, you know, one of the frustrating things for us to deal with as elected officials is that we have a limited amount of discretionary money. You have scarce resources of

your own that you have to distribute throughout the city. One of the concerns is the cost of these capital projects that, you know, we ask Parks Department, hey how much would it cost to fix this ball field or this playground or this, you know, tennis court or whatever the project happens to be and not only in Rockaway. You know so many of my constituents who's Forest Park and--and so many playgrounds and park spaces between, and the costs are just so high, and then we hear--and I don't know if this is actually true because I'm not a member of the committee, but that a third of that cost actually goes to the--architectural, internal costs of the Parks Department, the fixed costs. Is that--so if the project is \$1-1/2 million, does the actual construction only cost a million dollars, and 500,000 is going to Parks? Can you clarify that for me?

COMMISSIONER SILVER: Let me clarify.

There are two separate questions. So let me first go on the costs, and second we'll go on our projects either on in-house or with consultants, which is what you're referring to. In terms of the cost we share your concern. We put out competitive bid and this what the market is telling us it would cost, and

we're doing everything we can by standardizing our designs to help bring costs down, but even the New York Building Congress stated in their Annual analysis they're seeing prices going up 4% in 2016 and they expect it to be the same again. And to quote them they said that this means a stretched labor force, increased use of overtime and an ability for contractors to pick and choose which projects they pursue is causing an increase. This is something we do not control. We're doing our best with estimating software with doing custom-non-customized design and having more templates to help bring the cost down. We're still getting the higher bids. So it's something that we're hear to any ideas, but it's the nature of where we are in the market. In terms of what you were mentioning about the cost, what happens when we recommend consultants to do design on some of our projects these the 10/10/10, as you mentioned. Ten percent of the project cost is charged for design. Ten percent of the project is charged for construction supervision, and the ten percent is contingency. So it's not 30%. When we use consultants it's that 10% I mentioned, that we pay them for design and another ten percent

for construction supervision. So that is—is not a third of the budget? That—that part is not correct.

COUNCIL MEMBER ULRICH: You know, so many Council Members now participate in or use participatory budgeting in their district to engage their constituents to get ideas about what they'd like to see with respect to parks and libraries and DOT, and I think that some of the feedback I've heard from many of my colleagues is that Parks has been less than flexible with respect to the type of projects that you would allow in the participatory budget process. My office for instance Robbie who works for me submitted 14 projects, ideas that we got from people who serve on the community board and on the steering committee, and 13 out of the 14 were rejected by Parks. I mean clearly 14 is more than just a handful and 13 out 14 were just flat out rejected by the capital folks at the Parks Department and I would ask that maybe you take a look at internally their approval process or their willingness to accept certain capital projects that might be included in the PB process.

COMMISSIONER SILVER: Well, we'll certainly take a look at it. I know that when we knew

the process was starting, we wanted to make sure that what was capitally eligible and in projects that fit within with the park was discussed up front, so we'll certainly circle back and have a conversation with staff about that.

COUNCIL MEMBER ULRICH: Several years ago we funded and--and approved and allowed a handful of projects in Broad Channel and in Rockaway, and then we found out that that was not that the actual cost of those projects, and I'm--I'm now in the third year and I'm going to be funding some of those projects. So, I--I would--I would--I would almost appreciate it more if Parks said no it's going to cost a million and a half instead of \$500,000 or \$800,000 because then the--the community says well, we voted on this three years. How come we haven't seen a shove in the ground yet? When is it going to start? How come it costs all this money? Nobody told us this. So it's not that I was being duplicitous or that you were even being duplicitous. I just think that we have to put a lot more thought and--and consideration into how some of these projects are planned, designed, funded. Are they going out to an outside consultant? Are they going to be done in house? I don't know, but

that's something that I think we need to work on.

Lastly, Chair, Rockaway is undergoing a tremendous renaissance. You've been out there many, many times. I've seen you personally even on days when there's, you know, no events. You just pop in and we appreciate that, and we have a--a very dynamic Parks Administrator in Portia Dam for what--she's doing a phenomenal job out there. You should know that, but we have tens and tens of thousands of additional people coming to our beaches, and we're grateful for that, but we need more staffing especially on the weekends. When the hipsters invade, they come in from Brooklyn and they come into my district [cheers] or from--

CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: [interposing] Hey, hey, hey, hey.

COUNCIL MEMBER ULRICH: --or from the Bronx. [background comments] When the Hipster comes from the Bronx--Oh, he--he left. I guess he got him back. Oh, there he is. He's over there, but when they come from other boroughs, other parts of Queens and they want to enjoy the beach, you know, the garbage is piling up on the beach on certain days, the--you know the--I think that the lifeguard hours

need to be looked at. This is a conversation that Liam and I have had for a number of years. We need more staffing. We need more staffing in the—in the beach season in the Rockaways. That's my plea.

COMMISSIONER SILVER: Well, thank you for calling me a Hipster because it's one of my favorite [laughter] locations where I could run five miles continuously and get a nice breeze. So you know, we had a 500 peak season staff last year, and quite a few went out to the Rockaway. I actually did a detail of cleaning all the cans on hot August day. So we'll certainly look into that, but we purposely are deploying more weekend service particularly at our beaches to make sure we keep up with the demand of some of the trash that's collecting, but I'll certainly check with staff, but I've been there a number of times. I haven't seen that, but maybe it was a day I was not there, but we value this incredible asset, and you're right, it is a beautiful place, and more and more people are coming.

COUNCIL MEMBER ULRICH: Commissioner, thank you. Chairman, thank you again.

CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: Thank you, Council Member Ulrich. So for those Hipsters who are

planning their summer beach schedule, can you clarify whether there's money in the budget for extension of the Rockaway Bar-Rockaway Beach and other beaches and pools beyond Labor Day by one week?

COMMISSIONER SILVER: It is not in this budget, but I will defer to Commissioner Kavanagh about some of the numbers that we experienced at the tail end of the--the period of time where the beach was extended, but there's currently not in this budget.

CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: Okay, so you're-- you're going to tell us that it wasn't well used last year, is that right?

COMMISSIONER SILVER: He's just going to give you the numbers. [laughs]

COMMISSIONER KAVANAGH: In comparison to 2015, there was a marked in beach attendance in the extended week 2016. It was approximately 263,000 in 2015 and over 400,000 in 2016. So there was an increase there. For the first year we extended the-- the pool season. There were about 50,000 users in the pools during the seven-day extension. We don't have a basis for comparison in the prior year because this is the first time the pools were extended, but

looking back to the prior week in 2016, the week before Labor Day, we had about 90,000 attendees at the pools during that week as opposed to 50,000 in the extended week. So, it's—it's very much, you know, weather dependent in 2015. As you may recall, you know, we had cooler, rainier weather on the weekend with that extension. This year we—we didn't have such a drastic change in weather, and I'm sure that helped to account for the increase that we saw year over year at the beaches.

CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: [off mic] It is [on mic] dependent--it's weather dependent. It also depends on when the school calendar falls. There can be extra days after Labor Day that are—that are still school holidays, but I—I would caution you—it seems like where you might have been heading is to a statement that use at the beaches just—justifies the extension, but not use at the pools. Is that—is that where you were heading?

COMMISSIONER KAVANAGH: I didn't make such a statement, but--

CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: Okay, good.

COMMISSIONER KAVANAGH: --I think the jury is still out on that, but--

2 CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: Okay, good.

3 COMMISSIONER KAVANAGH: --I think the
4 jury is still out on that--

5 CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: [interposing] Okay.

6 COMMISSIONER KAVANAGH: --but the numbers
7 that we saw at the pools were--were certainly less
8 than at the end of August, which is traditionally a
9 slower time period, and I don't think we know enough
10 about whether or not it's going to grow in coming
11 years.

12 CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: Right.

13 COMMISSIONER KAVANAGH: And I--I just need
14 to say that, you know, we are always concerned about
15 having the--the appropriate number of lifeguards to
16 safely provide swimming especially at the beaches.
17 At the pools, we're able to, you know, cordon off
18 areas, and limit use. At the beaches it's much more
19 difficult and while our lifeguards have done a great
20 done during both extensions, many of them have
21 commitments outside of their--their work with us
22 during summer. So we're not--

23 CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: [interposing] Right.

24

25

COMMISSIONER KAVANAGH: --always able to predict exactly how many staff we're going to have to supervise this.

CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: Well, look, there's a equity issue that we've spoken about in the past between pool use and beach use and the reason why we want the season extended for both is it's a question of fairness, and while the Hipsters flock to the beaches in Rockaway and elsewhere, two-thirds of the users in our city's pools are people of color and generally from the surrounding neighborhoods and they--they tend to be located in communities of color, and there's a similar pattern in the lifeguard force whereas the lifeguards and the pools are more likely to be men and women of color and more likely to be from the neighborhood, and it's really an inverse of that at--at the beaches. So we've been advocates for extension of both of these wonderful resources, and we were grateful for the inclusion in the budget last year for the extra week, and certainly disappointed that it's not in this year's budget, and we'll be pushing very, very hard for that in the negotiations in the months ahead. I want to acknowledge we've been joined by our colleague Council Member Johnson,

and I want to queue our Majority Leader Jimmy Van Bramer for a question. He'll be followed by Council Member Mealy and then Council Member Johnson.

COUNCIL MEMBER VAN BRAMER: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. Commissioner, I wanted to follow up on a conversation with your Chief of Staff yesterday just because I think it's important that these things be on the record. In relation to Queensbridge Park and the Park House project, which is horrifically delayed, and which we're terribly unhappy about. Now, I have great respect for your Chief of Staff who we've done a great deal of work with over the years and yourself, but I just wonder if—if you can speak to where we're at now, when the people of Queens Bridge can expect that project to be done. And—also more globally, there was a discussion that what happened at Queensbridge Park with this park house, you've now made changes to the way you do these projects and so, therefore, we can expect far fewer kinds of nightmare scenarios like this going forward, and—and I would just like to hear you speak to that because what—the—the time frame that we now are looking as I understand it for completion of Queensbridge is—is—is a great—great

distance from when we thought we were going to have the Park House done and, you know, all jokes aside about—about hipsters going onto the Rockaway, which is great. There aren't any Hipsters going to Queensbridge Park, but the people who do go the Queensbridge Park are my constituents who live in the Queensbridge Houses and the Ravenswood Houses, and they deserve a—an first rate park. We've done some great work there, as you and I both know, but—but this one is—is not a success story. So maybe you can talk a little bit about where is that now, and when the Parks Department believes it will deliver the Queensbridge Park Park House and then more globally the changes that have been made that we—your staff and I assume your self, of course, to have more confidence going forward that what happened there won't be happening any more.

COMMISSIONER SILVER: Well, to understand specifically, I understand you met with at least the staff that updated you, my Chief of Staff, and I believe it's close to going into procurement. Procurement has a sliding scale 7 to 12 months. Of course, we try to push it to be at the shorter end, and the construction is anywhere between 12 to 18

months, but again, we've—I testified earlier that we're now seeing huge savings at least about three months on the construction side. So the news is not good, but it could at least be a couple of years before it's completed. I did call you after you expressed your displeasure, and we did bring it up at one of our critical meetings where we discussed projects that are delayed, and that answers the second part of your question. We now on a monthly basis have a meeting where if projects are challenged going forward, if there are issues I need to know about, we discuss it right away before the delays start to pile up. And I make sure that the council member is notified, that we understand the nature of the problem. If there are at any given time eight reasons why a project is delayed, but I also inherited a lot of projects that are were already in the pipeline before I got here. This was one of them, and many of them had experienced delays in the past. So this meeting is important. So at any given time we're going over five to seven projects, and I'm trying to figure out how to make it move forward or to deal with some of the issues that are out of our control that we have to share with the—either the

borough president or the council member. So this is a vital meeting. We call it red zone, and it's something that we sit down and figure out what's going wrong, and what can we do to make this project move forward or deliver the not so pleasant news that there's an issue that's just out of our control. The contractor defaulted or an unsuccessful bid. There could be a variety of reasons why a project gets delay, but at least we're seeing that less and less going forward.

COUNCIL MEMBER VAN BRAMER: So as soon as I mentioned it to you at the last Parks Committee meeting and it went into Red Zone I take it or it was--

COMMISSIONER SILVER: [interposing] But more for an update because you wanted me to get more familiar with what was going on. So it was brought there really to talk about what has transpired with this particular project, and so that's where staff was showing me exactly what had happened along the way, and there was a series of unfortunate events that caused it to be delayed. So at least I was more knowledgeable about what had transpired. I think

this one dated back to 2013 I believe. Yeah, about 2013.

COUNCIL MEMBER VAN BRAMER: Right. So I— I guess my question is the fact that it—it has now come to your attention and—and is it—is it—has it changed anything in terms of if it gets into the red zone discussion or meeting then has—has that resulted in the Queensbridge Park Park House project moving any more quickly?

COMMISSIONER SILVER: Right now with this moving toward procurement that is the process I have the least control over. I think the unfortunate events that happened, happened prior to procurement. You know, clearly we're trying to work through procurement to have it on the seven-month side not the twelve-month side, and that is something that staff is going to push working with all the irrelevant from law to MOCS to OMB to make sure it moves through the process. We've been getting great cooperation from all entities, and then for construction we want to make sure that we have a resident engineer, but make sure it's done safety, but is done as quickly as possible.

2 COUNCIL MEMBER VAN BRAMER: So, it's-it's
3 March and we believe we're going into procurement,
4 and I was told that we can expect construction to
5 start in early 2018. Is that something you feel
6 comfortable with?

7 COMMISSIONER SILVER: Yes.

8 COUNCIL MEMBER VAN BRAMER: And that we
9 would have the Park House completed in-in-in 2019.

10 COMMISSIONER SILVER: Correct.

11 COUNCIL MEMBER VAN BRAMER: And-and it
12 maybe an 18-month period, right. So we could
13 conceivably have the Park House in the summer of
14 2019.

15 COMMISSIONER SILVER: Correct.

16 COUNCIL MEMBER VAN BRAMER: So I just
17 wanted to have that on the record. We're going to
18 hold you to it--

19 COMMISSIONER SILVER: I know you will.

20 COUNCIL MEMBER VAN BRAMER: --and, you
21 know, I know you know how important this is, and-and
22 the good people of Queensbridge deserve nothing but
23 the very best, and that's why we have put so much
24 money into Queensbridge Park, and have-have really
25 helped transform that form. This is an important

piece of that. I think you know that, and the sooner that an abandoned park house gets torn down and we build a beautiful new state-of-the-art structure, is—is for me a sign to the children of Queensbridge and—and all of the people of Queensbridge that the city understands and values that park because the children shouldn't be playing baseball in the Summer Little League that I sponsor in the shadow of an abandoned park house. I don't like what that says to those children. I know you don't like that either. So the sooner we tear down that building and—and show the images that I've seen of the amazing structure that's going to go up in—in it's place, and I want to share those images with the people of the district because it's—it's maybe the nicest park house I've ever seen you all—you all designed. We want that in Queensbridge Park as soon as possible.

COMMISSIONER SILVER: Understood.

COUNCIL MEMBER VAN BRAMER: Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: Thank you, Mr.

Majority Leader and Council member Mealy.

COUNCIL MEMBER MEALY: [off mic] Hello, Commissioner and your staff, and to our former Jeffrey, then a new one Marty Maher. I want to say

thank you for all that you have done in Brooklyn and especially I could say at least about 90% of all our parks are done, but you were talking about the competitive bid contracts those comfort stations. Have you all tried any other contractor in regards to these comfort stations? But I remember we just did a—I could say about a \$10 million park, Imagination Playground, the second in the world in Brownsville, and here it is the architects—I know I asked for a comfort station, but it's not there. And now we have this state-of-the-art park, and now I have to put \$2 million in for just the comfort station. So I'm saying how can we do a little better with these comfort stations? That's a lot of the Capital Budget that we could be putting into schools when—if we get a competitive bid if they say a comfort station is \$800,000 or \$1 million, that's a good, you know, deduction from \$2 million. So have you all thought about going to a different contractor? I know it's an open bid, but maybe the—the same person is getting the same bid, and you know Parks has a little issue with the same people getting the same contracts. Have you ever tried a new contractor some way or

another, or someone has to do a lower bid that this one contractor.

COMMISSIONER SILVER: We put it out and we will accept the lowest responsible bidder. I share your concern. When I got here it was under \$2 million. It is now approaching \$3 million, and--

COUNCIL MEMBER MEALY: [interposing]
That's the problem.

COMMISSIONER SILVER: And as I stated earlier, we met with the--the industry. They recognized prices are going up across the board here in New York, and they expect it to continue. We are experimenting with one comfort station--

COUNCIL MEMBER MEALY: [interposing]
That's good.

COMMISSIONER SILVER: --in Staten Island where we have in-house staff doing it, and it's not building a new one, in-house renovation. We've even gone to standardizing all of our comfort stations to a template, and even with the template, we're experiencing different prices in different locations. So this is something that is out of our control. We are open to any and all suggestions, but what we've done is we've come with a standardized template. So

that wherever the comfort station goes we can compare one project to the other, and we sit down with the contractors, my staff, and sometimes evaluate what is pushing these prices to go so high? So, essentially, I can quote you what the Building Congress said, but it's a product of a very tight market, a desire for overtime. All these issues are pushing. It's really not on the material side. That doesn't change that much, but it's just in terms of just the demand for contractors here in New York. So going out to others we do that now. We put it out to bid, and we want more to bid so we can get a very good price.

COUNCIL MEMBER MEALY: Thank you. I really thank you. At least we doing something different. If you keep doing the same thing and getting the same results, I thank you. At least a template now that's a start. We're trying something different. So I really appreciate that, Commissioner and I was thinking that in regards to the OMB, OMB the budget was announced last month. Has the department made any additional budget requests from the Office of Management and Budgment-Budget?

COMMISSIONER SILVER: Well--

COUNCIL MEMBER MEALY: [interposing] And if you have--could you give me one of the requests you put in?

COMMISSIONER SILVER: Right. From the time we submit there's all-always ongoing conversations both about reductions as well as some other new needs. Those conversations are ongoing, and there's nothing I could really share at this time because we're just beginning those conversations now.

COUNCIL MEMBER MEALY: Okay, that's good to know, and have you ever [siren] asked for a line item of playground associates? My colleague he just asked that. He needs more staff in the parks. Playground associates I put in out of my discretionary funds--I put in just that my parks could stay clean--

COMMISSIONER SILVER: [interposing] Right.

COUNCIL MEMBER MEALY: --every summer. I do concerts out of my own pocket and bring it (sic) every year. But in my discretion I still have to put extra money in that we can have people to make sure that our parks stay clean, and it's not a problem and

it's giving employment. So have you ever thought about doing a-asking the city for a line item--

COMMISSIONER SILVER: [interposing]
Right.

COUNCIL MEMBER MEALY: --a play associate, a playground associate.

COMMISSIONER SILVER: [interposing] We-we did last year. We got 500 of peak seasonal staff that supplemented our parks in the past.

COUNCIL MEMBER MEALY: How many hours do they get?

COMMISSIONER SILVER: The work a regular work hour. It's a 35-hour week.

COUNCIL MEMBER MEALY: [interposing]
Because I believe we've passed--

COMMISSIONER SILVER: Yes.

COUNCIL MEMBER MEALY: We passed it that they stay a little longer than just the summer.

COMMISSIONER SILVER: Summer are they-are they 40 hours a week? They're 40 hours.

COUNCIL MEMBER MEALY: [interposing]
Forty hours.

COMMISSIONER SILVER: I'm sorry.
Correct, they're 40 hours, and with that peak

seasonal we're able to keep some of our comfort stations open longer. We also supplemented what we call--what happens is that staff has stepped up to pools and beaches, are--are supervisors and now we're able to back-backfill so we kept an even level of staffing in a lot of our parks. But also, most of the smaller parks--I'm really referring to a larger park or a smaller park. The smaller parks are really cleaned by mobile crews. In terms of fixed posts those are really for some of the larger parks. So with that seasonal staffing, we're able to provide 500 and that was baselined. So they'll be coming in again, and we're working out how they're going to be deployed right now throughout our parks. So they--they are playground associates specific to a park--

COUNCIL MEMBER MEALY: [interposing] Yes.

COMMISSIONER SILVER: --that is staying there. That is something--

COUNCIL MEMBER MEALY: [interposing] That you just did 500.

COMMISSIONER SILVER: Last year it was baselined so it's every year.

2 COUNCIL MEMBER MEALY: Baselined. Okay
3 that's good. Could you give me a breakdown of how
4 many you hire?

5 COMMISSIONER SILVER: We're in the
6 process of hiring now since they are peak seasonal.

7 COUNCIL MEMBER MEALY: [interposing]
8 Could you--

9 COMMISSIONER SILVER: So we're in the
10 process of hiring--Commissioner Kavanagh could
11 probably tell you that.

12 COUNCIL MEMBER MEALY: No, I'm talking
13 about and permanent staff because with the playground
14 associates this body had put in legislation that
15 instead of just like WEP workers having them just for
16 the summer, it should be a path to employment. So I
17 was just wondering--

18 COMMISSIONER SILVER: [interposing]
19 Right.

20 COUNCIL MEMBER MEALY: --have you all
21 practiced that as of yet?

22 COMMISSIONER SILVER: In terms of the job
23 training participants, it is a path. They both have--

24 -

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2 COUNCIL MEMBER MEALY: [interposing] The
3 pathway to a job?

4 COMMISSIONER SILVER: --both private as
5 well as public and New York City Parks jobs. I
6 believe the number [background comments]

7 COMMISSIONER KAVANAGH: I think we placed
8 about 700--

9 COMMISSIONER SILVER: [interposing] 700.

10 COMMISSIONER KAVANAGH: --participants in
11 the job training program into jobs. More so of them
12 in the private sector, but 100--

13 COUNCIL MEMBER MEALY: [interposing] The
14 private sector?

15 COMMISSIONER KAVANAGH: --but about 130 I
16 think were hired by the Parks Department directly to
17 fill vacancies within our ranks.

18 COUNCIL MEMBER MEALY: That's good. So,
19 at a later date I would love to see the breakdown of
20 the WEP workers, how many have went to--

21 COMMISSIONER SILVER: Right. We--we just
22 can--we don't do the WEP workers any more. Now it's
23 just the job training participants.

24 COUNCIL MEMBER MEALY: [interposing]
25 Okay, for the jobs.

2 COMMISSIONER SILVER: So we phased out
3 the WEP. It's just right now the job training
4 participants are the public assistance recipients
5 that we work with.

6 CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: Alright.

7 COUNCIL MEMBER MEALY: I would love. I
8 have one more question. Since 2016, you did
9 summonses—summonses in the park. It's almost like
10 20,000. It went up.

11 COMMISSIONER SILVER: Right.

12 COUNCIL MEMBER MEALY: What kind of
13 summonses are—summonses that you're giving people in
14 the park that it—it went up so high and since 2015 to
15 2016.

16 COMMISSIONER SILVER: I don't have the
17 actual breakdowns, but typically, we give summonses
18 for enforcing park rules. This is not related to
19 serious crimes per se, but we are on track to
20 probably do about the same this year, but these are
21 just for the quality of life offenses of that—
22 breaking the park rules. We first educate. Our first
23 goal of our Parks Enforcement Patrol is to educate
24 the public. If a rule is being broken, we request
25

compliance. If there's non-compliance, then a summons is issued.

COUNCIL MEMBER MEALY: See, and that's where I'm—I can't understand a decrease of 36% when compared to 10,380 summonses was issued during the same period of Fiscal 2016. However, the DPR keeps the current place. They might nearly—reach nearly 20,000 in 2016, 15 and 16. So I'm seeing respectfully something has changed from 10,384 summonses to 20,000 summonses in the park.

COMMISSIONER SILVER: Right.

COUNCIL MEMBER MEALY: Some—is crime going that bad in the parks?

COMMISSIONER SILVER: It's not related to NYPD.

COUNCIL MEMBER MEALY: I'm trying to see if maybe it was contributed to now it's no smoking in the park?

COMMISSIONER SILVER: Right.

COUNCIL MEMBER MEALY: Could you give me something?

COMMISSIONER SILVER: Well, I think the—yes, NYPD are the ones who—

COUNCIL MEMBER MEALY: [interposing] But NYPD don't give the summonses. It's the Parks Department.

COMMISSIONER SILVER: No, you mentioned crime. You said is crime going up? NYPD is the one that handles crime. Our PEP officers are the ones that enforce park rules. So we were baselined with 67 additional PEP officers, and so again our--

COUNCIL MEMBER MEALY: [interposing] Is this the NYPD giving these summonses or the--?

COMMISSIONER SILVER: No.

CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: [interposing] Well, well let me--let me jump in. We--we're going to need to move on unfortunately Council Member, but we--we had spoke about this earlier and--but--but the fact is

COUNCIL MEMBER MEALY: I'm sorry, but I admit that I would love to know, which one?

CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: But the fact is that Parks Enforcement Officer are law enforcement personnel and they have arrest powers. They in many cases respond to life and death emergencies. They also enforce park rules. That's a big part of their portfolio, and we did clarify earlier that it's not just minor infractions that are of concern, but the

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2 number of felony crimes against persons in the parks
3 are also up year on year. So we—we use that as a
4 context for advocating for an increase in the PEP
5 officers.

6 COUNCIL MEMBER MEALY: The increased
7 summonses?

8 CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: Yes, but we—we do
9 need to move on only because the Commissioner has a
10 limited time, and we have other questions and I don't
11 want to lose him, but if you want to stick around for
12 a second round of questions, we'll be happy for that.
13 And I'm going to queue our colleague, Council Member
14 Johnson followed by Council Member Salamanca.

15 COUNCIL MEMBER MEALY: Thank you,
16 Commissioner.

17 COMMISSIONER SILVER: Thank you.

18 COUNCIL MEMBER JOHNSON: Good to see you,
19 Commissioner.

20 COMMISSIONER SILVER: Good to see you.

21 COUNCIL MEMBER JOHNSON: I always enjoy
22 working with you and your staff, especially your
23 Chief of Staff Margaret Nelson and the folks in the
24 Manhattan Borough Commissioner's Office that I get to
25 work with. With that being said, I have some tough

questions. I want to preface by being nice. I feel like it's like Ground Hog Day. I'm like the guy that steps in the puddle every morning over and over and again when it comes to Parks capital. I feel so frustrated, and I know, Commissioner that one thing that you have taken very seriously over the last three years, and I think you're very proud of, and I give you credit for is the change in the Parks capital process. I've heard you speak about that in this hearing today, but I just want to give you a few examples and we don't need to go through and talk because it's—there are individual projects and each project has a unique situation, but I just want to—I feel like I have one day a year to vent about this. So give me my two minutes to vent. Okay.

COMMISSIONER SILVER: That's—that's what I'm here for.

COUNCIL MEMBER JOHNSON: So here we go—here we go. So, I funded a fence for a garden almost three years ago. It's like \$150,000, whatever the number is. A year later I'm told the fence is actually more expensive. It's about \$100,000 more expensive, Jane Street Garden, and I said okay, I'll put it in. The most expensive fence I've ever heard

of in my entire life. George V. the designer, I mean he builds good fences. I put the extra money in. Three years later still no fence. I understand procurement, bid issues. Three years no—a tiny garden. That to me says there's something broken, that there's something majorly broken that after three years a fence, you can't get a fence put in. And so as part of the multi-site contract, I give money towards Jackson Square Fountain repairs. Basic—I mean nothing complicated here. The Conservancy every six months coming to me when is the fountain being upgraded When's the found? Three years the found is not fixed. So I harass your staff because my constituents harass me and saying you keep telling us it's going to get done. It doesn't get done. That's very—you know, I've talked to your staff about it. We don't have to go into the situation. It just speaks to me that there is something broken if that's going on. There's really no excuse for it. Okay, I put money into Downing Street Playground. I put money into Father Fagan Park. I put money into—I can name a bunch of parks, and then I'm told by the Borough Commissioner's office, "Sorry, Father Fagan is—needs more money and

Matthews Palmer needs more money. So we have to take the hundreds of thousands of dollars you put into Downing and we need to move it to two other parks to cover the cost overruns that are associated. So forget about all that time, money, touring effort you put into Downing Street. Out the window because of cost overruns. I'm not trying to beat up on you because as you said, there are cost overruns, which you don't have control over, and if bids don't come in properly, you don't have control over that either. But it's extraordinarily frustrating that you spent time, energy, effort and this happens. So, I'm at the point now where I say to myself I don't even want to give want to give capital any more to Parks. I-I just don't want to do it. It's not-it's not worth the frustration on my part to give capital and then have my constituents upset with me and for me to bother your staff members. I feel bad bugging them honestly. I feel calling them up and bugging them. I don't enjoy it. I feel like I'm being a pest. That's my rant on Parks capital, and I just-I know you've spend an enormous of time and you're improved it in many ways, but I just ask that it be improved further. I don't know how that is. You're the

expert. I'm very frustrated. I'm grateful, but I'm frustrated. So I had to say that.

COMMISSIONER SILVER: I-I share your frustration and the answer is yes. You know, we're constantly looking at ways we could improve the process, and when it--sometimes with procurement we get surprises where we don't get a successful bid. That could delay things up to six months, but you're correct. We're working now with MOCS. They will be releasing something called Passport, which will allow the whole Vindex process to be online, and we're working with the Administration to constantly see other ways we can improve the process. Design, I'm pleased to say we've now shaved two months off the process on construction, three months off the process, but procurement is one that we're working out with MOCS to see how we can improve the process to moves things forward. As Helen Rosenthal with Council Member Cohen co-sponsored a bill to see if they could also streamline the--the procurement process, and so we continue to look at ways of doing it because we all have good relationships with our Council Members. This is one where I look in their eyes, and I know they're disappointed because they're

2 constituents are sharing the same concern, and I want
3 those completed as quickly as possible as well.

4 COUNCIL MEMBER JOHNSON: Thank you,
5 Commissioner.

6 CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: So, so in-in a
7 hearing that we held on the capital process about a
8 month ago, we explored in depth this tension between
9 storage you're hearing from the front lines, from
10 Council Members about projects, which are taking
11 three, four, fix more years, and-and the-the good
12 work that we know you're doing behind the scenes to
13 hammer out efficiencies, and one of the things that
14 emerged is that the main metric you're using to
15 measure your on-time success is only focused on the
16 construction stage. Now, from the perspective of our
17 constituents and, therefore, our own perspective,
18 it's very simple. The day the funding is announced
19 is when the clock start tipping in-ticking in the
20 public mind, and the day that the ribbon is cut is
21 when the clock stops ticking right. So if that's
22 seven years, and we extracted a little benefit in the
23 construction period of that while also having big
24 delays in procurement and design and even the period
25 of pre-procurement or pre-design then it's still a

loss for the community. So when you cited a 54-day gain in the time table of capital projects, were you referring to an overall gain in this process from funding to completion or were you just looking again at the construction stage.

COMMISSIONER SILVER: So, no, we're looking at--there are three stages. The ones that we can influence the most as Parks is design. Design there was 54 or 55-day savings roughly two months from design. Procurement we're working very hard, but that's the one we control the least and construction there's been on average a three-month savings, 99 days. So it's the two months on design, the three months on construction because I gave a range of anywhere between four to six months, and this we're able to shave some time off procurement. So that is what now we're seeing from the time I came on board tracking from 2014.

CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: I want to drill down on that more in a minute. I know Council Member Johnson has a follow up and has to leave. I'll--I'll just make the point that there are--there are--there really are four phases because they're pre-designed--designed procurement construction, and the public

doesn't care what agency has jurisdiction over any phase, and we understand that some are out of your control. And I know that pre-design has never been part of your calculus, but that is—I think your goal is for that to be a year only, which means in practice it's often longer. So, it's—it's a trivial addition to the total timeline.

COMMISSIONER SILVER: There isn't really pre-design. When we hold a public meeting that is when the process--

CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: [interposing] But in—in the public's mind when Council Member Salamanca or Johnson or Mealy or I secure funding for a park, that's when it's in the press, right. That's when the public becomes aware of it, and if it's 18 months before the first design meeting, you know, that's part of—

COMMISSIONER SILVER: Yeah.

CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: --that's part of the—the delay that we're experiencing, right?

COMMISSIONER SILVER: Well, last year we got 140 projects. All cannot start at the same time. It's like 140 plans all coming at once.

CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: Understood.

2 COMMISSIONER SILVER: What we do is we're
3 committed to have those projects within that fiscal
4 year assigned as staff become available. So you are
5 correct. There is some time for us to assign it to a
6 consultant and that could in some cases nine months
7 or up to a year.

8 CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: Okay, we'll follow
9 up on that in a second. Back to Council Member
10 Johnson.

11 COUNCIL MEMBER JOHNSON: Okay. [coughs]
12 Quickly, I-I put money in the budget to fill all the
13 tree pits in my district. I can't get a commitment
14 on when that's going to get done. I gave-I gave
15 enough money to fill every empty tree pit in my
16 district, and it would be helpful to understand when
17 the next planting season is so that I could have all
18 those tree pits filled. Who can make that commitment
19 to me of when that will happen?

20 COMMISSIONER KAVANAGH: Council Member,
21 I-I-the tree planning season actually began just
22 recently. I can't guarantee you that we will
23 complete them all this spring, but I will guarantee
24 you that every viable tree pit in your district

that's funded for planting will be planted by the end of this fall.

COUNCIL MEMBER JOHNSON: By end of this fall all of them?

COMMISSIONER KAVANAGH: Yes.

COUNCIL MEMBER JOHNSON: Manhattan Borough office did you hear that when I call you and harass you. By the end of this fall.

COMMISSIONER KAVANAGH: Thank you.

[laughs]

COUNCIL MEMBER JOHNSON: Commissioner Kavanagh said so. Okay, lastly the High Line seven million annual visitors, one of the biggest tourist attractions in New York City now, almost a decade old at this point. A huge success for the city of New York. Chair Levine has been a huge supporter and advocate for the park and I really appreciate his support. The park is now having some capital issues. You know, some of the stuff that was brand new back when it opened now needs help. They, of course, have raised a ton of money over the years for their own capital expenses. They've worked with EDC on some projects. You all have been generous in PEP Officers and other ways supportive of them. I really

1 appreciate that, but their capital needs over the
2 next five years are significant. I am allocating
3 over \$600,000, which is a lot for me, in capital
4 money to help them with some very unsexy things, but
5 things that are critically important to the
6 maintenance of the park. Is the Parks Department
7 going to put money up and help the High Line because
8 of the significance of the park?

10 COMMISSIONER SILVER: Well, I'll first-I
11 serve on the-the board--

12 COUNCIL MEMBER JOHNSON: Yes.

13 COMMISSIONER SILVER: --and I-I'm going
14 to have a conversation with both the board and both
15 the CEO, Robert Hannan. I'm not familiar about some
16 of the capital needs being asked for so I'll
17 certainly circle back, but there is some obligation
18 from the city. It is a New York City Park, but I
19 can't say exactly what our capital commitment would
20 be, but we do have responsibility since it's a city
21 park. But I serve on the Board and I know they are
22 looking at funding the last piece of the park, the
23 last strand or whatever they are referring to.

24 COUNCIL MEMBER JOHNSON: Section 3s.
25

COMMISSIONER KAVANAGH: Yes, but beyond that it has been brought to my attention about some of the capital requests.

COUNCIL MEMBER JOHNSON: Great. I'd love to chat with you about that and then lastly I want to say your staff has done a phenomenal job on 20th Street Park. You were there to cut the ribbon. The design team has done a great job, the community process, the charrette, the outreach. Everything has been really, really, really well done. I am really grateful because that has been a major for me as you know, for the last three years, and—and—and I think that that project if it gets done on time has really spoken to I think the amazing work that the Parks Department does in making neighborhoods in New York City feel included in the process, clearly communicating with folks about what's happening and what's going to happen, and it's a process that's made me feel really good about your agency and department, and I want to thank you for that.

COMMISSIONER KAVANAGH: You're welcome. I enjoyed every time I spent there. It's a very enthusiastic community.

COUNCIL MEMBER JOHNSON: Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: Thank you Council Member Johnson. You know the-the Bloomberg Administration, which was really great on investment of capital to create new parks including the High Line, and much to its credit had a proposition that they would invest in capital, but they would put not a penny in for expenses, which is done in a number of parks, the high line being one of them. Now they're faced with an onslaught of seven million users a year, and but that-that is a lot of trampling for a park that's not getting virtually any public support on the expense side except I guess for PEP officers. So I would argue that it's time to open-open the conversation of can we help them manage this-this just astoundingly high rate of usage. Otherwise, the park is really going to suffer and it's not good for anybody. Alright, we're going to pass it off to my colleague Council Member Salamanca from the Bronx.

COUNCIL MEMBER SALAMANCA: Well, thank you. [applause] Thank you, Mr. Chair.

CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: You've got a one-person fan club in the back there. [laughter]

COUNCIL MEMBER SALAMANCA: [coughs] Thank you all. Welcome--

2 CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: [interposing] Was
3 that your wife, Council Member?

4 COUNCIL MEMBER SALAMANCA: No, no. Full
5 disclosure. My wife does love the parks but no, it's
6 not. Commissioner, welcome. I have a few questions.
7 I want to talk a little bit about Orchard Beach.
8 Orchard Beach has been ignored for years. You know,
9 it's the Bronx Street area (sic). This is where
10 families in my council district they cannot afford to
11 on vacation so they go to Orchard Beach. There was--
12 the Bronx Delegation put in a request that was the
13 number one request last year, and we go zero dollars.
14 I know that the Governor has made a commitment, and
15 the Mayor has made a commitment. I just want to talk
16 a little bit about what's happening, what's the
17 timeline? When will work begin in Orchard Beach?

18 COMMISSIONER SILVER: Well, right now, the
19 project is not fully funded. There is a commitment
20 right now of about \$40 million. The project can cost
21 \$45 to \$50 million. So I stated earlier that we're
22 going to sit down and take a look to see exactly what
23 work could be done for a lesser amount. We don't
24 want to start scaling back. There was a proposal
25 from a consultant about how much it would cost to

full restore it, but right now with the \$10 million from the Borough President and the Delegation, \$20 million from the Mayor and then a commitment for \$10 million from the Governor gets us to \$40. There is still shortfall.

CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: [interposing] But I'm sorry, sorry to interrupt, but--but Commissioner was there not a \$10 million commitment from Assembly Speaker Carl Heastie on top of what you cited that would get us--

COMMISSIONER SILVER: There is, there is.

CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: That doesn't get us to \$50?

MATT DRURY: Yeah, just to clarify. We're in conversations with the State and the Assembly to kind of clarify the exact details there. I mean I-I believe there is not as public a commitment as the Governor made in terms of his \$10 million, but there are conversations happening about an additional \$10 million, that I believe are coming from the Assembly, but those details are still be worked out.

CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: Okay, but if that--if that \$10 million is there and--and I understand that

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2 it is. I think the Council Member did as well. Does
3 that get us to at least the starting line on you are
4 able to start that? (sic)

5 COMMISSIONER SILVER: Yes, if it is fully
6 funded for what we anticipate then the answer is yes.
7 We just cannot start a project unless it is fully
8 funded.

9 CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: Understood. Okay,
10 continue.

11 COUNCIL MEMBER SALAMANCA: And what's the
12 total cost of the project?

13 COMMISSIONER SILVER: About \$50 million.

14 COUNCIL MEMBER SALAMANCA: \$50 million?

15 COMMISSIONER SILVER: 50, 5-0.

16 CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: For--for the bath
17 house--

18 COMMISSIONER SILVER: Okay.

19 CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: --but the broader
20 grounds we're talking more over a \$100, correct?

21 COMMISSIONER SILVER: Correct.

22 CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: But you could start
23 the bath house if you had 50 in place.

24 COMMISSIONER SILVER: Correct

25

COUNCIL MEMBER SALAMANCA: Alright, so we're eager to get this started. I guess this is an ongoing conversation that we'll have. Barretto Point Park. When Sandy hit the pier, there was structure damage done to the pier. Many years have gone by. We're still waiting, you know, to open up the pier. When will work begin? What's the status on this pier?

COMMISSIONER SILVER: I'll have to—I did a site visit and I know that it is in very poor shape with some of the piles. I'll have to get back to you. I'm not sure of the status unless [background comments] We'll get back to you on that one.

COUNCIL MEMBER SALAMANCA: Alright, my—my other question, you know, Commissioner I'm very happy in my Council District in terms of the CPI. There were five parks that were done, prior with Community Board 2. When I became Council Member I had a bigger district. Melrose we're opening up new parks that are under construction. I'm really satisfied with the work. I know work is being done, but I have concerns about enforcement. You know, for years even when I was District Manager I felt that the South Bronx was not getting its fair share of PEP officers

actually patrolling or parks. Now, with some of these parks under construction you're bringing new amenities. That means that we're going to get bigger crowds coming to the parks. There's going to be comfort stations. How many PEP officers are assigned to the Bronx in this Fiscal Year?

COMMISSIONER SILVER: It's—we're funding for 54 but we have right 38.

COUNCIL MEMBER SALAMANCA: So, you're funded for 54 and you have 38 at the moment. Now, are you hiring new—you're hiring new PEP Officers.

COMMISSIONER SILVER: Hiring and putting—always hiring putting them through Academy. The answer is yes.

COUNCIL MEMBER SALAMANCA: Alright and out of the 38, how many are actually working because I know that you have officers that are on leave, on maternity leave.

COMMISSIONER SILVER: [background comments] yes, we have in general of all the staff seven on leave, but that's among all those that are—that are active.

COUNCIL MEMBER SALAMANCA: And so the summer is coming, and I know that we see less of a

presence of PEP Officers in our local parks because they're patrolling the beaches. What--what remedy are you going to so that we can see more of a presence in--in the South Bronx.

COMMISSIONER SILVER: So to be clear, we have the 38. We're also supplemented by 542 Park Security Service. The majority of those you will see deployed to pools and beaches. So it allows the PEP officers to patrol the various parks in the city. So we don't often talk about that. We have 292 when fully staffed on the Parks Enforcement Patrol, but we have 542. Now, they don't have the same powers as a PEP Officer. They can't arrest, but still they do provide a presence on the pools and beaches to remind people to follow the park rules. So it doesn't really affect that number because we deploy those to pools and beaches.

COUNCIL MEMBER SALAMANCA: Alright, you know, Commissioner, you know, unfortunately in some of my parks we have individuals who do not know how to behave, you know, in parks. There's a lot of illegal activities. They use the comfort stations for drug use, alcohol use. Having more of a presence means a lot to us especially when, you know, most of

our parks have baseball fields and children. You know, we—we want them to—to enjoy their parks in a safe—and have a safe environment and PEP Officers bring that safe environment just—just to have them there.

COMMISSIONER SILVER: And I had mentioned earlier, but we work hand-in-hand with NYPD, and you can imagine with a force of 255 we do our best to educate the public and help enforce the park rules, but in support of what we do, we work very closely with NYPD to make sure that they patrol as well we patrol our parks. And I do have an answer for you on the Barretto Point Pier. It's at the Controller's Office for registration. So that is a good sign, which means that construction can start very soon.

COUNCIL MEMBER SALAMANCA: So once his office signs off, how soon will construction begin? Is there—

COMMISSIONER SILVER: Yeah, about a month.

COUNCIL MEMBER SALAMANCA: About a month?

COMMISSIONER SILVER: Yes.

COUNCIL MEMBER SALAMANCA: About a month from now. Alright, and then just finally I just want

to give a big shout-out to my Bronx Commissioner Iris Rodriguez. I think that's one of the best decisions that you've made [applause] by putting Iris in the Bronx ,and if Corey was here I would tell him, you know, Corey she could resolve your issues over there in Manhattan a well. Alright, well, thank you very much.

CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: Now, that's much more than a one-person fan club. We are going to go a second questions, which we have from Council Members Mealy and Cohen. I'm going to ask the sergeants to put us a three-minute clock for the second round because we are running up against the deadline for the Commissioner's time, and I want to make sure that we do not lose him. So Commissioner, Council Member Mealy. Not a commissioner yet. Maybe one day. You're on, please.

COUNCIL MEMBER MEALY: I just want to pass. I mean I will speak to them afterwards just to get the numbers of the summonses. We have to see where the up-increase of all these summonses are coming. So I'll speak to you afterwards, and I think you. I'm—I can say I've put all the shovels in the

ground, cut the ribbons in 90% of my district and I—I say I have to save something for somebody else to do.

COMMISSIONER SILVER: And you have--you had anchor park.

COUNCIL MEMBER MEALY: Betsy had an anchor park, but my last statement, Betsy had an anchor would be better as a dome. If we—that's the highest density of public housing and I have asked the Mayor previous three—I could say two mayor's now. If we're really talking about saving lives if we put a dome in there, we could get the next Olympics, individuals right there from Brownsville. And I have—we had started at one point. We had—I had put up \$10 million and tried to get the Assembly, the Senate and the State, but I feel if we could do it and do at our Aviator in Brooklyn, we can do it right there in Brownsville just as well at Betsy Head Park. It's big enough that we could have—to save lives in a dome right there at Betsy Head Park. So please that's my vision. It's always been my vision. I hope someone takes their fire torch and take it away, but I feel we really need a dome not just a park there and thank you, Chairman.

2 CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: Well, thank you
3 Council Mealy and Council Member Cohen.

4 COUNCIL MEMBER COHEN: Thank you very
5 much. I really just have one thing I just kind of
6 forgot. On-on CPI one of the things I guess I've
7 been a little concerned about is in the Eleventh
8 Council District-District there's been a tradition of
9 the Council Members funding capital projects in their
10 parks, and I just want you to keep in mind when
11 you're reviewing appropriate spending for CPI that
12 that should not be like, you know, our district
13 should not penalized. Community Board 8 and Community
14 Board 7 should not be penalized because Council
15 Members had had the ability to fund parks in their
16 district. So it's-it's a-it's a concern of mine
17 that-that there again that we're not missing out on--
18 Like I had a very good project that I recommended to
19 a playground to try to-for some help there, and I
20 would hope that that would again maybe it's not.

21 COMMISSIONER SILVER: There are several
22 factors, but the main one is the-the 20 year lack of
23 investment. So each you have another set that's
24 rolling into that 20-year cycle. But that was the
25 main criteria. We wanted to focus on those parks and

again it turned out to be 134. That's seen a little or no invest in 20 years. Very dense high poverty levels and potential for growth. So we use that criteria, but each year you have a certain list that pops up. So I'm sure sooner or later parks in your district may--may surface, but we want to be very fair and use a data driven approach. I understand some felt concern, but for 20 years not see investment for us was a trigger that we had to do some intervention.

COUNCIL MEMBER COHEN: Thank you.

COUNCIL MEMBER MEALY: You're the Chair.

COUNCIL MEMBER COHEN: Alright, we're going to thank the commissioner. Commissioner, we're to thank you for your testimony, and we're going to call the next panel. Well, hold it. Hold. [pause] Commissioner, can you hold just one second while we start to figure out--

COUNCIL MEMBER MEALY: We can ask some question? No. [laughter] [pause] Commissioner, would you mind being patient for just a minute or two.

COMMISSIONER SILVER: I don't mind.

2 COUNCIL MEMBER COHEN: Thank you very
3 much. At least you've been quite patient already
4 this morning. [laughs.] [pause]

5 COUNCIL MEMBER MEALY: The sense we have
6 on here—[pause]

7 COUNCIL MEMBER COHEN: Council Member, do
8 you have a question? Okay. [background comments]

9 CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: I figured you would
10 be grilling him for a very long time. Thank you all
11 for waiting. Okay, Commissioner, I know that you're
12 on a tight schedule so I'll and get through some—some
13 additional questions in an expeditious fashion. The
14 QueensWay, a wonderful project that I cited in my
15 opening statement. What is the status as far as the
16 Parks Department is concerned?

17 COMMISSIONER SILVER: We are certainly
18 having conversations with the QueensWay, and I do
19 know that we signed off on a letter authorizing them
20 to do some early design work. We are focused because
21 we have such a large system of making our old parks
22 new again, and right now that tends to be our focus,
23 but in the meantime I'm meeting again with the
24 QueensWay team that has a new leader as far as the
25 Trust for Public Land, but in terms of our focus

right now, is to make sure like the Anchor Parks Initiative we want to make those old parks new and focus there, but we're certainly open to having a conversation.

CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: Well, I'm with you on supporting our existing parks, but a project like this it just doesn't come along more than one in a generation because of the existence of the abandoned rail line, and usually when we talk about creating new parks, we stumble over the acquisition challenge, and the cost of it as we experienced spectacularly with Bushwick Inlet I'm very happy it was resolved, but here we have a new park proposal where the entire, every square of inch of it if I'm not mistaken the acquisition problem is solved So there's--there's--there's costs associated with the--the renovation, but not--not the acquisition. So time is not necessarily on our side because it currently is an abandoned property now, which it's probably unsafe. It's certainly unsightly. Are you--are you concerned about the current state of that--that property at the moment?

COMMISSIONER SILVER: I haven't had a full view. I've seen it on paper. So I don't know

all—I know it traverse parks in other neighborhoods, but as I stated that I'll be meeting with the QueensWay team soon, and we did sign a letter that authorized them to get a grant to start the early phases. So I'm eager to see some of the work that they're doing. I was just saying just for now we are focusing on making some of those older parks new, but I'm also open to see the QueensWay proposal and how it evolved since I left met with them with maybe two years ago.

CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: Well, I'll look forward to hearing your update after that meeting. I know that the cost of tree pruning has risen quite significantly, and the impact has meant that you can get to each tree less off. What is the—the now expected interval between tree prunings for street trees.

COMMISSIONER SILVER: I'll ask Commissioner Kavanagh to answer that question.

COMMISSIONER KAVANAGH: Council Member, we did see for the first time in many years a significant increase in the cost per tree pruning, and it did have a temporary impact on our ability to prune trees. Thankfully, the Mayor's Officer funded

that gap between what we part—we used to pay and what we're paying now. So we're still on a seven-year cycle, which is the—which is the good news.

CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: I didn't appreciate that and that is great indeed. Thank you. Alright, street stump removal. This is a real challenge particularly in the Outer Boroughs where the back log is quite considerable. What is the current backlog on tree stump removals?

COMMISSIONER KAVANAGH: The current backlog is about 20,000 stumps.

CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: Wow.

COMMISSIONER KAVANAGH: It's down significantly from what it was just a few years ago, however, and we are—we are making progress.

CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: And that is because you—you were able to put in a million dollars for—in last year's budget to reduce the backlog, right?

COMMISSIONER KAVANAGH: Yes, we had a baseline of \$2 million in mayoral allocation to which the Council added a million dollars, which we appreciated greatly. However, there is, you know, you know, a—a gap between the number of tree we remove every year, the number of stumps we're able to

remove with those contract dollars, and the current backlog. So while we have made significant progress, we would need an additional investment in order to eliminate the backlog and remain current with the stumps that are generated by our tree removal program.

CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: Okay, it's not the case that there was a million that you put last year on top of the baselined amount, which now would be lost?

COMMISSIONER KAVANAGH: I'm sorry, yes, the Council funding is not baselined in the upcoming budget.

CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: Understood. So if I were to call today to inform you of a tree stump that needed to be removed, what's the expected delay before it's actually removed?

COMMISSIONER KAVANAGH: It-it's difficult to say because of a variety of factors. Number one being-having a qualified contractor in place to remove them. There was always some amount of time in the-the bidding and procurement and-and--

CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: [interposing] Could you even estimate? Is it a year? Is it 18 months? Is it more heaven forbid?

COMMISSIONER KAVANAGH: It would probably be between a year and 18 months I would say would be a—a good estimate for removing every—if we were fully funded to removing every stump after a tree was removed.

CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: Okay, well that's—that's—that's far too long, and we will be pushing on the budget negotiations to make sure that we can reduce the backlog and—therefore reduce the delay for the benefit of our—our colleagues in the Outer Boroughs and I gather in Brownsville this is perhaps an issue as well. Am I correct that there are no—there's no additional round of parks equity at the Community Parks Initiative funding? Is that correct? Have you run through allocating all the parks that you can under the current funding?

COMMISSIONER SILVER: Under the current one, the next round to be announced is 11 more sites. Those will be announced this fall, and I believe that will include the—the funds that we have allocated from the initial \$318 million.

2 CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: So at the point the
3 door is closed for--unless you get additional money
4 for adopting parks into the program.

5 COMMISSIONER SILVER: Correct, correct.

6 CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: When you designed it
7 originally you did an inventory, and I believe that
8 you identified 200 parks or more that--that qualified
9 based on lack of investment. They were--

10 COMMISSIONER SILVER: [interposing] There
11 were 215 parcels and when we did our analysis some of
12 these weren't--they were park assets, but what you
13 would call a playground per se, and that list went
14 down from 215 to 134. The 67 was part of that
15 initial and that's now what is--we're moving forward
16 with the 67.

17 CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: Okay, on just--I just
18 have one follow-up question from my staff the--the
19 stump removal, which is what would it cost to fully
20 fund that program? If--if resources were not the
21 constraints any more, are we talking \$2 million more,
22 \$3 million? What is the--what's the shortfall there?

23 COMMISSIONER KAVANAGH: There are two
24 components to it. To eliminate the backlog would
25 cost about \$7.5 million just for the line--

CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: [interposing] Oh, that's a one-shot deal, right.

COMMISSIONER KAVANAGH: One shot and then it would it take approximately \$4.5 million in total to keep current with the stumps that are generated annually through our removal program.

CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: Okay. There are a lot of people waiting to testify. So, we'll wrap it up there, and I thank you very, very much for your attention over the last 2-1/2 hours. Thank you and our—our first panel will consist of Heather Lubov from the City Parks Foundation; Lynn Kelly from New Yorkers for Parks [background comments, pause] as well as—as Lynn (sic) from the New York City Community Garden Coalition, and those—that's going to be our first panel. If you call could make your way up. [background comments, pause] And—and sergeants because—sergeants because we have a very, very thick stack of people who want to testify, we're going to—I'm going to ask you to use a two-minute clock here, and Heather—Heather and Lynn if you're in place please—Heather, why don't you kick us off?

[background comments]

HEATHER LUBOV: Thank you, Chairman Levine and members of the committee. I'm Heather Lubov. I'm the Executive of City Parks Foundation. We are the only independent non-profit organization with the mission to offer programs in public parks throughout the city, and our goal is to help transform parks into vibrant community centers. We work in every Council District. We bring sports, arts, education, and community development programs to more than 350 parks, recreation centers and schools across the city, and we reach 425,000 people every year.

CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: Oh, that's amazing.

HEATHER LUBOV: This year thanks to the Council's Leadership Expense Funding we offer track and field instruction in 12 parks to nearly 1,700 kids, bringing high quality lessons into neighborhoods where few organized athletic activities exist. Leadership funds also allowed us to connect more than 2,400 students to experiential learning in parks, gardens, forests, and coastal areas to nurture a lifelong relationship between young people and the environment. I also want to thank Council Members for providing discretionary funding this year for

City Parks Founding Programming in their districts, and the Council for providing \$2.6 million in the capital appropriation for Summer Stage in Central Park, which is currently in the design phase, and should begin next summer. The Council's Parks Equity Initiative and the NYC Parks Community Parks Initiative has allowed us to grow Partnership for Parks, which you heard was the public-private program that we jointly manage with NYC Parks. Partnerships has supported and championed a growing network of volunteer groups caring for and advocating for neighborhood parks. In the past three years with this new funding we've been able to support 37% more Friends of groups citywide. We've tripled the number of community visioning consultations and skill building workshops, and we've increased the number of It's My Parks service projects by more than 60%. These groups are comprised of volunteers. We have a myriad of work and family obligations, but still find the time to give back and improve their communities. The Council's Parks Equity Initiative Funding is key to making sure that these programs are successful, and their work is sustainable in the long term. We're proudly—we're proud to directly address the

Administration's strong focus on equity, and we support NYC's Park-NYC Parks emphasis on community parks, and serving underserved communities. We're committed to delivering the most responsive service and so with the recent growth in Partnership for Parks we've made improvements that include how we identify and build new groups and coalitions in the neediest parks, and also how we provide more advanced support to our longer term groups. But at the most basic level the more staff we have on the ground, the more groups we'll be able to serve. To that end, we would [bell] strong support adding new our outreach coordinators allowing us to continue to build new groups every year while supporting the growing number of existing groups. Our programs are free and are synchronized with New York City Parks, but the City Parks Foundation is a non-profit organization and we need the Council's assistant-assistance to continue supporting the vision for an equitable park system. Thank you for hearing my testimony, and I look forward to working with you.

CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: Thank you very much. Just to clarify, the number of outreach workers you currently have is at?

HEATHER LUBOV: Sixteen.

CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: Sixteen. Okay, so each worker has how many parks under their portfolio?

HEATHER LUBOV: It's approximately 45 per outreach coordinator.

CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: But that seems like an extremely heavy load, and I'm guessing they have each two or three community boards as well?

HEATHER LUBOV: Yes.

CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: That's a lot of territory for one person to cover.

HEATHER LUBOV: It is a lot of territory.

CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: And it probably means they don't show up at any one park very often.

HEATHER LUBOV: I think they do their best working nights and weekends and around the clock. So they are serving all those groups as best as they can, but we--

CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: [interposing] We-we know they are.

HEATHER LUBOV: --we strongly advocate for more outreach coordinators.

CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: But we know that they are super committed. So if you were to have

another 10 outreach coordinators, what would that do to your impact?

HEATHER LUBOV: To give you a sense right now, we're in about 30% of parks around the city. So another ten would be another 30 to 35 parks per person at minimum. So you can do the math on that. They would have a huge impact on our ability to building Friends group around the city.

CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: So ten additional outreach workers might translate into 300 parks that could reach that you're not currently reaching?

HEATHER LUBOV: Yes.

CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: That's—that's really significant, and I think justifies why we're pushing for this funding in the budget. So thank—thank you for the amazing work that City Parks Foundation does. You've been really a strong partners for the City Council and you've helped make the Community Parks Initiative—the Parks Equity Initiative extremely popular among my colleagues. So we thank for that. Okay, Lynn.

LYNN KELLY: Good afternoon. I'm Lynn Kelly, Executive Director of New Yorkers for Parks. Thank you for inviting us to testify today on the

budget. Parks, as you know, has continued to make meaningful investments throughout the city, but we really feel strongly that there's more work still to do. We understand the Administration's conservative approach in this year's budget due to pending cuts from Washington, and as you rightfully pointed out Council Member the cuts CDBG Program is going to have devastating effects on Green Thumb unfortunately.

And so we would urge the Council and the Administration to consider funding \$1 million that could be lost as a result of these cuts. One of the most critical additions we believe needs to be baselined in the city's budget is the \$9.6 million to retain the 100 City Park workers and 50 gardeners throughout the city. Again, as you rightly pointed out this is our third time testifying to restore and have this money there, and it's simply not tenable to have the Council to continue to put this money in, but these are real jobs for real New Yorkers, and we hope that they will continue and remain.

Essentially, we see this as an infrastructure and an investment in the infrastructure of the people of the Parks system, and Parks has gone to great extents, as you've heard today through the capital process to

invest in its infrastructure of the Parks itself, but you need an equal investment in the infrastructure of the people that run the parks. Along with those lines, I'd like to actually talk a little bit about Partnership for Parks. A budget—a budget allocation of just \$1 million, Council Member, would allow for these 10 million outreach coordinators, five new program assistants. I just attended roughly all of our five borough meetings that we've had on parks, and hear time and time and again from Friends groups and parks advocates that the folks that work for Partnership for Parks are essentially the lifeline, the blood line to their communities and to their park system. And right now the—the list that these outreach coordinators has is simply untenable. So we would ask that the Council and the Administration really push to have that money for the increasing in staff. We'd also like see an allocation in this year's budget of \$3 million to allow for [bell] 50 new Urban Park Rangers. Many of the Parks Department staff that you see here today were Urban Park Rangers, stated their careers in public service as park rangers, as those green ambassadors in the community. They also provide another set of eyes in

Parks. As we've heard today, there's been a lot of talk about crime in parks, and maybe that would help to go a long way to have increase in rangers. In the Capital Budget, we're pleased to not the Administration's commitment to infrastructure improvements, retaining walls, comfort stations, HVAC all the things that the public might not see as sexy, but is so important to the life line of these parks and for the ongoing maintenance of these parks, and we're pleased to see the continued allocation or new allocation of \$82 million committed toward new street tree planting citywide. Our tree canopy is really important to the city's public health, and we also support the ongoing maintenance through an expense commitment of \$2.7 million. Before I end my testimony today, I would agree with you that now is the time to really think creatively and boldly about our park system. Not to be reactionary to Washington but rather be proactive in what we're doing. And we support projects such as BQ Green, QueensWay, Daylighting in Tibbetts Brook because of their vision. Much in the way we support our Community Parks Initiative, parks without borders and anchor parks. Now is the time to really be the leader for

this nation [bell] and the park system and to really send the message back to Washington that is not acceptable to make these cuts to what we consider critical urban infrastructure in New York City. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: Thank you, Lynn, and your point on--on the imperative now that we lead locally at a time when the help is not coming from Washington. I--I want to whole heartedly endorse I don't--I think we need to do more than just play decent. We need to play offense and that means scoring wins for our public space in this city. Whatever is coming out of Washington and the projects you laid out, would be a very powerful way to do that. So, thank you for your continued advocacy for the park system. You're off to a great start in your new role. Thank you both very much and. Alright, our next panel will be Peter Stein from Local 508 of DC37; Joe Puleo, from Local 983 also DC37; and Josie Bennett from Local 1505. [background comments, pause]

JOE PULEO: Good afternoon. Good afternoon City Council--

CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: Good afternoon.

JOE PULEO: --and Chair and Council Members. [coughs] my-excuses me [coughs] excuse me. My name is Joe Puleo. I'm President of Local 983. I represent a number of parks titles. I represent the Urban Parks Rangers, better known with the PEP officers within that-with that title, the Assistant-excuse me-the Associate Park Workers and the City's Seasonal Aids. I'd like to begin by stating that crime has arisen in Parks. If you look at the COMPSTAT Reports from the Third Quarter of 2015 and 2016, it went from 391 in '15 to 495. That's over a third, you know, percentage spike. If it were in any-any precinct that I would probably think that there would be a serious uproar. New York City parks are sanctuaries for most people. This is where our seniors, our children they go to these places to seek refuge from the city. They should not be treated at the same level as being at Times Square or riding the R-Train at 2:00 in the morning. When-when I hear people say well it's not that bad, it is bad and it's getting worse. You know, we need more Parks Enforcement Officers. They do the job best in New York City Parks. NYPD does a great job out in the streets. Almost five percent decline from last year

to this year in overall park crimes. The reason why they haven't matched the parks when it comes to lowering the Crime stats, is because we don't enough Parks Enforcement Officers. You know, we need about 200 by the Parks Department estimates. That will be [bell] about \$11.9 million. Last year we did not receive any funding from the City Council when it came to the Parks Enforcement. We did receive some from the Mayor's Office, but then again, you know, the job—the job is not yet over. We need—we need more presence in—in our parks. People need to be—feel safe in our parks and, you now, time and time again it has proven that where you have PEP Officers, you have a reduction in crime. We also would like to see included in that 200 at the agency's discretion because I heard mention of Urban Park Rangers, well our PEP Officers come from the title of Urban Park Rangers, but we also have ones that do dedicated service to stewardship. They give out tour guides. They do mostly educational parts—parts of the job description. We encourage the City Council to and the Parks Department to hire more of them. There is only 35, 35 citywide, you know. These are the people who probably would do the most in combatting crime

for the future because they reach out to the children. They explain to them the essentials of why it is important to—to not, you know, destroy our parks, why—why the ecosystem is so—is so—so fragile. So, with—without them, you know, it's just going to be crime and punishment, you know, for—for our future to come. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: Well, thank you, Mr. Puleo, for your advocacy for these incredibly important workers, and as you know, I—I wholeheartedly agree that we need to increase the ranks both of PEP Officers and Urban Park Rangers. There is really embarrassing few of each category right now, and we can do much better. So thank you, sir. Alright, Ms. Bennett.

JOE PULEO: Thank you.

JOSIE BENNETT: Good—good afternoon Chairman Levine and fellow Parks Committee members. My name is Josie Bennett. I'm the President of Local 1505 representing the City Park Workers. I have members in DOT, Sanitation, Parks and DEP. Our members work in all five boroughs conducting maintenance in all city parks. I'm—I'm and my people are in charge of all the maintenance operations in

all the boroughs. I want to first start off by thanking the Council for funding my people the City Park Workers in 2017 from the Parks Department. The funding was used to maintain city funded line for 100 city park workers and 50 gardeners. Parks has over 39,000 acres of land meaning that one gardener is responsible for maintaining an average 254 acres of parkland. The Department of Parks and Recreation is woefully unfunded and we request your support in making our communities and those underserved parks in our communities beautiful. Since the—since the Fiscal Budget year funding has been baseline for—baselined for 2018, I'm urging the Council to restore the increase in the funding. If this funding is not restored, there will not be enough workers in the city—in the city park workers and gardener titles to perform their duties as stated above. Therefore, the maintenance and upkeep of the parks will suffer leading to blight and—and neighborhood decay. I'm sorry. [laughs] As we approach the spring season in the next several weeks, they have a lot of work to be done to prepare for the summer. The booths are opening, and I get additional lines during the summer, but without these 150 lines, we don't—our

1 maintenance will be down. The council down. The
2 parks are not safe. My people also have saved rapes,
3 murders, and I'm quite sure my people have been
4 awarded for stopping crimes in the parks. [bell] My
5 people also do the late lockup in the parks at
6 nights. They open up the parks and they lock the
7 parks up at night. My-my maintenance crew like I
8 said, it harms-it-they have been put in harm's way
9 everyday, and like I said, without these 150 lines,
10 the parks are going to suffer. Okay. I want to
11 thank you for taking the time to hear on-on what I
12 had to say to you and what I had to say when it came
13 to the maintenance and the park workers, and I want
14 to thank you for the opportunity to testify, and I
15 anted to know if you have any questions for me.

17 CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: Well, thank you,
18 Madam President for advocacy on these-on behalf of
19 this incredibly important workforce-workforce, which
20 is critical to keeping our parks healthy and inviting
21 and as you point out, far too often they're involved
22 in difficult incidents that require them to
23 intervene, often putting their own safety at risk.
24 We've honored of a few of your members who have acted
25 heroically to protect people in the park. But I want

to just clarify a statistic. You said that on average each gardener has to care for 254 acres system wide?

JOSIE BENNETT: Yes because they don't have enough gardeners in the Parks Department to cover all the land.

CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: That's--that's--

JOSIE BENNETT: There's 39 acres--there's 90--39,000 acres.

CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: And how many total gardeners do we have?

JOSIE BENNETT: I don't know in total numbers. Susan might know a number. Do you have a total number, Susan? I think it's 200--

MALE SPEAKER: It's 200.

JOSIE BENNETT: --a year it's about 200 and something in total between the gardeners and the assistant gardeners. It's not a lot of gardeners.

CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: So when--when--when you put in perspective to lose 50 gardeners is a huge chunk of the existing workforce.

JOSIE BENNETT: Yes.

CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: I mean that--that--that is a quarter roughly of the existing workforce.

So imagine one-quarter less gardening work, one-quarter less in every park, and you get a picture of the impact that will be felt all over the city and, of course, the maintenance workers where the proposed cut is even larger of 100 just do such important work. Difficult work by the way, but they really are the heart of the operations--

JOSIE BENNETT: Maintenance and operations.

CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: --and at the end of the day, if you don't have men and women out there in the field doing the heavy lifting in cold weather and hot weather, then the parks are going to suffer.

JOSIE BENNETT: Yes.

CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: And I—I repeat the irony of the fact that these workers have been deployed into what is really a pet project of the Mayor, which is the CPI Parks, and we—we support that program. But these are clearly core to the mission of the department, and it's really deeply unfortunate that for the third year in a row, we now have to fight just to keep our—our existing staffing levels.

JOSIE BENNETT: Again.

CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: We should be fighting to increase the ranks of gardeners and—and maintenance workers and, of course, PEP officers and others, and instead we're back in the trenches just trying to keep these men and women on the job, and let's make this real. If we don't succeed on June 30th, all of them are getting laid off.

JOSIE BENNETT: All of them are getting laid off and like I said, I would love to have them on a permanent basis, but I haven't been that lucky. So every year we come back in here and we have to fight again. And like I said, I want to thank the City Council for backing me. Every year that we came back in here, my people have been called back and I thank you for that.

CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: Well, we—we—we value working with you. We want to baseline these workers, but until that happens we're going to fight to get them in the budget this year.

JOSIE BENNETT: Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: Thank you, Madam President. Thank you, Mr. Puleo. Than you to you.

JOE PULEO: It's a pleasure to be here.

JOSIE BENNETT: Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: Alright.

JOE PULEO: Good afternoon.

CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: Next up we have Pamela Pettyjohn from the Coney Island Beautification Project; Dan Cohen, my friend from the Anibal Aviles (sic) Playground; Nora MacCauley from Love Our Pool; and also Lee Levine from Love Our Pool. [background comments] And I—I should clarify that Love Our Pool is connected to Brooklyn Bridge Park. [background comments] Okay, Ms. Pettyjohn, would you like to kick us off?

PAMELA PETTYJOHN: [off mic] Yes. Good afternoon. I'm Pettyjohn.

CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: Could you make sure your mic is on, please?

PAMELA PETTYJOHN: Okay, is that better?

CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: Good.

PAMELA PETTYJOHN: Okay great. I'm Pamela Pettyjohn, President of Coney Island Beautification Project, a volunteer community group, which works closely with Partnership for Parks. Our members have a passion for assisting in the beautification and upkeep of our public spaces. Many New Yorkers are more than eager to donate their time, energy,

expertise in helping in weeding, planting, painting and doing whatever it takes to maintain the aesthetics of and of diverse usage of our parks ground. During our tenure working with Partnership for Parks, we have become aware of the thousands of hands needed to preserve our parks and public spaces. Just look around. You'll be amazed at the tremendous amount of accomplishments that our brought by our volunteers every year throughout the vast acreage in each of the five boroughs. From our very first event, the role of Partnership for Parks was immeasurable. Their contribution was tantamount to a successful community affair. From our initial introduction, Partnership for Parks supported us by providing in-depth workshops such as how to work with parks and the elected officials. Hello, we are all here. [laughs] Time management and networking with other park leaders how to apply for 501(c)(3) et cetera. Partnership for Parks also connected us to financial resources. Example: Applying for grants in in-kind of services. It's My Park Day afforded Coney Island Beautification Project to organize approximately ten Coney Island area schools, 12 community groups, neighborhood businesses and several

elected official. You know, Mr. Treyger is one of them if he was here today and cleaning and greening our 21 blocks of commercial corridor. How grateful was the group to [bell] Partnership for Parks for all it's assistance. Partnership for Parks without a doubt and amplified city resources multiplied several times by factors of Excel (sic) for each Partnership for Parks workers supported by the city. There is a product gain and numerous non-paid volunteers. Community engagement and pride and public is the non-monetary bi-product of Partnership for Parks. Please tally the value of Partnership for Parks programs and budget in your worthy-worthy discretionary fund budget line. I urge the City Council to please double the contribution to Partnership for Parks to fill the empty positions of outreach coordinators so that more parks and communities can benefit from these wonderful program.

CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: Alright, thank you Ms. Pettyjohn and Council Member Treyger was here before, and I know he loves your work, and we appreciate your testimony on the great work of Partnership for Parks. It's good to hear a real life example of the impact, and I strongly support

increasing the budget particularly for outreach workers. Who is your outreach worker?

PAMELA PETTYJOHN: Hannah Barfield (sp?) and Ted Enochs (sp?), but can I just go off.

CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: Sure, briefly yes.

PAMELA PETTYJOHN: --on more thing. O was listening to everyone and-and everyone's concerns, but some of these--or I didn't get a chance to listen to some of the events that we have in Coney Island, but as far as crime and everything is concerned, we have annual events for the Explorers and--and law enforcement Explores, and so we have Explorers from the Police Department, Homeland Security, Amtrak, FBI, all come out to the parks and celebrate together. We have the Girl Scouts, the Boy Scouts. We have these environmental educational programs. With all these programs Partnership for Parks has helped us put these programs together not only for the community, but for South Brooklyn and even the--the schools. This cuts down on a lot of crime. It involves the people in the parks and--and other--and--and, you know, keeps people involved in all of these community events, and it--it helps immensely. Without out, I don't what we would do.

CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: Thank-thank you.

We—we appreciate that and I appreciate you speaking out today and thank for all you do for that wonderful park. Dan Cohen, please.

DAN COHEN: Good afternoon. I am Daniel Marks Cohen, the President of Friends of Anibal Aviles Playground [Speaking Spanish] which is on West 108th Street between Amsterdam and Columbus Avenue in Manhattan Valley. Manhattan Valley Neighborhood of the Upper West Side ably represented in the City Council by the astonishing City Councilman Mark Levine. [laughter] I am testifying to the relationship--

CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: We give extra money for that.

DAN COHEN: Yeah. [laughter] Thank you very much. I'm testifying to the relationship of the Friends of Anibal Aviles Playground to the Parks Department, Partnership for Parks and City Parks Foundation. I want to state right up front that we would not exist without the generous and sustained support of the Partnership for Parks and the City Parks Foundation. The playground honoring—honors the memory of Anibal Aviles, a gifted athlete who

attended nearby Junior High School 54 where he was captain of the basketball and track teams. He was raised on West 109th Street. Aviles belong to a local Catholic youth organization, participated in other organized athletic programs in the neighborhood. He left school to enlist in the United States Marine Corps and was killed in the Vietnam War. His brief life ended on March 5, 1966 when he was killed in action. He died a month away from his 20th birthday. The park is a fitting memorial for Corporal Aviles who played in the neighborhood as a child and whose name graces the refuge for today's children. I found the Friends of Anibal Aviles Playground in July 2015. It is an all volunteer organization. The group exists to support the playground one of the few Upper Manhattan playgrounds with sufficient shade to protect children from sun in the hot summer months. Virtually all of the neighborhood playgrounds in my community are difficult for children to use by June as the direct exposure of the sun on the metal playground equipment makes it too hot to touch, but not Anibal Aviles. Once it gets warm enough to go outside, my almost five-year-old son is there almost everyday. When we

happened upon the park three years ago, we noted that it was spacious but underutilized and a bit run down as it had not seen a significant investment since the Jenkins Administration almost 25 years ago. It was with the help of Partnership for Parks and the City Parks Foundation that led [bell] to our creating the Friends of Anibal Aviles Playground. From there, things moved swiftly. By December 2015, we had succeeded in persuading the Parks Department to install a new child safety fence to prevent children and toys from rolling out onto the street, and several months later in February 2016, we won a small grant from the City Parks Foundation that enabled us to hold a successful It's My Park Day a few months later in April. Over 100 people attended including Borough President Gale Brewer. Shortly thereafter, City Parks Foundation recommended that the Friends of Anibal Aviles be featured in the City Parks Foundation's Capacity Fund Grant sponsor, TD Banks rooted in New York Campaign, which last summer featured a local park volunteer and board member Morris Grady. He looked fabulous by the way. More recently in October Anibal Aviles Playground was repainted through the Parks Department Community

Parks Initiative. In December we participated in New Yorkers for Parks Daffodil Project, and planted 250 bulbs in the gardening area of the playground with the help of 20 children and parents from a local preschool. Our next It's My Park Day project is coming up this spring, and we expect it to be even bigger and better than last year. But we are not done yet. We have secured a commitment from a local non-profit to construct a public bathroom on their property, but accessible to the playground they succeed in their ULURP application for affordable housing to be constructed next door.

CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: [interposing] And-- and sorry if you can--if you can--

DAN COHEN: [interposing] Last sentence.

CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: --finish up there.

DAN COHEN: We have ambitions for new playground equipment. Much is done--much has been done, and much remains to be--to be done. The Parks Department and Partnership for Parks and City Parks Foundation will help us get there. We could not have done it without them and we are immensely grateful for their support.

CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: Well, thank you, Dan, for working on behalf of this jewel of a park. You've really done amazing things in building this coalition and we're grateful for your service, and again it's good to hear about a real life testimony on the important of Partnership for Parks. To have two examples of some different parks in the city, really makes the case better than I could. So thank you being here, and for your great work on behalf of the playground.

DAN COHEN: Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: Alright, please.

NORA MCCAULEY: [coughs] Hi, City Council members and thank you for holding this hearing today. My name is Nora McCauley and I'm from a small volunteer organization with many members called Love Our Pool, and we rep—we represent the—the users, the enthusiastic supporters of the pool in Brooklyn Bridge Park and our—our objective is to keep a pool in Brooklyn Bridge--Brooklyn Bridge Park, and we have an interesting moment right now. I realize this the—one of the first times that we've talked about pools today at all. The situation in Brooklyn Bridge Park is that there is a small pool, which is well loved

and used not just by every-by constituents in every city council district in Brooklyn because we did a survey last summer and had a petition. But also by people from City Council districts in every other borough and, of course, the many visitors from out of state and even out of country that come to Brooklyn Bridge Park. We were every pleased at the beginning of today's hearing to hear Brooklyn Bridge Park listed with Central Park and the High Line as-as some of the-the top park attractions in the city. That was very gratifying. The-the Park Corporation, with whom we've met, is on track to pull out the little pool that's currently there because in their vision they have a vision for a much larger, more dramatic pool, probably a floating pool to go into the water, and this is a very large and complicated project. As I'm sure everybody is aware, Brooklyn Bridge Park is not just a-is not just city a park, although it's used and loved and treated like a city park, but the funding is-is complex. And there's also-there's state parkland so there's state money and there's [coughs] a private corporation that does money with real estate there. So the potential is there for money to be raised, but at our meeting we have heard

a price tag of between [bell] \$10 and \$20 million for a pool. So that--that's staggering actually. It's very substantial. What we are hoping--and my colleague Lee may speak to this as well--what we're hoping to put forward to the City Council is there's--there's ample opportunity for matching funds I think but we would love and the--the conservancy and the corporation of Borough President as well would love to be able to speak to the City Council for a commitment that could then be matched by additional funders because this is a--

CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: [interposing]

Alright. Sorry to jump in. Only because I know that Lee wants to speak and we're--we're super short on time. So--so my--my--my long lost cousin Lee Levine is here.

LEE LEVINE: Yep, I was say going to say that. I was going to attest to that. Thank you. Let me just quickly flesh out some numbers. So, in the survey that was done for the little pop-up pool that exists right now, besides having a thousand petition signers, we serve 31 different zip codes and 82% of the users of Brooklyn Bridge Park's pop-up pool do not come from the neighborhood. So we come

from -we deal with underserved communities. So Council Member Treyger and Council Member Mealy have a robust constituency that use our pool. Recently, Douglas DeGraw Pool has had some environmental upgrade needs that are about to come to fruition in the next two years. So if that pool is taken out that's an important piece of the pool for our area and for our constituents and to juxtapose what we're dealing with, public parkland has been used by the one hotel that's just opened in Brooklyn Bridge Park, and now we've just heard that Governor's Island is going to put in a day spa on public parkland, and so to juxtapose these very privileged and luxurious options for pools with our, you know, very meager needs to serve the community it's critical. So we're asking the Council to help us advocate with the Mayor to get the necessary funding. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: Alright, well I appreciate that and we'll be checking with your local council member on this topic as well, but thank you for coming with your advocacy for these important resources. Thank you, panel. We have to move on. I'm sorry. We have so many people who still want to testify. We have next Aziz Dehkan from New York City

Community Gardens Coalition; Ed Janoff (sic) from Madison Square Park Conservancy and Marie Winfield from Community Board 11 and as you're making your way to the table, I'll—I'll remind folks that despite the low headcount currently at the table up here, everything you say is being entered into the record. It's being live streamed now on the web and will be transcribed so that what you say does matter, and we're glad you're here to speak up, and Azusa, I will pass it to you first.

AZIZ DEHKAN: So thank you for having me be here today.

CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: Could you maybe speak into the mic and make sure it's on, and—and that is--[background noise]

MALE SPEAKER: You're good.

AZIZ DEHKAN: Okay. My name is Aziz Dehkan. I'm the Executive Director of the New York City Community Garden Coalition. I thank everybody for allowing me to take a few seconds here to talk about the importance of this budget. There are 600 community gardens in New York City. It's about 100 acres of land. We continually work to make them better. They're community pieces. They're called

community gardens because they are shared by everybody in the community. We're very proud of the work that we're doing in those community garden. A lot of it is the sweat equity of gardeners, but a lot of it has to do with being able to get the support of Green Thumb to help us get resources and materials into those gardens. And we would be--neglect not to say that, and you know, often times we're community gardeners and we think we do everything on our own, but we're really aware that--that we need Green Thumb to help us and continue to support us, and as an advocate for community gardens within the city agencies, it's really important to keep this budget and to keep funding it and expanding on it. And I know Councilman you've done quite a bit to help us do that, and we really appreciate the work that you've done to support community gardens, and we continue to hope that that this new assault from the federal level on community gardens and on the Parks Department in general can be stopped, and I'm a firm believer in--in the people power of us and working together through agencies and through government and through again the sweat equity of people. So we're not going to give up on this. We know that you're

not and you've been really supportive. Again, and I'll stop because I know I have two other colleagues here who want to speak, but Green Thumb is-is a vital piece of what we do in community gardens. [bell] We're on parkland essentially, and our-my-my organization the New York City Community Garden Coalition our goal is to mote-promote, preserve and create more community gardens, and we can't do that without the-the work and the-the backing of different organization and different agencies in the city. So, whatever we can do, we will do to make sure that this-these budget cuts don't affect us, don't affect Green Thumb and don't affect the city in general. I mean it's not just community gardens. It's-it's Meals on Wheels. It's everything that we believe in. It's everything the community is about. So that's what we're going to try to do, and we thank you for giving us this--

CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: [interposing] Thank-- thank you, Aziz for what you've done, and leading the Coalition and the building it is just incredible and so important, and even more importantly what the gardeners are doing, thousands of them and the 600 properties. It's just-it's just making our city a

better place and helping our environment and our physical health, and so much more. And as you pointed out, these gardeners don't generally ask for a lot of help. Sometimes all they want is for us to get out of the way, but there are some very important targeted supports, which Green Thumb has done, which has made Green Thumb essential. In some cases it's resources. In some cases it's technical support. It's also connecting gardeners to each other across neighborhoods in the city, and it would just be a body blow to our community gardens if that work stopped, and it's why I have joined you and shining a light on this threat so that it doesn't happen without us fighting back hard, and I'm definitely committed to standing with you in that fight.

AZIZ DEHKAN: Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: Thank you, Aziz.

Yes, please.

ED JANOFF: Good afternoon, Chairman Levine and members of the City Council Parks Committee. My name is Ed Janoff. I'm the Director of External Affairs for Madison Square Park Conservancy in Manhattan. We're a non-profit organization, which is responsible for maintaining

that park at 23rd Street and Broadway. I'm testifying today to ask the Council to allocate funding in the FY18 Capital Budget to improving a very important monument in Madison Square Park, which is the Eternal Light Flagstaff. The Eternal Light Flagstaff is a monument, which was dedicated in 1923 to the victorious military forces of World War I. Today the Flagstaff is the starting place of New York City's Annual Veterans Day Parade where wreaths are laid in a-in an important ceremony paying homage to-to all those who have made the sacrifice defending our freedom. The Veterans Day Parade draws New Yorkers from all boroughs and this monument is a very important art space for the local veterans community, which encompasses New Yorkers that have a background. This location has historic significance as a starting point for parade units returning home from World War I including marches for the Fighting 69th comprised largely of Irish-Americans of the 77th Division that by Chinese-American Color Sergeant Sin Kao Ki (sp?) and the famed African-American 369th Infantry Regiment and the fact that historians point to that parade for the 369th as the start of the-the Harlem Renaissance. Unfortunately, over the many decades since the

monument was erected its frontage along Fifth Avenue has blocked and crowded by-by park fencing enshrouded in overgrowth, which is really hiding it from public view and creates a challenging bottleneck for the parade family. So in response, Madison Square Park Conservancy in partnership with the United War Veterans Council is proposing that that monument be opened up to Fifth Avenue to make a prominent new entrance plaza for the park at West 24th Street complete with paving and benches and landscaping, and event infrastructure for the Veterans Day Parade. This grand entrance plaza would be well aligned with a new direct pedestrian crossing at Fifth Avenue at West 24th Street [bell] fulfilling DOT Vision Zero safety objectives and NYC Parks Without Border Design Principles. [background comments] The estimated cost of the project is \$2 million. The Conservancy has committed to raising at least 25% of that privately, and we're almost all the way there thanks to a great commitment from New York Life Insurance Company of \$400,000. So we're asking the Council for a million dollars in capital funding for this project in FY18 to make it possible to renovate the monument in time for the important and highly visible upcoming

International Centennials of the end of World War I in 2018 and the First Veterans Day Parade in 2019. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: And you're hoping that this capital project will be completed by 2018 or funded by 2018?

ED JANOFF: We can phase it.

CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: [interposing] You might not have been here for the earlier part of the hearing.

ED JANOFF: Yeah, we can—we can—we believe we can build it privately, and do half of it in time for '18 and the other half in time for '19.

CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: Okay, well, it's—it's an incredibly worthy project, one that I've heard a fair amount from other sources, and I know that our colleagues, the Chairs of the Veterans Affairs Committee Council Member Eric Ulrich who was here in the—in the hearing earlier is involved and very supportive, and so we—we appreciate you speaking out to get that on the record here, and we look forward to—to coordinating with you and the Conservancy throughout the budge process.

ED JANOFF: Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: You got it. Okay,
so Ms. Winfield.

MARIE WINFIELD: Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: Sure.

MARIE WINFIELD: Good afternoon. My name
is Marie Winfield. I'm testifying on behalf of
Community Board 11 in Manhattan, which is East
Harlem, as the Vice Chair of the Environment Open
Space and Parks Committee. Since East Harlem has been
slated for rezoning under the Mayor's Housing Plan,
we obviously have serious concerns about our Built
Environment Open Space and Parks Portfolio. We're a
Community Parks Initiative zone, and we remain a
neighborhood where our parks playgrounds and
waterfront areas serve. Haven't seen the needed
investment to accommodate our existing community much
less an eventual up-zoning. Our parks and
playgrounds serve very vulnerable populations. Our
students in city schools, we're in East Harlem. We
have sizable numbers of homeless families estimate at
over 2,000 children, the largest percentage at 40% at
PS 38 on East 103rd Street, and we certainly have a
moral obligation to ensure that there are spaces in
our communities where children can be children,

experience play and a sense of childhood at safe rehabilitate—rehabilitative spaces, and it's certainly not an equitable framework to suggest that volunteer work should make up cuts in staffing by the Parks Department in our most vulnerable communities. Our longstanding budget priorities reflect these concerns like renovating the East River Esplanade, and we recommend the comprehensive plan for funding these priorities in this budget cycle, which is reflected in our—in our budget response. There are several things that we would like to point out, mainly that we would like to see increase in BPR staffing and PEP officers to improve upkeep, maintenance and safety, Poor Richards Playground rehabilitation—rehabilitation of the field turf at Eugene McCade Field as well as increase in funding for street tree maintenance and Green Thumb staffing for our local community gardens. More specifically, we have three playground associates that have been—are right now paid for through a deal between the MTA [bell] which took over staffing of the Second Avenue Subway, and we need to see those playground associates baselined in this year's budget, and we'd really like to see Poor Richard's Playground also

renovated, and so I thank you for time and consideration.

CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: Thank you, Ms. Winfield. Excellent points and we thank this panel. We'll move onto the next one. Appreciate it. We're going to hear from Kelly Vilar from Let's Rebuild the Cromwell Coalition; Virginia Ribot and Edna Figueroa from El Puente; John Butler from Friends of Van Cortlandt Park and Paulette Spencer from the Bronx Community Health Network. [background comments, pause] Alright, Kelly, would you like to kick us off?

KELLY VILAR: Yes, thank you.

CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: Okay.

KELLY VILAR: First of all, running for the ferry over here I have some misspellings on here so I've got to apologize for that. My name is Kelly Vilar, and I represent the Let's Rebuild Cromwell Community Coalition on Staten Island. The Let's Rebuild Cromwell Community Coalition stands with thousands of Staten Islanders and virtually every elected official including Council Member Rose to urge our city government to rebuild the Cromwell Recreation Center. This is a major capital project that Staten Island and our city needs right now. I

want to remind you that on October 9, 2015 a 16-year-old boy fell to his death playing on—in an abandoned building on the North Shore Staten Island. This was only a few blocks from Eric Garner was killed. Up until seven years ago and a stone's throw away, was where Cromwell once stood right at the physical center of these unfortunate events and it's stood there for 73 years. Cromwell was the largest public recreation center on Staten Island that served an average of 750 people daily, and I promise you there's no place on Staten Island where people—750 people get together. Youth from all over the island had frequented Cromwell since the 1950s, and as a result of years of storm and shoreline damages, our center was demolished in 2010. Finally, all hopes of it had—all hopes of it of ever being rebuilt were ravaged by, of course, Hurricane Sandy. Right now in the very vicinity of where Cromwell now stands—where Cromwell was is Staten Island's North Shore Waterfront is experiencing the largest economic development project in 30 years, and our community has broken ground on a courthouse for criminals, an observation wheel for tourists, malls with high end stores for shoppers and a luxury hotel with exclusive

waterfront apartments. [bell] But Staten Island hasn't broken ground on a single facility for public use on the North Shore. Some urging, you know, the Council to help us. We've met with--with the Speaker about this. We've met with several Council Members about this. We are engaging the Mayor on a discussion on this, but this is becoming an issue of really dire need because now it's a race for space and--and the commitment, and we're losing kids. There are no rec centers of this size of--of even close to this size on Staten Island, and I really urge the Council if you can help us getting this into the budget. It is a big ask, but we think that Staten Island has waited a long time and deserves it.

CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: There's no doubt the North Shore is gaining population and we need to do more to enhance public space there to meet that demand. So we thank you for running for the ferry today. [laughter] Sorry for mispronouncing your name earlier, Ms. Vilar, but we're--we're happy that you came and spoke out. I'm not sure which one is Virginia and Edna, but are you all a team? Okay. Take it away.

VIRGINIA RIBOT: Good afternoon and thank you for the opportunity of letting us speak. My name is Virginia Ribot. I am a community organizer at El Puente. That's a non-profit organization in Brooklyn in the east part Brooklyn and the south side of Williamsburg, Brooklyn, and I—I was born and raised there in Williamsburg. So I know the neighborhood for many years. All throughout my childhood there. I've seen the changes that everyone else seen. I've seen the poverty. I've the corners. I've seen gentrification. So I've that all, and there's been a lot of changes. One thing that did not change was our air pollution, our air pollution. We at El Puente are now conducting with an organization called Mothers Upfront and we're conducting air monitoring and it's extremely high. So this is the second time El Puente has this campaign on the air pollution. So we're here to advocate for the BQ Green. The BQ Green is a project that was designed by Borough President Diana Hannah (sp?) and so we have worked very close with her because she is rezoning from our neighborhood. So are actually working very close with mothers and students to do this study. So we did the study as the pilot and now we got funded by

different universities. So we're working with different and different organizations. So we're here to bring our project which has--had been mentioned at the beginning, and I was very happy it has been mentioned because to work and see the numbers that see unfortunately it was a last minute call. So I don't have the numbers with me, but it's amazing how I lived there. Maybe I got used to it, but when you see the numbers and you could breathe by--right by the edge of the Williamsburg Bridge it's--it's stunning. And I also want to share that two of those parks have kids that go there for their recreation because they just--for example if they're charter schools, they don't have their own gym, and they're sharing with the public school system their gym. So when they have recess, that's the parks that these children go to. So for the health of--of the children and for the families that live there, I came to advocate for this big project. Again, like I have heard through the day, it is a big project, but I think it's more important the health of our children. I am an asthmatic born and raised there. My son is also asthmatic, and I personally have the experience of bringing him to that park, and taking him to the

emergency room right after. Then not knowing why and now knowing why [bell] my passion is really, really strong now as a mother and as a community member. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: Thank you, Virginia and Edna.

EDNA FIGUEROA: Good afternoon. I also work for the El Puente community based organization, but I coming as life time resident of Williamsburg. I was born and raised there, and I am here to support Green Thumb and the Parks Department. We have a beautiful garden on South Second between Robling (sic) and Griggs and it's green—oh, a few of the green spaces and it's very community-oriented and the community comes out and they—they have their lunch there on Saturdays and Sundays. You can see children playing in our garden, and Green Thumb and the Parks Department has helped us a lot in building the beds and building a stage and just making the overall look of the garden inviting. And without them we couldn't have done it because we are volunteers and we just make up so much, but they give us volunteers and they help us build these beds and without them I—it would just be a hole in the wall, a department building and

we're so grateful for them. So I'm just here to support them as a community member. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: Well, we're happy to hear that. I'm a big, big supporter of the BQ Green and have been since Council Member Reyna's days and, of course, Council Member Reynoso is a huge booster and he and I have worked together on this, and we're going to keep pushing for a project that would really transform people's lives in a very, very needy area.

EDNA FIGUEROA: So thank you.

VIRGINIA RIBOT: Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: So we thank you for that. Ms. Spencer.

PAULETTE SPENCER: Hello, can you hear me. Thank you very much for having this meeting, Councilman Levine and the rest of the committee. My name is Paulette Spencer. I am the Community Engagement and Policy Analyst from the Bronx Community Health Network, and I work with the project called the Bronx REACH CHAMPS for Parks and Open Spaces. REACH stands for Racial and Ethnic Approaches to Community Health, and what we are doing through this CDC Center for Disease and Control Prevention granted—excuse me. I'm a little nervous.

Forgive me. We were funded by the CDC, and Bronx Community Health Network is a 501(c)(3) federally funded health center where we provide subsidized primary and preventive medical care in 12 clinics run by the Montefiore Center and the Causey (sic) Network in the Bronx, and six clinics in public schools. Our services are available to community residents regardless of their ability to pay. And in addition, through our Community Health Worker–Health Educator and Patient Navigator Programs we increased access for community residents to social services and health literacy in our communities. So my project Bronx REACH CHAMPS for Parks and Open Spaces in partnership with New Yorkers for Parks and the Montefiore Office for Community and Population Health is taking steps to increase the physical activity in parks by–Bronx parks by making parks more accessible to community residents and thereby improve health outcomes. From May to August of last year, our 34 members strong Coalition for Community Partners–or Community Partners for Parks and Open Spaces brainstormed on ideas [bell] to increase access to Bronx parks. The outcome included the park–park–a series of park work–workshops and a series of colorful and informative

park visitors guides prepared by New Yorkers for Parks, which includes a park map and description of park facilities and instructions on how to obtain park permits. In the late summer of 2016, park visitors found a space for mental relaxation, educational resources on nutrition and a few demonstrations in physical fitness in seven Central and Northeast Bronx Parks including Shoelace, Seton Falls, Poe, Saint James, Devou, Soundview and Aqueduct Parks. During our outdoor activities--

CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: [interposing] And if--and if you can--if you can just wrap up on it because we're short on time.

PAULETTE SPENCER: Sure. Sorry about that. We are interested in strengthening our parks programs. We have Train the Trainer programs to provide community residents with the ability to learn some of the techniques to relaxation so that they can teach each other and utilize the parks more in ways that could benefit their health, we are seeking your support for all of it.

CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: Alright, thank you and--and I couldn't agree more with the link that you point out between physical space of a wonderful park

and our health. It's been proven time and again, and that's great to hear how a professional is making that case here. So thank you for coming out.

PAULETTE SPENCER: Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: Mr. Butler.

JOHN BUTLER: Hi and thanks for having me today. My name is John Butler and I'm the Ecological Project Manager at the Friends of Van Cortlandt Park. You normally see my boss Christina. She's on vacation so I'm here in support. So first of all, on behalf of the staff and the boards of Friends, I want to thank Council Member Andrew Cohen for his vital support of Friends and Van Cortlandt Park as well we are extremely thankful of you Councilman Levine for your support on our efforts Daylight Tibbetts Brook. So just if you don't know, the Friends are an independent community based organization that actively promotes the conservation and improvement of Van Cortlandt Park through environmental education, restoration and enhancement and we began in 1992. So, basically we're the third largest park of the first largest park in Pelham Bay and the third largest park in Van Cortlandt in the Bronx. The Bronx has more parkland than any other borough, but we

often wonder if we're getting our fair share of budget to maintain these parks and keep them up to the levels that Bronxites deserve. So for the upcoming fiscal year the Friends are looking to request funding for the following projects: One is-- is Daylighting Tibbetts Brook. So New York City Parks is in the process of designing phase one of this project, which involves wetland restoration within the Van Cortlandt Park to begin decreasing the amount of brook water entering the city's sewer system. Daylighting Tibbett Brook has been a potential project for about 20 years, and we've made tremendous progress over the last couple of years, but we need to make--keep that momentum going and begin phase 1 as soon as possible. Since December 2015, the Friends have been monitoring the water quality of Tibbetts Brook and its importance to the biodiversity of--of New York City. Two is the Friends have a trails plan for Van Cortlandt Park and we're-- we're really in--depth in the maintenance of the hiking trails, the 20 plus miles of hiking trails in the park, and--[bell--and we'd like to make some more significant progress on our trails plan and the third is just shadowing what many other people said, which

is maintenance funding. We see a lot of money go to capital projects, but we need to maintain those as well after--after they're done. So, the Friends fully support the New York City Parks Department and--and our efforts to maintain and improve all the parks in New York City.

CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: Okay, John, you know I'm a big supporter of the park and Tibbetts Brook Daylighting plan, and we look forward to continuing with you for that.

JOHN BUTLER: Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: And thank you very much, panel. Okay, our final panel we're going to try and squeeze them. We have seven speakers on the topic of Roosevelt Park. So I'm going to ask Camille Dana, Judith Calamandre. [pause] Okay. William Roddenbush, Regina Clark, Claudia DiSalvo, Fritz Mueller, and Carey Goodman. [background comments, pause] And--and I'm happy that you are so well represented here. I will just ask in the interest of time if you could--if--if one of your colleagues has already made a point, if you could not repeat that would be very helpful, and ma'am, why don't you start

us off. [background comments] [coughing] Go ahead,
ma'am, you can start us off.

FEMALE SPEAKER: I should start.

CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: Yes.

FEMALE SPEAKER: Okay, press the button.

[background comments, pause] Thank you for the
opportunity to express our community's opposition to
the proposed funding for the expansion of the
American Museum of Natural History onto Parks
property. I am President of the Friends of Damrosch
Park and a member of the Committee for
Environmentally Sound Development. We were lead
plaintiffs that brought a suit against New York City
Parks under Adrian Benepe (sp?), New York City under
Mayor Bloomberg and Lincoln Center for the Performing
Arts under Ben Levy. Plaintiffs were successful in
ousting the powerful conglomerate fashion Week from
Damrosch Park in 2014. Equally impressive our
settlement agreement required that Lincoln Center
restore the park. New Yorkers were horrified to wake
up one morning 2010 to find 47 trees in Damrosch Park
cut down. The famous then Kiley (sp?) Gardens were
decimated and the park closed to the public.
Shamefully, Parks Department was complicit in the

destruction of those beautiful established shade trees without any notice to the community. Trees that were listed as healthy on the Parks own website were criminally destroyed without so much as mandatory forest permit, a jewel of a park that served the community so well was destroyed overnight while our elected officials said nothing. Today, park advocates oppose the destruction of another idyllic setting less than a mile away. We opposed the destruction of established trees by a museum that exists that teach the public about the glory of our natural habitat. We oppose the taking of spoonful of [bell] Teddy Roosevelt Park, a little oasis that has served the community so well as a retreat in an overbuilt community in order to build an incongruous massive \$350 million edifice that will primarily serve as an entertainment venue purporting to be a center for innovative science. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: Alright, thank you very. Thank you for being very timely. We appreciate that. Go ahead, ma'am. [background noise, pause]

JUDITH CALAMANDRA: Hello, my name is Judith Calamandra. I live on West 79th Street. I am

the neighbor of the park and the museum. A week ago, the day before St. Patrick's Day, there was a very timely illustrated article in the Times and the headline is *Thinking Inside the Footprint*. Instead of being exhorted to think outside the box. Here are examples of other museums and institutions with an amount of money expected to do this being a fraction of the \$300 and something million here that the Museum of Natural History proposes to put there. I call it a mini Guggenheim Museum there. When you look where are—if you have a minute to read this, and I hope you will, there are—there are statements here from among others the Dean of the Architectural School at Yale, which knows the gang (sic) associates. They are saying that it is unseemly at this time, and even someone says tone deaf to go ahead with the idea of new large buildings and in our case taking away from this tiny little park, which has nothing to spare, which is well used. Everybody loves it. Why [bell] put a wall around the trees and by their own description have a couple of trees and benches inside. They're already outside. You don't have to do anything with wise use of it. You got to do with what you got.

CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: Alright, thank you very much. I realized we skipped one of the colleagues. Were—are you here to speak as well, ma'am. [pause] Then we will continue down the row. [background comments] Okay, go ahead, sir.

MALE SPEAKER: I'll go ahead. I'd like to pivot a little bit and talk about something that's near and dear to your heart, Chair and your heart, council members, which is transparency. It's bewildering as a citizen the opaqueness and the impenetrable nature of the Parks Department when it come to their budget, when it comes to their items on their budget. I know you've done great work so far, and I know that 1340 is progressing so you can get updates on capital projects. But let me be positive about the effects of having transparency when it comes the budget in the Parks Department. One of the things is you can be engaged in public/private partners in a meaningful way in order to further the vast resources of the private citizen when it comes to their capital projects in their park. This helps us with the staffs like I think we're all bewildered when we heard 200 plus acres per gardener. You know, when you can start funding these wealthy

neighborhoods and their parks you can start resources everywhere, but you can't do it without transparency. The reason you can't do it is because you can't go advocate for something that in turn turns into a boondoggle for several years and when you go to check in on it, for instance we've got a project going right now in Teddy Roosevelt Park that we heard from the Parks Department in 2015 about this dog run and that it as funded and everything, and now it's supposed to be finished the month. We have yet to see a shovel. It's between the \$1 and \$3 million. It's separated into five pieces under the same code over several parks, and we have no clue about this project. Now, I'll tell you about this museum. When you're sitting there and you're a member of a community, and you see that a museum and a "conservancy" effort—I put that in quotation—and the Department of Parks has a memorandum of understanding to manage your park, and you have them saying that they don't want money for the park because that would make the park shine and make it difficult for them to build on. You see that there is \$130 million going to this project, and this museum has debt, \$477 million when you total it all up [bell] and

everything is paid off, and you wonder how are we as a community supposed to manage our park when all this money is going to them and going to what it should be going to, which is the head room we need in this budget for the oncoming onslaught to our way of life. Thank you very much.

CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: Thank you very much as well. Alright, please.

REGINA CLARK: I am Regina Clark. On the Upper West Side of Manhattan is a very small park, Theodore Roosevelt Park. On a quite morning in springtime it seems wonderfully at odds with the surrounding city. It pits green swad against the city's sharp angles, green life against brick and asphalt, winding paths against the unbending streets of New York's remorseless grid into which it has been squeezed as if in a vice. On such a favorable morning, Theodore Roosevelt Park resembles nothing so much as a small defenseless principality surrounded by a predatory empire, hostile to its spirit, covetous of its green fields, yet miraculously surviving nonetheless, a sort of municipal Lichtenstein. In the least poetical of cities it makes the unexpected triumph of poetry over

practicality in a certain vague sentiment over the hard calculations of interest and profit. Its mission is so singular, so beautiful and gallant, and that is why so many New Yorkers, tourists and especially the Upper Westsiders have taken to their hearts. Let us hope that this little principality can survive in the center of the Empire City.

CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: Alright, thank you and thank you for being succinct. We appreciate that. Yes, sir.

FRITZ MUELLER: [off mic] My name is Fritz Mueller, and I live West 72nd Street. [coughs] I-I talked to---

CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: [interposing] Lift the mic up, sir, just to make sure. There--there you go.

FRITZ MUELLER: [off mic] -I live on West 72nd Street. The city has been allocating any more profit money for the expansion--[on mic] Oh, sorry.

CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: Great.

FRITZ MUELLER: So, now you're hearing again. Is it red now?

FEMALE SPEAKER: Yes, it is.

FRITZ MUELLER: [laughter] Fritz Mueller is still my name against allocating of more public money for the expansion of some natural history museums—museum into Theodor Roosevelt Park to—to in order to build a center for science, education and innovation. Science, education and innovation, these two—these threes words serve in my opinion only to distract from the real purpose of this—of this project, namely to create a large brand new entrance for the museum. It's—it's 89th Street and Columbus. And starting work to restore the entry hall in my opinion is just a big vanity showpiece with a—with a billionaire's name on it. It does nothing for science, education and innovation, but it may be a good venue for a fundraiser for example. And besides the loss of park bench a large new entry at this spot on Columbus and 79th Street will bring a total influx of traffic, foot traffic and vehicular—vehicular traffic into such multi-use and already very overburdened section of Columbus Avenue. Such a new center or such new space for science, innovation and education, which the museum wants to build minus a new entry hall could easily be put into a—could easily be created within that underutilized footprint

of the present museum. All you have to do is make it--do the earth (sic) the museum from the top down, and you see how much space there is still within the museum [bell] especially in terms of volume to--to develop. In such space--

CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: [interposing] Just briefly. If you could wrap up, Mr. Mueller so--

FRITZ MUELLER: After this context I would like to also sites that occupy Jan Devine (sic) and parts of--also museums go with parts of expansions such as the American History and the Natural History Museum is the only museum and this big history museum goes outside its footprint.

CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: Alright, we appreciate that and --

FRITZ MUELLER: Good day.

CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: --just briefly, if you could briefly so that Mr. Goodman can pick up the baton and continue your line of reasoning.

CARY GOODMAN: I had the pleasure of listening to the Commissioner and all the Commissioner's men earlier. So I think I'll integrate that into my remarks if I can. I'm here-- I'm Dr. Cary Goodman. I live not far from the

museum, and I'm here to call for Commissioner Silver's resignation. Commissioner Silver as charged by the Charter is responsible for and I'm quoting "his duty to manage and care for all parks." Instead of managing Teddy Roosevelt Park effectively, this Commissioner has targeted it, and I heard you, Mr. Chairman talk about targeted investments earlier in you—in the session. The \$8 million that you mentioned as a heavy lift of the gap between what the Commissioner says is coming to this Fiscal Year 18 budget and what is needed. That \$8 million is back in the budget again this year by Council Member, your colleague, Helen Rosenthal for another \$8 million to go to the Natural History. Now, there's already been, and there's some dispute between \$100 and \$130 million steered into this project without one Parks Committee hearing on it, without one community board hearing on it. The first time this conversation every took a public forum was in the Parks Department's scoping session last April. We had a new dialogue without any communication, and it's really a tragedy. You mentioned earlier that there are a lot of things that the parks need to have happen for them. We couldn't agree more. The \$100

million could be clawed back since there's not been a building permit or, you know, a green light given to the project, and to—and could be used for many of the things that you outlined. Commissioner Silver himself mentioned earlier that he wants to have a more equitable park system for all New Yorkers. What sense does it make to put another cultural institution into the Upper West Side? I know you're a neighbor of Lincoln Center already the Museum of Natural History. New York Historical Society, and Manas (sic) Children's Museum. They're all within a few blocks [bell] but this is a great cultural center for all New Yorkers? Let's put it somewhere else where other New Yorkers will have the kind of access that we as Upper Westsiders have. So I urge you if you're not going to ask for the Commissioner's resignation, would you be kind enough to convene a Parks Committee Hearing where people like this good folks here who live near the museum—we have over 4,000 signatures of people who don't want where that kind of thing can take it away.

CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: [interposing] Okay, okay, you're—you're over time. I ask the questions around here not vice versa. [laughter] We don't do

a hearing on individual park projects. We've never done one during my tenure. We focus on broad policy here. Did you have comments as well, ma'am. Okay, take it away.

CLAUDIO DISALVO: Can you hear me? Okay. My name is Claudia DiSalvo. I'm President of Community United to Protect Teddy Roosevelt Park. After \$130 million of taxpayer money taking seven trees and losing our canopy, losing our park, the museum continues to have a voracious appetite. Their appetite can be traced back to the 1800s where in 1885 they made a presentation to the Committee for Appropriations to build more lecture halls, more rooms for teachers and where they more space for exhibitions and dioramas, et cetera, et cetera, and they were turned down in 1885 for this expansion. It is time for our city to start turning to the more powerful elite in this city who have access to—to so much. Hundreds of organizations come to you with budgets that are so stretched for assistance. When we—when the hurricane hit and NYU lost its library, they have now completed a digital medical library that's one room. The museum wants to build an event center. They want to add more space for events

making for their revenue streams to bring in more money. This is not going to be an area of science, and what about what we're living in today? If we're thinking of the museum for the 21st Century we could-- are now moving into interactive digital work. There should be gilder cloud, a gilder cloud that will expand and bring this museum into a world class education setting. I'm an educator for 47 years. We don't need more classrooms. We don't need more brick and mortar. We don't need to take parks from people. Once it's cemented and rolled over, we will never have the opportunity. You need to speak to the people in our community to understand the passions, the history, how they feel about this park leaving them and, of course, what we will lose with the fact of [bell] what we'll have with pollution, what we will have with our transportation systems, what we will having with all for three years of construction what we're going to have to live. So we would appreciate for your consideration, and we need an interactive museum, not another brick and mortar. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: Thank you. Thank you to all our witnesses today. This is our final

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2 panel. This concludes our hearing. [gavel] Thank
3 you very much.

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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 April 12, 2017