

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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March 4, 2026  
Start: 10:11 a.m.  
Recess: 1:25 p.m.

HELD AT: 250 BROADWAY - 8TH FLOOR - HEARING  
ROOM 1

B E F O R E: Ty Hankerson, Chairperson

COUNCIL MEMBERS:

Shekar Krishnan  
Linda Lee  
Christopher Marte  
Frank Morano  
Mercedes Narcisse  
Sandy Nurse  
Yusef Salaam  
Pierina Ana Sanchez  
Kayla Santosuosso  
Sandra Ung

OTHER COUNCIL MEMBERS ATTENDING:

Gale A. Brewer  
Chris Banks  
Lincoln Restler

A P P E A R A N C E S

Tricia Shimamura, Commissioner of New York City Parks

Ben Osborne, Assistant Commissioner of Forestry and Horticulture at New York City Parks

Matt Dury, Chief of Citywide Legislative Affairs at New York City Parks

Louise Yeung, Chief Climate Officer at Mayor's Office of Climate and Environmental Justice

Paul Lozito, Deputy Executive Director at Mayor's Office of Climate and Environmental Justice

Lynn Bodnar Kelly, Executive Director of New York Restoration Project

Sarah Balistreri, Urban Forest Program Senior Manager at Partnerships for Parks

Alia Soomro, Deputy Director for New York City Policy at the New York League of Conservation Voters

Kathy Park Price, Director of Advocacy and Policy at New Yorkers for Parks

Obed Holzinger, Executive Director of the Natural Areas Conservancy

Merrit Birnbaum, President and Chief Executive Officer of Riverside Park Conservancy

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

Tami Lin Moges, Director of the Nature Conservancy's  
New York City program

Kathryn Mercier, Deputy Director of Queens Forestry

Lucy Koteen, Friends of Fort Greene Park

Taige Rambarran, Environmental Educator at Trees New  
York

Joan Reutershan, Parks Department Super Steward

Hayley Gorenberg, Friends of Mount Prospect Park

Christopher Leon Johnson, self

Louis Cox, self

2 SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: Quiet, please. Thank  
3 you.

4 Good morning, and welcome to the New York  
5 City Hybrid Hearing on the Committee on Parks and  
6 Recreation.

7 At this time, please silent all  
8 electronic devices.

9 If you have any questions, please raise  
10 your hand and one of us, the Sergeants-at-Arms, will  
11 kindly assist you.

12 Chair, we are ready to begin.

13 CHAIRPERSON HANKERSON: Alrighty. Good  
14 morning. I'm Ty Hankerson, Chair of the Committee on  
15 Parks and Recreation. I'd like to welcome everyone  
16 who has come to participate in today's hearing on how  
17 we can ensure our city's trees are properly cared for  
18 so they can thrive in the near and long term.

19 The importance of trees to New Yorkers is  
20 obvious. They are the frontline in providing for a  
21 healthy environment. Trees improve water quality by  
filtering and diverting stormwater runoff, filter  
high frequency noises, and provide habitats for  
wildlife. They also help reduce the urban heat island  
effect, bring people closer to nature, cool the air

1 in hot weather, and improve air quality by reducing  
2 pollution. Various studies have estimated that trees  
3 reduce annual residential energy costs by 17 million  
4 dollars per year and reduce runoff by 69 million  
5 cubic feet per year. In terms of where trees are,  
6 just over half of the stock is managed by the Parks  
7 Department. This amounts to about 28 percent, 28's a  
8 good number, that are in parks and 25 percent that  
9 are on streets or other rights of way. About a third  
10 of the canopy is on private land, and the remaining  
11 11 percent on land that is owned by various other  
12 government entities. Typically, the highest numbers  
13 of tree cover is found in areas with large parks and  
14 in neighborhoods that have lower population density  
15 levels. The lowest tree cover can be found in heavily  
16 developed and dense areas. Despite their importance,  
17 the process for maintaining, planting, and increasing  
18 the overall number of trees throughout the city can  
19 often be overlooked and not very transparent to New  
20 Yorkers. That's why I wanted to focus on this issue  
21 for our first hearing as the Parks Committee. Nothing  
shows how a city treats its infrastructure more  
clearly than the value it places on caring for its  
trees.

2           In terms of the process, Commissioner  
3 Shimamura and her team will surely speak to it in  
4 greater detail today, but briefly, the process  
5 involved in maintaining trees by the Parks Department  
6 has many facets. It includes a block by block pruning  
7 schedule, contracting with various businesses to  
8 maintain trees, engaging non-profit organizations to  
9 help plant, preserve and protect trees, and an  
10 inspection process through the Park Inspection  
11 Program, or PIP, in which inspections on Park  
12 properties, including trees are carried out  
13 routinely.

14           It's no surprise to anyone that over the  
15 years and indeed very recently, the Department's  
16 budget for maintenance has suffered ups and downs. It  
17 was stretched from once every seven years to once  
18 every 15 years before being brought back to every  
19 seven years again. Though some of those funds have  
20 been restored with the most recent FY26 budget,  
21 issues persist. And we've talked about difficulties  
that the FY27 budget may face. I am very, very  
concerned because tree-related issues are nothing to  
be dismissed or treated lightly. For example, three  
of the top five categories of Parks-related 3-1-1

2 calls involve complaints about trees, including  
3 concerns over premature deaths to new trees, broken  
4 tree limbs and sidewalk damage resulting from growing  
5 tree roots. Additionally, numerous tragic incidents  
6 over the years have occurred where bystanders have  
7 been severely injured and even killed from falling  
8 tree branches, many from trees that have been  
9 weakened due to severe weather.

10 I hope to use this hearing to examine  
11 ways by which we can improve the maintenance and  
12 inspection processes, including looking at how recent  
13 local laws enacted by the Council are being  
14 implemented to this end. At today's hearing, I also  
15 want to make sure we push for meaningful action to  
16 expand our tree canopy equitably so more communities,  
17 especially underserved communities, that have long  
18 lacked green space are better protected from the  
19 dangers of urban heat. Research shows that the most  
20 vulnerable communities, those with lower average  
21 incomes, higher percentages of people of color, and  
higher rankings on the heat vulnerability index  
tended to have lower tree canopy. This is a sad  
reality, but one that can be fixed with the right  
amount of political will to allocate resources

2 necessary to make equitable tree coverage and green  
3 space access a reality for all New Yorkers, no matter  
4 where you live or where you come from.

5 Many advocates have been working for  
6 years on this issue. For example, the Forest for All  
7 Coalition did extensive work studying our urban  
8 forest to help City policymakers understand the best  
9 steps to protect and grow our tree canopy. As a  
10 result, the Council passed Local Law 148 of 2023,  
11 which requires the creation of an Urban Forest Plan  
12 that aims to help the City expand the tree canopy  
13 from the current 22 percent coverage to 30 percent  
14 coverage. I want to ensure that this Council and  
15 Committee support all efforts that aim to increase  
16 the quality and quantity of City trees and how the  
17 City strategically plan for the long-term future of  
18 the urban forest. All levels of government need to  
19 get serious in treating our tree stock as crucial  
20 infrastructure that must be supported with sufficient  
21 resources and equitably distributed to all parts of  
our city. We deserve no less, and the well-being of  
our environment and the health of each and every New  
Yorker depends on this reality.

2 I'd like to welcome everyone who has come  
3 to participate in this hearing and offer testimony  
4 today. Thank you again, and welcome.

5 Now I'll turn this over to our Committee  
6 Counsel, Kris Sartori, to swear in the members of the  
7 Parks Department.

8 COMMITTEE COUNSEL SARTORI: Thank you,  
9 Chair.

10 Would Commissioner Shimamura and the  
11 representatives of the Parks Department please raise  
12 your right hand if you're able?

13 Do you affirm to tell the truth, the  
14 whole truth, and nothing but the truth in your  
15 testimony before this Committee and to respond  
16 honestly to Council Member questions?

17 COMMISSIONER SHIMAMURA: I do.

18 CHIEF CLIMATE OFFICER YEUNG: I do.

19 ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER OSBORNE: I do.

20 CHIEF DRURY: I do.

21 COMMITTEE COUNSEL SARTORI: Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON HANKERSON: Commissioner, you  
may begin.

COMMISSIONER SHIMAMURA: I hope everyone  
can hear me.

2           Good morning, Chair Hankerson, Members of  
3 the Parks Committee, and other Members of the City  
4 Council. I am Tricia Shimamura, Commissioner of New  
5 York City Parks. I'm pleased to be joined today by  
6 our Assistant Commissioner of Forestry and  
7 Horticulture, Ben Osborne, as well as our Chief of  
8 Citywide Legislative Affairs, Matt Drury. We're also  
9 pleased to be joined by our colleagues from the  
10 Mayor's Office of Climate and Environmental Justice  
11 including the City's Chief Climate Officer, Louise  
12 Yeung, and their Deputy Executive Director, Paul  
13 Lozito.

14           I'm honored to be here for my first  
15 opportunity to formally testify on behalf of the  
16 agency as Commissioner. So, I'd like to take a brief  
17 moment to share a little bit about my personal  
18 history. I had the opportunity to work with many of  
19 you in my most recent role as Parks Manhattan Borough  
20 Commissioner, as well as some of the other  
21 governmental roles I've served in recent years. But I  
actually began my career in public service as a  
social worker in Sheepshead Bay, Brooklyn, working  
with students and their families. Like many of those  
families, I grew up believing that government was not

2 something meant for people who necessarily looked  
3 like me or came from families like mine, and the  
4 problems we encountered often seemed too broken and  
5 too large for any one person to be able to fix. But  
6 through that experience, I started to see government  
7 as not only a way to deliver change, but also a way  
8 to deliver belonging in a city that so many called  
9 home. And our city parks and open spaces are a hugely  
10 important component of making that a reality. I was  
11 humbled to be appointed by Mayor Mamdani to lead this  
12 agency that I love so much and which touches the  
13 lives of millions of New Yorkers each and every day.  
14 I deeply appreciate and understand that the agency I  
15 now have the honor of leading has a mandate to uphold  
16 and a critical role to play in the future of our  
17 city, and I look forward to working productively and  
18 cooperatively with the Council so that we can give  
19 New Yorkers the incredible city park system that they  
20 so truly deserve.

17 I'd like to begin my testimony today by  
18 noting our appreciation for the Council's continued  
19 advocacy for our city parks and for the resources and  
20 support as provided for our forestry efforts. The  
21 City's urban canopy is one of the most vital

2 resources the City has in ensuring our neighborhoods  
3 are healthy and thriving. It provides numerous  
4 immeasurable benefits to everyone living in the five  
5 boroughs, including improving human health and  
6 well-being, and I am very proud of the work our  
7 parkies do every day to grow and protect our city's  
8 trees.

9 Yet the importance of our urban canopy  
10 can be often overlooked and undervalued, even though  
11 our city's trees are essential living infrastructure,  
12 just as vital for New Yorkers as roads, subways, and  
13 telecommunication lines. New York City has nearly  
14 43,000 acres of tree canopy, a full 23.4 percent of  
15 the city's land area, which is best defined as the  
16 cover or shade provided by our city trees. This  
17 robust urban forest provides an incredible array of  
18 environmental, social, and economic benefits, such as  
19 resourcing stormwater runoff, shading buildings, and  
20 conserving energy by reducing heating and cooling  
21 costs, protecting city's pavement from rain and sun,  
noise mitigation, increasing property values, and of  
course, cleaning and cooling the air, benefiting our  
overall health and well-being. Though a lot of the  
public's attention is focused on the value of

2 planting new trees, it is important to note that the  
3 benefits from tree canopy increase exponentially when  
4 you protect and nourish the growth of the larger,  
5 healthy trees that already exist. We are proud to be  
6 known as the Agency of Trees. Our agency logo,  
7 recognized around the world, is literally symbolized  
8 by a tree leaf, and New York City Parks is  
9 responsible for roughly half of the city's tree  
10 canopy, nearly 23,000 acres. The rest of our city's  
11 tree canopy grows on a combination of private and  
12 public land parcels, such as residential, front and  
13 back yards, cemeteries, vacant land, and other public  
lands not managed by New York City Parks, such as  
NYCHA campuses, NYC Public Schools schoolyards, and  
State property.

14           The trees that make up the canopy under  
15 our care generally fall into one of three categories.  
16 They are located in one of our natural forests, in  
17 landscaped areas of a park, and along our city  
18 streets. We estimate that there are nearly five  
19 million trees in our natural forests, and those are  
20 managed by our agency's Natural Resource Group as  
21 part of the forested ecosystem, which includes  
understory vegetation, soils, and wildlife.

2 We will welcome the opportunity to  
3 further discuss the care of our natural forests and  
4 other related topics with the Council, but  
5 maintaining and growing our city's tree stock is an  
6 incredibly sweeping subject, encompassing many  
7 technical and complex nuances, so for the purposes of  
8 today's hearing, we'd like to focus on our street  
9 trees and trees in landscaped parks. These are the  
10 trees that are individually managed by our agency,  
11 nearly 823,000 trees, over 666,000 of which are along  
12 city streets, and nearly 157,000 of which are growing  
13 in landscaped areas of parks.

14 I'd like to provide a quick update on the  
15 tree impact resulting from late February's Winter  
16 Storm Hernando, which produced the most significant  
17 impacts we've witnessed from a snowstorm since 2018.  
18 I'm grateful to our expert forestry crews at parks  
19 and to our partners on the Down Tree Task Force,  
20 including NYC Emergency Management, Department of  
21 Sanitation, FDNY, and NYPD, who worked as one team to  
respond to the reports we were hearing from the  
public and bring some normalcy back to our city.  
During the course of the storm, we received more than  
1,800 tree-related service requests, which included a

1 significant portion of duplicate requests related to  
2 the same concern, as often happens during storms.  
3 After performing over 1,200 inspections, all of which  
4 were completed within 48 hours of the end of the  
5 storm, our foresters confirmed that a total of 220  
6 fallen trees due to the storm, including 47 that were  
7 blocking streets and nine trees or large limbs that  
8 fell on buildings, all of which were addressed within  
9 72 hours after the storm ended. We created over 1,000  
10 work orders related to damaged or fallen trees and  
11 limbs and are completing that work as quickly as  
12 possible, prioritizing the most severe and dangerous  
13 conditions. To be clear, this can be complex and  
14 challenging work, especially in slippery and snowy  
15 conditions, involving the use of heavy equipment and  
16 large vehicles, so we thank New Yorkers for their  
17 patience and support as the work continues.

18 Even outside of emergency extreme weather  
19 conditions, our agency is dedicated to caring for our  
20 trees in a way that keeps New Yorkers safe, so we  
21 utilize a rigorous risk management approach to  
prioritize tree conditions that present the most risk  
to the public and address those immediately. This  
involves a comprehensive inspection program carried

2 out by some of the most qualified foresters in the  
3 country, accompanied by responsive in-house crews  
4 working alongside contractors who focus on proactive  
5 tree maintenance, including neighborhood block  
6 pruning, tree-related sidewalk repair, and pest and  
7 disease control. While we believe that the totality  
8 of the benefits that trees provide greatly outweigh  
9 the inconveniences that can be caused, the simple  
10 truth is that trees are living and growing entities  
11 that can come into conflict with surrounding  
12 infrastructure at times. Our Forestry Team has taken  
13 steps in recent years to improve best practices in  
14 hopes of minimizing these negative impacts, such as  
15 enlarging our standard tree beds to allow more room  
16 for root growth, doing our best to avoid building  
17 damage due to tree limbs, and being more selective  
18 about the tree species being planted in a given  
19 location to avoid conflict with above-ground or  
20 below-ground infrastructure. Though it will take  
21 significant time before the full impact of these  
efforts are borne out, we are committed to continuing  
to seeking the best possible outcomes while  
protecting and nourishing this vital living  
infrastructure.

2           Since we believe that every New York City  
3 neighborhood should get to enjoy the benefits that  
4 trees provide, we are working to expand our tree  
5 canopy with new plantings all over the city,  
6 delivered in a more efficient and equitable fashion.  
7 Thanks to the concentrated planting strategy adopted  
8 through our recently launched Neighborhood Tree  
9 Planting Program. For years, new street trees were  
10 often planted primarily upon request, leading to  
11 inefficient planting around the city, resulting in  
12 some neighborhoods receiving a larger percentage of  
13 new trees while other neighborhoods went without.  
14 Now, new street trees are getting planted on a  
15 data-driven basis of fairness and efficiency,  
16 prioritizing the most heat-vulnerable neighborhoods  
17 first as a matter of environmental justice. Over a  
18 nine-year period, New York City Parks will serve the  
19 entire city with new trees in a strategic and  
20 equitable manner, ensuring that every street location  
21 that is appropriate and viable for a tree will have  
been planted by the end of that timeframe. Through  
this new approach, a significant portion of every  
community district in the city will receive new trees  
at least once every three years.

2           Additionally, while New York City Parks  
3 will be planting new street trees through a more  
4 comprehensive approach along each city block, we will  
5 concurrently remove tree stumps and dead or dying  
6 trees, plant in all appropriate locations, and  
7 identify all unplantable tree beds, either restoring  
8 them to pavement or working with local community  
9 members that volunteer to care for it as green space.

10           Even in its early stages, this new  
11 strategic approach is already delivering results for  
12 New Yorkers. In the fall-winter planting season that  
13 just concluded, our agency set a new 10-year high  
14 watermark for as more than 9,500 trees were planted  
15 along our streets and in our parks, in neighborhoods  
16 that were most vulnerable to the impacts of extreme  
17 heat. We worked with nurseries to prepare a larger  
18 stock of trees well in advance of the planting season  
19 and coordinated an incredible effort amongst our  
20 foresters, Tree Procurement Team, and our  
21 contractors. We look forward to building on this  
great success as we resume planting in the spring. We  
have already reached out to your Council offices and  
local community boards to share maps and other  
details about the upcoming planting season, so please

2 let us know if there are any additional information  
3 that would be helpful to your constituents.

4 The health of our tree canopy would not  
5 be possible without the city's numerous advocacy  
6 groups and the diligent work of our numerous park  
7 stewards and volunteers. These volunteers generously  
8 donate their time and energy to looking after our  
9 city trees in coordination with our incredible  
10 stewardship team to build and foster a  
11 community-based culture of caring for trees. Please  
12 encourage your constituents to sign up for  
13 stewardship events via the NYC Parks website or care  
14 for their neighborhood trees by watering trees weekly  
15 and weeding unwanted plants from tree beds. New  
16 Yorkers can even record their tree care activities on  
17 the NYC tree map located on our agency's website.

18 We are also in the midst of our decennial  
19 Trees Count Tree Census in which volunteers are  
20 helping us survey and count all of the trees within  
21 our landscape parks. Over 2,500 dedicated tree lovers  
came out last summer to take part of this effort  
which will start back up again in the spring and we  
welcome all of you to help us get the word out and  
even come out and join us in the parks. This

2 grassroots volunteer effort in our parks will be  
3 accompanied by the use of groundbreaking technology  
4 as we plan to count every single street tree in New  
5 York City using state-of-the-art LIDAR scanners that  
6 will create 3D models of every tree providing  
7 information about each tree's size, species,  
8 condition, and location in incredible detail.

9           Though we don't have time today to  
10 exhaustively outline every effort the agency is  
11 taking to ensure the long-term health and growth of  
12 the city's tree canopy, I hope this overview has  
13 helped demonstrate our commitment to growing and  
14 protecting this living infrastructure that is  
15 absolutely vital for New Yorkers. Moreover, I hope  
16 that you leave this hearing with a renewed  
17 appreciation for our trees and the people who care  
18 for them including the New York City Parks foresters,  
19 climbers, pruners, as well as a larger pool of NYC  
20 Parks horticultural professionals who care for our  
21 vast and diverse park system.

          Thank you for allowing us to testify  
before you today and for your continued advocacy and  
support for our city parks. I'm very happy now to  
take answer any questions that you may have.

2 CHAIRPERSON HANKERSON: Thank you so much,  
3 Commissioner.

4 I do want to mention that we've been  
5 joined by a number of my Colleagues, Council Member  
6 Marte, Council Member Ung, Council Member Morano,  
7 Council Member Banks, Council Member Salaam, Council  
8 Member Brewer, Council Member Narcisse, and Council  
9 Member Nurse, and Council Member Santosuosso via  
10 Zoom.

11 All right. With that, I'm going to start  
12 with just a few questions and then I'll turn it over  
13 to my Colleagues and then I'll come back for a second  
14 round so I don't hog up all the time.

15 Local Law 148 requires a path to 30  
16 percent canopy cover citywide. Based on the data  
17 reviewed by the Committee, canopy cover was about  
18 23.4 percent as of 2021. Based on DPR's current  
19 planting and maintenance rates, when does DPR  
20 estimate the City will reach 30 percent canopy cover?

21 COMMISSIONER SHIMAMURA: Thank you so much  
for the question. I love this question not only  
because it talks about the impact of our trees and  
what happens when we not only plant new trees but  
take care of our existing tree stock, which really

2 does exponentially help our canopy, but I also love  
3 it because it points to our upcoming plan that's  
4 coming out in partnership with our partners at MOCEJ.  
5 So, I'm just going to start it off then I'll look to  
6 our Chief Climate Officer to add more detail.

7 We are so excited that finally our City's  
8 plan in order to reach 30 percent canopy is coming  
9 out just this spring. I just want to point out that  
10 this plan is going to be laying out the steps on how  
11 we get to 30 percent canopy, but also will highlight  
12 the incredible importance of our vital  
13 infrastructure, which is our trees. Oftentimes, I  
14 think that people think differently about our subways  
15 or sidewalks or underground infrastructure and lose  
16 sight of this vital living infrastructure, which is  
17 trees, is providing so much benefits, including  
18 things like shade, like cooling down our buildings,  
19 like additional stormwater runoff, like air quality  
20 and noise mitigation. So many of those benefits are  
21 coming from this plan to increase our canopy and  
we're looking forward to seeing that plan come out  
very, very soon. But I'll pass it over to our  
partners over at MOCEJ.

2 CHIEF CLIMATE OFFICER YEUNG: Thank you so  
3 much. And thanks for the question, Council Member.

4 My name is Louise Yeung and I'm the Chief  
5 Climate Officer and the head of the Mayor's Office of  
6 Climate and Environmental Justice. And as the  
7 Commissioner mentioned, we've been working in  
8 partnership to develop the Urban Forest Plan.

9 And I want to give a little preview of  
10 the roadmap that we're laying out. We're still  
11 developing our plan recommendations and so are  
12 excited to come back to you once they're finalized,  
13 but we're really thinking about this roadmap in three  
14 different kinds of buckets.

15 The first is to plant more trees wherever  
16 possible with a priority on environmental justice  
17 communities that have historically had low canopy  
18 cover.

19 The second is, as the Commissioner  
20 mentioned, to preserve the existing trees that are  
21 already here and to make sure that we can help them  
to mature and to expand their tree canopy coverage.  
Our analysis found that the 90 percent of the canopy  
growth that we're expected to see is actually going  
to come from the maturing of existing trees, and so

2 we really want to make sure that that pillar of work  
3 is just as important as planting new trees in those  
4 areas that we can deal with that.

5 And last but definitely not least, the  
6 plan focuses on strengthening connections between New  
7 Yorkers and their urban forest. As the Commissioner  
8 mentioned in her testimony, the trees that exist in  
9 our city are across all sorts of types of property  
10 from parks to our public right of way to private  
11 property owners, small homeowners, large  
12 institutional landowners, and so we have worked very  
13 closely with our Forest for All Coalition, many of  
14 the members are here today, to make sure that we  
15 engage a diverse group of stakeholders to think about  
16 the ways that we can support them in caring for their  
17 trees, educate people on the benefits of them, how to  
18 prune them, how to care for them, when to plant them,  
19 how to make sure that they're not going to fall on  
20 your roof during a storm, all of those different  
21 things. And so, we are really excited for this Urban  
Forest Plan to really lay out a very concrete,  
actionable roadmap that the City, along with our  
partners in the private sector and the environmental

2 space, can really make sure we're expanding our tree  
3 canopy to meet that 30 percent goal.

4 CHAIRPERSON HANKERSON: Given that, what  
5 would it take in terms of staffing, contracts,  
6 nursery capacity, and funding to potentially expedite  
7 the timeline for reaching the 30 percent?

8 COMMISSIONER SHIMAMURA: It's a great  
9 question. So, one point I'll just point out at the  
10 very beginning is that ultimately, as we said in our  
11 testimony, the canopy that NYC Parks is responsible  
12 for is just about a little over, I think, half of all  
13 the trees that are ultimately contributing to that  
14 canopy. So, for Parks, we look at that half that we  
15 can control that's in our landscaped areas, our  
16 natural areas, and our street trees.

17 I am so proud of this agency for looking  
18 very critically at the way that we used to do  
19 plantings. And the way that we used to do plantings  
20 was really based on requests. There was this long  
21 list of where these requests were coming in many  
times, and it was a privilege and honor to take those  
requests in from Members of the Council. But  
ultimately, it really was based on requests, and so  
you would start to see some inequities around where

2 those trees were planted, where they weren't planted,  
3 and ultimately, we weren't being very efficient with  
4 our time and with our resources on how this was done.  
5 So, the agency went back and really looked at,  
6 instead of doing this somewhat ad hoc, somewhat by  
7 request, kind of bopping around our city, what would  
8 it look like to comprehensively do this work, what  
9 would it look like to look at every single plantable  
10 inch of the city, and how long would that take, and  
11 not only were we looking at planting new trees, but  
12 we were also looking at, what would it look like to  
13 provide comprehensive services on every single block,  
14 where we were also expanding tree beds, where we were  
15 also removing stumps, working with partnership  
16 organizations and non-profit leaders to look at  
17 non-plantable tree beds. And oftentimes, there are  
18 some of those too, and either filling in those beds  
19 or looking at doing other sorts of natural plantings  
20 there. And if we did that on a comprehensive level,  
21 if we instead were directed and more purposeful, I  
would say, in doing that across the city, we came up  
with this idea that we could do this in nine years,  
which I think is pretty amazing. In nine years' time,  
I will be able to look at you and tell you that we've

2 been able to plant and assess every single piece of  
3 our city. And so that is where we're at now, where  
4 we're looking at implementing this plan, always with  
5 an eye towards equity, always prioritizing our  
6 heat-vulnerable neighborhoods first, and that's what  
7 you'll see us continue to do over the next several  
8 years.

9 CHAIRPERSON HANKERSON: Thank you for  
10 that.

11 Last year, NYC Parks planted just under  
12 18,000 street trees. Does DPR currently have enough  
13 staff and contract capacity to increase that number?  
14 And what would it take to reach 25,000 and/or 50,000  
15 trees per year?

16 COMMISSIONER SHIMAMURA: Sure. Thank you  
17 again for the question. So, just kind of building off  
18 of the last response I gave, that comprehensive  
19 approach has not only, I would argue, served New York  
20 City better, which is ultimately our goal, but it  
21 also has meant that we've increased our amount of  
plantings significantly. Last year, I believe, in my  
testimony, we said that we planted, we had a record  
high of over 9,500 street trees that were planted,  
and we do this work really in partnership with both

2 our in-house Tree Planting team as well as a kind of  
3 wide array of contractors. But mostly, I think that  
4 looking at this comprehensively, we're excited to see  
5 those tree numbers grow, also excited to see that  
6 really and truly, we're looking at the whole picture,  
7 not just where we're putting in new trees, but also  
8 where we're filling in and taking away other kind of  
9 unnecessary stumps or unnecessary planting beds where  
10 trees wouldn't be able to grow.

11 I'm going to look towards our Assistant  
12 Commissioner, Ben Osborne, for Forestry, just to make  
13 sure that there are any additional information around  
14 just the hard numbers for you, so you can understand  
15 where we were in past years and where we look to go  
16 now, particularly with the upcoming planting season  
17 ahead of us.

18 And I will just add, before I pass it  
19 over to you, that, of course, a large portion of this  
20 work can be impacted by weather. So, what we will  
21 see, too, is that based on the year, based on whether  
or not we have more storms or other extreme weather  
activity, that does also play a role in our planting  
season.

2 ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER OSBORNE: Thank  
3 you, Commissioner.

4 I don't have much to add. I will just  
5 say, as we're transitioning into our approach to  
6 neighborhood tree planting, as the Commissioner said,  
7 we're really proud of the great fall season we just  
8 had, and we're hopeful that this approach to  
9 neighborhood tree planting will prove to be even more  
10 efficient than our past practices, and we hope to see  
11 those numbers go up in the coming years.

12 CHAIRPERSON HANKERSON: Thank you.

13 Based on canopy data reviewed by the  
14 Committee, citywide canopy cover increased from 2017  
15 to 2021, but some neighborhoods, especially  
16 low-income and marginalized communities, still saw  
17 canopy loss and higher heat vulnerability. How does  
18 DPR explain that difference, and what may you be  
19 doing to address those concerns in those particular  
20 communities?

21 COMMISSIONER SHIMAMURA: Yeah. Thank you  
for that question. Ultimately, and I believe I said  
it in my testimony, but it's worth repeating many  
times over, we should be approaching all of our work,  
all of the work that is absolutely essential to

1 serving the city through a lens of equity. So, where  
2 we put our resources, where we look to lead here,  
3 should always be looking at what are the  
4 neighborhoods that have received less, what are the  
5 neighborhoods that are more vulnerable to extreme  
6 weather, more vulnerable to heat? And so, through our  
7 Neighborhood Tree Planting program, that is  
8 absolutely, we use a data-driven approach that really  
9 looks at HVI neighborhoods, so that's Heat Vulnerable  
10 Index based on DOHMH data, and we look at those  
11 neighborhoods that are at HVI levels four and five,  
12 first and foremost. When it comes to the overall  
13 canopy, what I'll also point out is that those  
14 neighborhoods that we saw a reduction in their  
15 canopy, and I'll also look to MOCEJ in a second to  
16 add onto this, but they were also neighborhoods that  
17 were hit particularly hard through extreme storm  
18 events in the past. So, when you look at those data  
19 point, we also see that those were exactly the same  
20 time when we had extreme weather, tropical storms  
21 that came through. And unfortunately, I wish it could  
be said where that only one type of tree was  
susceptible to extreme weather events, but it's not  
that way. You can see new trees, old trees, trees

2 that have only lived half of their kind of usable  
3 life years, they're all somewhat susceptible to these  
4 extreme weather events. It really just depends on the  
5 type of weather that comes in.

6 But I'll look now to our partners at  
7 MOCEJ to see if they'd like to add anything else  
8 about the canopy.

9 CHIEF CLIMATE OFFICER YEUNG: Yeah. Thank  
10 you, Commissioner. And thank you for that question.

11 So, we did a lot of extensive analysis in  
12 developing the Urban Forest Plan, and what we found  
13 was some of the biggest losses in tree canopy cover  
14 were happening in Eastern Queens and a lot of that  
15 was due to new development and removals for different  
16 reasons. And then in coastal neighborhoods, as the  
17 Commissioner mentioned, extreme weather has a really  
18 major impact on the health of trees. And so, the  
19 neighborhoods that were affected by storms in the  
20 last couple of years really saw a lot of those  
21 losses. And so, private property is a really  
interesting space for us because it's an area where  
we saw a lot of losses, but also has the largest  
untapped planting opportunities, and that's why we  
wanted to make sure that as we were engaging

2 stakeholders during the Urban Forest Plan, we really  
3 thought very intentionally about what it looks like  
4 to educate and bring in private property owners into  
5 this process and really make sure they have the tools  
6 to care for their trees on their property, to think  
7 about how to best plant new trees and to make sure  
8 that they're safe from storms.

9 And I want to also mention a couple of  
10 bright spots too. As you mentioned, Council Member,  
11 the tree canopy coverage did grow from the time that  
12 you mentioned from 2017 to 2021. We had about 8,000  
13 acres that were gained. We had 5,700 that were lost,  
14 but it's a net gain of 23,000 acres. And the areas  
15 that saw the greatest gains included Central  
16 Brooklyn, Upper Manhattan, and the Bronx, and those  
17 specifically reflected the targeted planting  
18 investments that the Commissioner mentioned to try to  
19 make sure that we are focused on high heat vulnerable  
20 areas and to make sure we're growing the tree canopy  
21 in the places that need it the most. So, we're really  
proud to see those outcomes reflected for New  
Yorkers, and we hope that the roadmap provided in the  
Urban Forest Plan can continue to accelerate that  
expansion in our tree canopy.

2 CHAIRPERSON HANKERSON: Does the  
3 Department track and prioritize the neighborhoods  
4 with repeated canopy loss across multiple reporting  
5 periods?

6 COMMISSIONER SHIMAMURA: I'm sorry. I  
7 couldn't hear that question.

8 CHAIRPERSON HANKERSON: Does the  
9 Department track and prioritize neighborhoods with  
10 repeated canopy loss across multiple reporting  
11 periods?

12 COMMISSIONER SHIMAMURA: So, we do work  
13 very closely with MOCEJ to look at the canopy growth  
14 and then canopy loss. And so, in partnership with  
15 MOCEJ, where we are frankly at this point with our  
16 Urban Forest Plan coming out soon in daily  
17 conversations together around this, that is where we  
18 continue to track that.

19 And I'll look to our Chief Climate  
20 Officer to add more about that specific tracking.

21 CHIEF CLIMATE OFFICER YEUNG: Yeah. I  
22 really love this question because, and again, thank  
23 you to Council for passing the historic legislation  
24 that allowed us to do the Urban Forest Plan. It  
25 really prompted us to do this kind of analysis that

2 had never been done before. So, the data that we  
3 cited from 2017 to 2021 is the most recent batch of  
4 information that we have, and that's the basis that  
5 we used to perform our analysis and to make our  
6 recommendations as we're developing them. But, what  
7 we're also going to be doing is every five years, a  
8 LIDAR survey of our tree canopy coverage and making  
9 sure that we're taking stock on a regular consistent  
10 basis of the canopy change over time, and so this is  
11 going to be data that we will now be able to have in  
12 our arsenal, and we'll be using that to make data  
13 driven decisions about where is the most important  
14 places for prioritizing planting and where do we need  
15 to be focused on the most? So, this will be coming up  
16 as part of our Urban Forest Plan.

14 CHAIRPERSON HANKERSON: Thank you. I'm  
15 going to ask a couple more questions, and I'm going  
16 to turn it over to my Colleagues.

16 What neighborhoods in the city currently  
17 have the lowest tree canopy coverage and are most at  
18 risk of canopy loss? How does DPR choose areas for  
19 increased tree planting? What factors are used in  
20 that process and what are examples of areas being  
21 targeted now?

2           COMMISSIONER SHIMAMURA: So, I'll kick it  
3 off and then I'll pass it over to our partners at  
4 MOCEJ. But as I mentioned before, we are now  
5 undergoing a full comprehensive neighborhood tree  
6 planting program where we are looking at every single  
7 plantable street in New York City and making sure  
8 that we are comprehensively planting in every place  
9 we can. That is something that we are committed to  
10 doing in nine years' time, which I think is a very  
11 exciting and ambitious timeline, we will be able to  
12 say that we have assessed every single New York City  
13 block to make sure that they have as many plantable  
14 trees as possible. We are not doing this in a vacuum.  
15 We are using data-driven approaches and particularly  
16 with our partners at MOCEJ and DOHMH using their data  
17 on heat vulnerable neighborhoods, first and foremost  
18 prioritizing those who are most vulnerable to extreme  
19 weather and extreme heat. And you should see, we've  
20 continuously shared that information with Council  
21 offices, with community boards so you should have  
additional information right now in your offices  
around where we're planting, where we're planning to  
plant. We're looking at additional messaging to come  
out because we want New Yorkers to be excited and we

2 want New Yorkers to be proud of the work that's being  
3 done. We want them to be excited about this living  
4 infrastructure that they get to have a relationship  
5 with. It's a little different to have a relationship  
6 with this living infrastructure versus like sewage or  
7 streets or sidewalks. It's a different relationship  
8 and we want to embrace that, and so we're really  
9 excited about what we're doing. We're really excited  
10 about that growth and happy to give you more  
11 information to your specific offices around when  
12 we're coming to your neighborhoods.

13 When it comes to the other question  
14 around, I think canopy and other approaches, I'll  
15 look to MOCEJ.

16 CHIEF CLIMATE OFFICER YEUNG: Yeah. Thank  
17 you.

18 So, in our analysis, we found that  
19 environmental justice areas that have historically  
20 borne the burden of environmental harms and pollution  
21 have a lower tree canopy coverage than  
non-environmental justice areas. So, environmental  
justice areas average a 19 percent canopy coverage  
compared to 26 percent in non-environmental justice  
neighborhoods. And the areas that have the lowest

2 canopy within that are in Hunts Point in the Bronx,  
3 Rockaway Beach, Arvin and Edgemere in Queens and in  
4 Sunset Park in Brooklyn, and so those are  
5 neighborhoods that we really want to focus on. I  
6 mentioned in my previous response the areas that have  
7 seen the biggest losses, primarily Eastern Queens and  
8 our waterfront communities that have been very  
9 affected by coastal storms. And so, between those  
10 areas with lowest canopy coverage and those areas  
11 that have seen the biggest losses, we are going to be  
12 looking at how we can increase tree plantings there,  
13 take care of the trees that already exist and make  
14 sure that we're doing that in line with our goals on  
15 equity.

16 CHAIRPERSON HANKERSON: Thank you. I just  
17 want to switch gears just a little bit. What is the  
18 approximate budget currently allocated for overall  
19 tree maintenance for FY26 and how is that funding  
20 split across major categories of tree maintenance  
21 work if tracked?

22 COMMISSIONER SHIMAMURA: Thank you for the  
23 question. So, we have our current FY26 budget. It  
24 includes roughly 37 million in OTPS, which is just  
25 non-salary for those who may not know that, for the

2 care and maintenance of our existing street trees and  
3 trees in landscape parks. And then to dial down into  
4 that, we also have approximately 250 active staff  
5 dedicated to caring for our trees, both in streets  
6 and in our landscape parks. That includes around 60  
7 foresters and 90 climbers and pruners.

8 CHAIRPERSON HANKERSON: Thank you.

9 Switching gears one more time and then I'm going to  
10 turn it over to my Colleagues. Sorry, Colleagues and  
11 crew.

12 The recent storm that we had, I know you  
13 mentioned in your testimony that Park staff were  
14 assigned to work and assist in cleanup. Were any Park  
15 staff assigned particularly to shovel and/or clean  
16 non-parks property or public right-of-way areas  
17 during the recent snow response? And if so, how many  
18 staff members were assigned and what were their job  
19 classifications?

20 COMMISSIONER SHIMAMURA: Thank you so much  
21 for your question. I love this question because it  
22 gives me an opportunity to publicly thank again the  
23 incredible work that our Park staff did, not just  
24 through this most recent storm, but in every storm.  
25 Parks is a 365-day operation. So, in extreme heat, we

2 are out there in our pools, beaches, in our parks,  
3 providing incredible services. Our recreation  
4 centers, our cooling centers, we do so much, but also  
5 in extreme cold, in extreme winter weather, we are  
6 also out there. Our Park staff dedicates our entire  
7 maintenance and operation team towards snow removal.  
8 And we have a very robust winter weather response  
9 plan that gets put out every year that prioritizes  
10 perimeter sidewalks, it prioritizes crosswalks,  
11 prioritizes high traffic areas in our parks, and then  
12 JOPs, jointly operated playgrounds, to make sure that  
13 those are also clear. After that, we go through a  
14 number of other spaces, but yes, we are deeply  
15 involved in snow removal. And we do, as part of that  
16 winter weather plan, as built into our operations,  
17 dedicate additional staff to our partner agencies at  
18 DSNY to help with that clearance. And we also  
19 dedicate some portion of vehicles to them. Our Mayor  
20 recently visited our Randall's Island Garage during  
21 the storm to see that Park staff are turning out and  
fixing our vehicles, fixing vehicles for other sister  
agencies, all throughout the night, throughout these  
storms, to make sure that we can deliver safe streets  
to all New Yorkers, and that includes sidewalks that

2 are a part of our responsibility because they're  
3 adjacent to parkland. Our foresters, in this most  
4 recent storm, our Forestry Unit, played an incredibly  
5 important role. As I mentioned in my testimony, we had  
6 1,800 service requests come in through 3-1-1 with New  
7 Yorkers reporting downed trees, downed limbs, that  
8 were blocking streets, that were on top of private  
9 property, that were needing to be addressed. And I am  
10 so proud of my team, including our Forestry Unit  
11 that's represented here today, for what they did to  
12 respond to that storm in a very quick and efficient  
13 way. We convened the Downed Trees Task Force, which  
14 is helped run by our partners at New York City  
15 Emergency Management, as part of the task force,  
16 FDNY, NYPD, Sanitation all serve on that task force  
17 where we are tracking in live time, real time, where  
18 we see downed trees, making sure that we're  
19 prioritizing getting those trees out of the streets  
20 so that emergency vehicles can get there. And then on  
21 top of that, then partaking trees and limbs off of  
properties, and then continuing to move down that  
list. From the most recent storm, we had over 1,000  
work orders created. I want to again shout out my  
Forestry team and the Parks teams that came out and

2 cleared all of those streets within 72 hours of the  
3 storm's end, and we are just about getting finished  
4 with all of those work orders to date. Some of the  
5 last ones that we have on our list are really related  
6 to extra utilities work that needs to get done, or  
7 other kind of coordination that needs to get done.  
8 But overall, I'm incredibly proud of the role that  
9 Parks plays. Parks is a part of the sort of emergency  
10 response when it comes to these storms. And while we  
11 looked very much in partnership with NYCEM, with  
12 DSNY, with DOT, I'm very proud of the work that our  
13 staff does, and I know that many of them are  
14 listening in today. I know that many of them look  
15 very closely at hearings like this so, I want to give  
16 them their shout out and say thank you tremendously  
17 for the work that they did across the city because no  
18 part of the city was not affected by that storm.

19 CHAIRPERSON HANKERSON: I also want to say  
20 thank you to them as well.

21 Just as a follow-up, particularly for the  
City Parks workers that were assigned to shovel  
and/or clear non-parks property, was their rate of  
pay consistent with that of the emergency snow  
shovelers who were hired per diem to clear public

2 areas such as the bus stops, crosswalks, and fire  
3 hydrants?

4 COMMISSIONER SHIMAMURA: You know, I'll  
5 have to get back to you specifically on that. I can  
6 only speak for our staff so I don't know intimately  
7 the rate of pay for other workers at other agencies  
8 or how that works. We're happy to get back to you on  
9 that. But I will say that we understand that, I mean,  
10 snow shoveling is part of our responsibilities. When  
11 you look at our parkland, or specifically our  
12 landscaped parks, the sidewalk includes, that's our  
13 property, and we are responsible for clearing that.  
14 We understand that New Yorkers, many of them drive,  
15 but many of them walk. They take the buses. They bike  
16 to work. And so, we take that responsibility very  
17 seriously. And it's not something that I would ever  
18 look to kind of move to another agency exclusively  
19 because those are our sidewalks. We take a lot of  
20 pride in them. During the snowstorm, I myself went  
21 out to visit with teams. I myself helped clear a  
couple bus shelters and some crosswalks with those  
teams. It's a big job that I'm very proud that our  
team takes on, and I'm very proud of the partnership  
that we have with other agencies.

2 CHAIRPERSON HANKERSON: Given that  
3 partnership, and we definitely understand and  
4 appreciate Parks lending a hand to sister agencies,  
5 but in doing that, how is fairness assessed in the  
6 labor impact of assigning Park staff to assist in  
7 areas that really aren't Parks property?

8 COMMISSIONER SHIMAMURA: Sure. I think  
9 that when it comes to our approach here, it really is  
10 looking at one city and looking at not through the  
11 boundaries of this is Park's job, this is DOT's job,  
12 this is DSNY's job, this is somebody else's job.  
13 Really and truly, we're looking at the lived  
14 experience of New Yorkers. We're making sure that  
15 when New Yorkers wake up after a snowstorm, when  
16 they're trying to get their kids to school, when  
17 they're trying to get to their jobs where they don't  
18 have the luxury of working from home or staying in on  
19 a snow day, that they can actually do that job. And  
20 so my goal as Commissioner of this agency is to make  
21 sure, yes, to fight for my team, yes, to highlight  
the work that they do, but ultimately to make sure  
that we can serve New Yorkers so that New Yorkers  
don't have to say, well, this is DOT's job, and this  
is New York Park's job when they step up here, and

2 this is another contractor's job, that ultimately New  
3 Yorkers just see clear sidewalks, that ultimately  
4 they are just able to get to their jobs, get to their  
5 kids, get to the groceries, and come home safely. So,  
6 I would just say that our team knows how much our job  
7 expands beyond the parks. We are always there to  
8 answer the call. We are always there to step up, and  
9 I'm so proud of the efforts that came in. Not only  
10 was our Park staff out early in the morning, 4  
11 o'clock in the morning, overnight, our Park staff  
12 stayed in rec centers overnight to make sure that  
13 they could be there the next morning. They showed up  
14 early. They were very much in lock and partnership  
15 with our colleagues at DSNY, because ultimately, it's  
16 not about jurisdiction. It's about serving the city  
17 with comprehensive services.

18 CHAIRPERSON HANKERSON: And as we  
19 appreciate that willingness, were they compensated  
20 for the time that they spent overnight in rec  
21 centers?

22 COMMISSIONER SHIMAMURA: Yes. For this  
23 last one, we provided overtime, a code that was used  
24 throughout the city for that service.

25 CHAIRPERSON HANKERSON: Thank you.

2 I'm going to come back the next round  
3 with more questions.

4 I wanted to mention that we've been  
5 joined by the former Chair, Council Member Krishnan,  
6 as well as Council Member Pierina Sanchez on Zoom,  
7 and I'm going to turn it over to Council Member  
8 Banks.

9 COUNCIL MEMBER BANKS: Thank you, Chair,  
10 and congratulations on your first Committee hearing,  
11 and to the Commissioner, congratulations on your  
12 appointment.

13 These are obviously District-centered  
14 questions, because every time I, when I think about  
15 the Forestry Unit, there's some frustration there  
16 with my constituents, and I just want to get straight  
17 to this. When it comes to the 42nd Council District,  
18 can you give us a number as to currently how many  
19 maintenance or are there overdue tree maintenance  
20 pruning that exists, or what exists as far as the  
21 amount of blocks that are needed to be pruning,  
pruned?

COMMISSIONER SHIMAMURA: Sure. Yeah,  
Council Member. Thank you. It's lovely to meet you,  
and I'm looking forward to meeting you in your 42nd

2 Council District. I will just warn you that I'm going  
3 to probably have to get back to you with more  
4 specific information on your Council District, and  
5 we're happy to, but I want to point out a couple  
6 additional resources that we have available to you  
7 and to all of your constituents. So first of all, we  
8 just came out in the last two years with our Vital  
9 Parks Explorer. It's on our website, where your  
10 constituents can look based on their community board  
11 district and I believe on their Council District for  
12 all sorts of services and the closeness of those  
13 services. I don't believe that the Vital Parks  
14 Explorer goes into that level of detail around where  
15 we're tree pruning, but we're happy to give you an  
16 idea as --

17 COUNCIL MEMBER BANKS: Yeah. We could get  
18 a breakdown. Yeah.

19 COMMISSIONER SHIMAMURA: -- to where  
20 exactly you are with that breakdown. What I will say  
21 is that overall, because constituents across the city  
can put in a request for a tree-related concern  
through 3-1-1, this information is fairly dynamic. We  
saw just in the last storm that 1,800 number that  
came in --

2 COUNCIL MEMBER BANKS: Right.

3 COMMISSIONER SHIMAMURA: -- so it's always  
4 a little bit of a moving list. I will say that also  
5 we look at tree pruning versus sidewalk concerns in  
6 slightly different buckets. We have a seven-year  
7 cycle for tree pruning --

8 COUNCIL MEMBER BANKS: Okay.

9 COMMISSIONER SHIMAMURA: -- so every year  
10 within the city, within seven years, you should  
11 expect that all of your trees in seven years are  
12 pruned. That's according to industry standards.

13 COUNCIL MEMBER BANKS: So, it's a  
14 seven-year, okay.

15 COMMISSIONER SHIMAMURA: Yes, so one in  
16 seven.

17 COUNCIL MEMBER BANKS: And how many open  
18 3-1-1 tree service requests pruning pertains to  
19 pruning, removal, emergency, are outstanding in my  
20 particular District?

21 COMMISSIONER SHIMAMURA: Again, for your  
particular District, we have to get you that specific  
information. For, in terms of, I think what you're  
asking about is really the sort of outstanding, you  
may have heard about the --

2 COUNCIL MEMBER BANKS: Correct.

3 COMMISSIONER SHIMAMURA: -- outstanding  
4 backlog of service requests.

5 COUNCIL MEMBER BANKS: I was going to get  
6 to that in the next questions, yeah.

7 COMMISSIONER SHIMAMURA: Happy to jump  
8 there if you'd like, but really it comes back to  
9 where you see is we tend to rate tree and sidewalk  
10 repairs on a one-to-100 kind of scale. And in those  
11 one-to-100 scale, we look to using a tree risk  
12 management approach of understanding kind of the  
13 severity of where we see trip hazards, or we see  
14 broken sidewalks, we see potentially falling limbs  
15 and that sort of thing, and we really look at that  
16 where we look to address the most extreme, most  
17 dangerous situations first. And within that time, and  
18 I'll look to our Assistant Commissioner to speak more  
19 to this, I believe that our response rate is within  
20 seven days.

21 COUNCIL MEMBER BANKS: Okay.

COMMISSIONER SHIMAMURA: Then from there,  
we go to our slightly less, but still very serious  
concerns, where they're in that 80 to 90 range, where  
we are looking to respond to those within 14 days.

2 Where we do see a significant backlog is where you  
3 see that kind of mid-level still concerning range of,  
4 I think, 60 to 75 --

5 COUNCIL MEMBER BANKS: Right.

6 COMMISSIONER SHIMAMURA: -- in that rating  
7 scale, where we do see a significant backlog, and so  
8 that's where we do have, I think, I believe it's,  
9 I'll look to our Assistant Commissioner to give those  
10 specific numbers. But I do want to emphasize that for  
11 those most severe situations, we are looking to  
12 respond to those within a week's time.

13 COUNCIL MEMBER BANKS: Okay. And when it  
14 comes to quality assurance standards, do the forestry  
15 inspectors use when determining that a tree is in  
16 good or fair condition, I know that's normally the  
17 rating they get, especially when elected officials  
18 provide photos showing trees being damaged or  
19 protruding onto private property. How often are  
20 inspectors plan to review or audit, and what  
21 percentage of these cases are overturned after a  
22 second review is done once a rating has been given?

23 COMMISSIONER SHIMAMURA: Sure. I'm going  
24 to pass it over to our Assistant Commissioner to go  
25 into those details for you.

2 ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER OSBORNE: Sure.

3 Thank you, Council Member Banks, for that question.

4 So, as the Commissioner mentioned, when  
5 we inspect trees, we take a tree risk management  
6 approach, which is what you're alluding to, and  
7 that's a very systematic methodology that's based on  
8 an industry standard that we've developed into a  
9 prioritization system to allow us to get to the most  
10 significant tree conditions first. So, that looks at  
11 the entire tree. Our inspectors look at the  
12 likelihood of a tree or any part of that tree failing  
13 or falling, the likelihood of that impacting people  
14 or property, and the consequences of that event,  
15 should it happen, right, how big is that tree, how  
16 big is that branch?

17 COUNCIL MEMBER BANKS: So, when there's a  
18 rating that has been done, after, I guess, the first  
19 inspector comes out, what is the quality assurance?  
20 Is there a second review that's done? Because we've  
21 had situations where inspectors have come out and  
they said no work is needed, but the pictures clearly  
show that there's a need for work to be done on that  
particular tree.

ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER OSBORNE: Sure.

2 COUNCIL MEMBER BANKS: So, what's in place  
3 to overturn that review so the constituent can get  
4 the good service?

5 ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER OSBORNE: Sure.  
6 Yeah. So, I mean, our inspectors are performing  
7 thousands and thousands of inspections every single  
8 year, right? So, not every single inspection is  
9 reviewed or evaluated. If a concern is brought to our  
10 attention, the attention of management, they will  
11 take another look, and we don't track the number of  
12 times an inspection result is changed. It does happen  
13 from time to time. In terms of quality assurance, we  
14 are working, we're a citywide operation, although our  
15 foresters are primarily based in one borough or  
16 another. We do, from time to time, take foresters  
17 from one location to another and cross-train so that  
18 they're kind of sharing their knowledge, sharing  
19 their expertise, so that one inspector isn't kind of  
20 pigeonholing themselves into a result. But I  
21 appreciate the question. We do review these concerns  
when they're raised, but we don't have --

19 COUNCIL MEMBER BANKS: So, have you  
20 overturned an inspector when an inspector rating has

2 been given? Has it ever been overturned by your  
3 agency?

4 ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER OSBORNE: Yeah.

5 COUNCIL MEMBER BANKS: Or your unit?

6 Okay. So, and this is another  
7 District-specific question. Parks and Green Thumb  
8 have inspected trees on a concerned resident's Barbey  
9 Street garden, which is a Green Thumb. The site is  
10 planned to be included in a pruning contract  
11 currently out for BID with anticipated work in the  
12 summer of 2026. Parks had advised the homeowner to  
13 file a Comptroller complaint for damage on a property  
14 and noted that additional street trees are scheduled  
15 for planting nearby. Question, has the Parks Forestry  
16 or Green Thumb physically visited this site recently  
17 to review the current tree status, including the roof  
18 contact? And this is particularly dealing with a  
19 property, and I happened to do an exhibit that we  
20 created where the house is actually, you can see the,  
21 this is the tree right here, and it's actually  
22 leaning on the house. And it's a Green Thumb that is  
23 basically on the side of the house. And it seems  
24 like, you know, the resident is not getting the  
25 service as needed after they've taken multiple

2 pictures to show to Forestry, and nothing has been  
3 done.

4 COMMISSIONER SHIMAMURA: Sure. Well, first  
5 of all, I will thank you for bringing it to our  
6 attention. We'll certainly take any sort of photos  
7 that you want to share with us, or any sort of  
8 contact information, and we can certainly take a look  
9 at this.

10 And I'll just say with our Green Thumb  
11 team, this is a really hands-on group of a unit  
12 within our agency. They are constantly out in our  
13 community gardens across the city. They're very much  
14 working very closely with the partners on the ground  
15 so I'm sure that this is on their radar, but I'm  
16 happy to take it back and take a look into this.

17 COUNCIL MEMBER BANKS: We need some work  
18 really done. Being on the radar is one thing, but  
19 getting it done is the next thing. So, we really  
20 need, because we constantly get complaints from  
21 constituents on this issue. And I don't know if it's  
a budgetary issue, a lack of manpower, but these  
trees are causing damage to residents' properties.  
And we're constantly hearing about the, you know,

2 that the complaints are being made, but nothing's  
3 being done.

4 So, I want to move on to this question.  
5 Given the unresolved issues, Parks recently proceeded  
6 with plans to plant an additional tree adjacent to  
7 this particular property before the existing problem  
8 was dealt with. So, I want to understand how's that  
9 done. If a resident's complaining that a tree is  
10 doing damage to their property, and then the next  
11 couple of days they wake up and there's another tree  
12 planted, what's the priority here?

13 COMMISSIONER SHIMAMURA: Sure. The  
14 priority is most definitely to, of course, serve New  
15 Yorkers. So, very much so the priorities, but the  
16 kind of devils in the details, right? So, we want to  
17 plant in every plantable area possible in our city,  
18 and I'm frankly very happy to hear that that means  
19 that we're hitting at least one of your streets on  
20 the higher list within that nine-year cycle that  
21 we're looking at. So, I'm happy to hear that some of  
22 your constituents are getting to see that early on.  
23 So, one, we are planting, but two, of course, we are  
24 also pruning the existing trees, and we mentioned  
25 before in our testimony that ultimately our

2 prioritization has to go down from like the most  
3 extreme loss of life sort of concerns around  
4 dangerous situations, and then we work our way down.  
5 It sounds like in this situation, although I'm happy  
6 to look into it further personally, is that it sounds  
7 like we're in procurement to get that tree pruning  
8 contract done, which is a good sign. That means that  
9 it's coming soon, but the folks who are doing the  
10 tree pruning are not necessarily the folks who are  
11 doing the planting. We have different teams that are  
12 doing that, so that's why you would see some work  
13 being done on planting and some work being done on  
14 pruning and not necessarily at the same time. Again,  
15 I would say that that's a good thing. That means that  
16 we don't have just one team that's doing it all, that  
17 your constituents can see some work that's being done  
18 on their tree beds, on new plantings in the area, but  
19 that certainly does not mean that we are forgetting  
20 about the work that needs to get done on pruning.  
21 Like I said, we're happy to take it back. It always  
goes back to that prioritization of safety, and so we  
do have looked at that, and of course, those things,  
as Ben has said, that can change. This is living  
infrastructure. A snowstorm, a windstorm, things like

2 that can change the situation, so we're happy to take  
3 a second look.

4 COUNCIL MEMBER BANKS: Okay. Now when it  
5 comes to tree work permits and private hire options,  
6 when the Parks suggest that a residence may hire a  
7 private company to prune a City tree, is there any  
8 viable pathway for reimbursement?

9 COMMISSIONER SHIMAMURA: I believe that  
10 that may have to be looked at with the Comptroller's  
11 office, depending on the exact situation. I'm looking  
12 to our Assistant Commissioner, Ben Osborne, to share  
13 with us if that's correct. Just want to make sure I'm  
14 correct with that pathway.

15 ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER OSBORNE: That is  
16 my understanding. If there's an expense incurred to a  
17 property owner due to damage from a City tree to  
18 their property, the Comptroller would be the best  
19 place to address those types of questions.

20 COUNCIL MEMBER BANKS: Okay. And the last  
21 question, and I guess I'll come back in the second  
round if --

CHAIRPERSON HANKERSON: I just don't want  
to make everybody jealous, you know?

2 COUNCIL MEMBER BANKS: Oh, sorry. My last  
3 question, and I'll come back in the second round. Is  
4 that okay, Chair?

5 Does the Parks maintain a list of  
6 pre-approved vendors or certified arborists for  
7 residents to use?

8 ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER OSBORNE: We do not  
9 recommend private contractors. You know, there's the  
10 potential for a conflict of interest there. However,  
11 we do recommend that people look at the  
12 qualifications of a contractor they may hire, and the  
13 International Society of Arboriculture provides the  
14 internationally recognized credential for that type  
15 of work.

16 COUNCIL MEMBER BANKS: Thank you, Chair,  
17 for your indulgence.

18 CHIEF DRURY: Sorry. If I could just  
19 really quickly interject and just clarify that a tree  
20 work permit is completely free of charge, right? So,  
21 the advice and the consultation that's provided by  
the agency, that expertise, you know, is available to  
the public and the folks they hire, you know,  
completely free of charge.

CHAIRPERSON HANKERSON: Thank you.

2           Before we move to the next Council  
3 Member, I just want to mention to my Colleagues, only  
4 because this seemingly was a highly anticipated  
5 hearing, we're going to institute the clock at this  
6 point, giving each Member five minutes, because we  
7 also want to hear from our advocates as well.

8           COMMISSIONER SHIMAMURA: And excuse me,  
9 Chair, I just want to make mention, just because it's  
10 sitting in my mind, that your question about overtime  
11 for our recent storm, I just want to get back to you  
12 with final confirmation on when, what overtime was  
13 covered. We've been changing some of the systems  
14 around this, and so before, I think I said it was, I  
15 just want to triple confirm that with you, so we'll  
16 get back to you on exactly the overtime that was  
17 covered.

18           CHAIRPERSON HANKERSON: Thank you, thank  
19 you so much.

20           Council Member Salaam.

21           COUNCIL MEMBER SALAAM: Thank you, Chair,  
and thank you, Commissioner.

          Just a few questions here on health and  
inspections. DPR Tree Inspection program and Local  
Laws 20 and 59 of 2022 and 2025 have laid out

2 frameworks for prioritizing and maintaining the  
3 health of street trees. Can you elaborate on how  
4 these regulations are being implemented and monitored  
5 to ensure the health of trees in all five boroughs?  
6 And how does DPR ensure that these trees are  
7 inspected on time, and what improvements are being  
8 made to address the backlog or delays in pruning and  
9 maintenance?

8 COMMISSIONER SHIMAMURA: First of all, I  
9 just want to say that it's my understanding that both  
10 of these local laws was done in partnership with our  
11 agency, so on behalf of our agency, thank you for  
12 continuing to work with us on thinking through ways  
13 that we can systematize and improve services to New  
14 Yorkers, particularly with our tree canopy.

14 I will look to our Assistant Commissioner  
15 to give you an update on specifically how  
16 implementation of those local laws is going, but I  
17 will just say that our Block Pruning Program, which,  
18 again, looks to prune every single New York City  
19 street tree within a seven-year cycle, is really  
20 where we're looking at the gold standard. It is  
21 industry standard to do so, and so you can tell your  
constituents and you just understand that all of our

2 trees we're looking to prune on that seven-year  
3 cycle. But I'll look to our Assistant Commissioner to  
4 give you more specific updates on those two pieces of  
5 legislation.

6 ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER OSBORNE: Thank you  
7 for the question, and as far as Local Law 59 of 2025,  
8 so that specifically requires the Parks Department to  
9 incorporate a system for evaluating a building  
10 clearance prune request into our existing tree risk  
11 management protocol. So, we have developed the  
12 framework for those inspections, and we're putting  
13 the finishing touches on the technology that will  
14 allow us to perform those inspections and record the  
15 data. You know, this will provide a standard where  
16 there previously had not been a precise standard for  
17 evaluating these types of requests and working any  
18 work orders that result into our existing  
19 prioritization of work orders, and we expect to be  
20 fully compliant with the legislation when it goes  
21 into effect in May.

18 COUNCIL MEMBER SALAAM: Thank you. The  
19 Neighborhood Tree Planting Program aims to address  
20 heat-vulnerable neighborhoods and increase canopy  
21 coverage to 30 percent. How does DPR track the

2 progress of this initiative, and how can the Council  
3 ensure all communities, especially those with lower  
4 tree density, are adequately served?

5 COMMISSIONER SHIMAMURA: Thank you for  
6 your question. Our Neighborhood Tree Planting  
7 Program, the comprehensive approach that I referenced  
8 earlier in my testimony, was directly kind of grown  
9 out of the target for us to plant in heat-vulnerable  
10 neighborhoods and to complete those plantings of HVI  
11 4 and 5 by the end of 2027. And so certainly we are  
12 tracking this very closely because we want to ensure  
13 that we reach that mark, that by the end of 2027, we  
14 have fully planted in HVI 4 and 5. But from there, as  
15 we've discussed, we've seen such success with this  
16 targeted comprehensive approach that we are looking  
17 to expand and make sure that that tree planting work  
18 gets done on a comprehensive level within nine years'  
19 time. I do believe because it has to do with canopy  
20 and because this is very important to us, looking at  
21 that 30 percent number, that this is in close  
partnership also with our sister agency at MOCEJ so  
I'm going to look to our Climate Officer to see if  
she'd like to add anything to that.

2 CHIEF CLIMATE OFFICER YEUNG: Thank you,  
3 Commissioner, and thank you, Council Member, for that  
4 question.

5 As I think I mentioned in an earlier  
6 response, part of our work with the Urban Forest Plan  
7 is also to make sure that we have good systems of  
8 accountability in place to make sure that we are  
9 doing exactly that, tracking our progress and making  
10 sure we understand the changes in our tree canopy  
11 over time. So, what that will look like is every five  
12 years, we will be doing a LIDAR survey that basically  
13 covers all of the areas citywide to do a very  
14 detailed stock take of all of the different trees,  
15 the species, the canopy size, and so the data that we  
16 looked at to inform our plan analysis was for the  
17 five-year period of 2017 to 2021. And now going  
18 forward, we'll have that five-year analysis as a  
19 consistent way to benchmark our progress. So, we  
20 definitely want to make sure that we're using  
21 data-driven approaches and to reach those equity  
goals that the Commissioner mentioned.

COUNCIL MEMBER SALAAM: Thank you. And  
lastly, regarding the storm and risk mitigations, in  
light of the increased frequency of extreme weather

2 events, how is DPR's attempting its tree care  
3 programs to ensure that trees are resilient against  
4 storms, hurricanes, and blizzards? For instance, how  
5 does DPR prepare for the impact of snowstorms like  
6 the one that we just experienced this past February,  
7 2026, which resulted in significant tree damage? And  
8 can you share the details about DPR's emergency  
9 response system in the aftermath of severe weather,  
including response times and the current readiness  
for tree damage restoration?

10 COMMISSIONER SHIMAMURA: Of course. So, I  
11 will just say that while it would seem that we could  
12 do a lot to prepare for storms like this, like we  
13 just experienced, ultimately trees are susceptible to  
14 any type of weather and the tree issues that come up  
15 can come up for a number of different reasons. The  
16 only way that we, the best, I guess, offense that we  
17 have in these situations is through regular pruning.  
18 That is the industry standard, but even so, you could  
19 see a newly planted tree that ultimately falls and  
20 fails due to extreme weather. You can see a larger  
21 tree, ultimately, as you probably saw in the news,  
fail because of extreme weather. That doesn't really  
make a difference. What we see, though, is that with

2 regular pruning, that can be the best offense that we  
3 provide, and that's why we are committed to pruning  
4 on a seven-year cycle. That's industry standard in  
5 order to make sure that those trees are regularly  
6 pruned and able to withstand this type of extreme  
7 weather. In addition to that, we do have a whole  
8 winter weather response plan that is formed every  
9 year that we follow through on that I referenced  
10 earlier in terms of how we plow, how we clear snow.  
11 We also have the Downed Trees Task Force, which gets  
12 activated when we see blizzard conditions coming up,  
13 and we are in extremely close communication with our  
14 partners at NYCEM and other sister agencies as the  
15 storm kind of is gearing up so that we're ready to go  
16 once the storm ends and we can get to work.

14 CHAIRPERSON HANKERSON: Thank you. We're  
15 going to move over to Council Member Marte.

16 COUNCIL MEMBER MARTE: Thank you, Chair.  
17 First of all, I want to say congratulations,  
18 Commissioner. I'm so excited to have you in this new  
19 role. As Borough Commissioner, you were literally the  
20 best. You showed up almost in every single part of my  
21 District, and so I'm sure a lot of the garden

2 activists and park activists are excited about your  
3 tenure as Commissioner, so congratulations.

4 I've been looking at the map during this  
5 meeting, and I want to say what you guys have said is  
6 actually correct. You've been focusing mostly on  
7 environmental justice communities as part of the  
8 initial phases of your plan, so it's great to see  
9 large parts of the Lower East Side and Chinatown in  
10 my District as part of that first phase.

11 My question is in regards to a lot of the  
12 resiliency projects that we have downtown. There are  
13 commitments made for a fund to help plant trees to  
14 mitigate some of the trees that were lost during  
15 construction and demolition of East River Park. Would  
16 this phasing approach stop the planting of trees in  
17 that area that were supposed to be committed to by  
18 Parks on a timely basis, or how do you juggle  
19 previous commitments of planting compared to this new  
20 holistic phasing strategy that you have?

21 COMMISSIONER SHIMAMURA: Thank you so much  
for the question, and thank you for your ongoing  
partnership.

Let me just say from the top that no one  
takes more seriously the loss of healthy trees than

2 our agency. Before any plan goes before a community  
3 board and gets presented to you or any other public  
4 body, we closely pressure test and truly debate  
5 behind closed doors the merits and what is lost when  
6 we lose one of our healthy trees. As I mentioned  
7 before, we have a serious mandate to get to 30  
8 percent canopy, and we know that planting new trees  
9 is wonderful and a part of that plan, but taking care  
10 of the trees that we have, those adult mature trees  
11 that provide so much canopy, that's the only way that  
12 we're going to get to 30 percent, and so we take the  
13 loss of healthy trees extremely seriously. Now, we  
14 are doing our comprehensive planting plan, but I  
15 believe that when it comes to other projects, like  
16 what you're maybe referencing with our Eastside  
17 Coastal Resiliency Project or other things like that,  
18 those, I believe, are on separate timeframes, and so  
19 separate projects. This is what we're doing kind of  
20 through our maybe bread and butter of Forestry  
21 Planting Team, but on top of that, when it comes to  
these other commitments made, we have those, I  
believe, on a separate timeframe. I'm going to look  
to Matt Drury from our team to give us a little bit  
more detail there, but ultimately, that loss of trees

2 is something, and I hope your constituents know this  
3 personally, but it bears repeating. It's something  
4 that we take very seriously.

5 CHIEF DRURY: Yeah. Just if I can help  
6 clarify, the Neighborhood Tree Planting Program that  
7 the Commissioner has described, and as you mentioned  
8 with the plan timeframe, that is focused on street  
9 tree planting, and so any effort for a park  
10 improvement project, capital project, as the  
11 Commissioner mentioned, we look for every opportunity  
12 to minimize any impacts on trees that are within our  
13 parks, but if and when it is necessary, obviously  
14 replacement well over and above what's removed is  
15 certainly always the plan, and additionally, through  
16 any capital renovation project, we're always looking  
17 for opportunities. It is actually built into our  
18 landscape design process that our capital division  
19 team leads to look for planting opportunities within  
20 that park or playground or sitting area or what have  
21 you, so the short answer is I think we can reach out  
to our partners at DDC and others to get you an  
update in terms of that timeline and those efforts,  
because that is sort of separated apart from the  
Neighborhood Tree Planting Program.

2 COUNCIL MEMBER MARTE: I think  
3 specifically there was a commitment to plant trees  
4 throughout the Lower East Side because of the park  
5 being under construction.

6 CHIEF DRURY: Yes. And to address that  
7 specifically, that commitment is being worked into  
8 our Neighborhood Tree Planting Plan. It's not being  
9 replaced by our Neighborhood Tree Planting Plan.

10 COUNCIL MEMBER MARTE: Okay. I would just  
11 love to follow up on timing, because there are some  
12 areas around East River Park that look like they're  
13 in phase three, and so that means they won't get the  
14 tree until much, much later than expected.

15 COMMISSIONER SHIMAMURA: Absolutely. We  
16 can follow up with you on timing.

17 COUNCIL MEMBER MARTE: All right. Thank  
18 you so much.

19 CHAIRPERSON HANKERSON: We're going to  
20 jump to Council Member Brewer.

21 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Thank you very  
much. I want to congratulate the climate, whatever  
the hell your title is, whatever, Chief Climate  
Officer and the Commissioner of Parks. They're both  
fabulous.

2           Okay. So, I have four questions. I'll go  
3 them, and then you can decide how to answer. The  
4 first is just how many trees, I think you said there  
5 were 1,800 service requests that came down in the  
6 recent storm, and two of them on my block, so I'm  
7 very familiar with this issue. So, I have two  
8 questions. How many weather-related in 2-5, sort of  
9 similar so I can get a sense of how many trees were  
10 either down or there were complaints? And then  
11 second, just in terms of those that did get the  
12 service requests, in some cases, I guess it's a huge  
13 branch. That's what happened in my area. And then the  
14 whole street is full of branches and pain-in-the-neck  
15 neighbors who call 3-1-1 every five minutes. So, is  
16 that Sanitation or you who cleans up? That's question  
17 number one, and then including the data.

18           Number two, just like you, I am a tree  
19 hugger. So, I want to say, and that's why I have so  
20 many people here today, that we have tree care  
21 clinics, even just put it in our recent newsletter,  
constantly. So, we do feel very strongly about tree  
care, because you can't have a new tree and not have  
somebody caring for it. And I think you sort of said  
that, but I would say that very, very loudly.

2           Number three, we have a letter that was  
3 sent before your term, August 25, 23 Council Members  
4 signed. I do not like this program that you like so  
5 much. And I'll tell you why. I have four years, 38 of  
6 us have four years. Nine years and four years do not  
7 compute in terms of getting our trees planted. So,  
8 the political calendar does not fit with the tree  
9 calendar. So, that has to fit better. So, my question  
10 is, how we can do a parallel process? Because I  
11 understand that some areas have not had trees and  
12 you've got floods and blah, blah, blah so we need a  
13 parallel process, I think, to work on. So, I want to  
14 know what that would cost, because I mean, literally,  
15 if you want to pick the most popular topic in the  
16 City of New York, it is street trees. So, the  
17 question is how much it would cost. Now I have some  
18 numbers for an area, my area, for two years, 79  
19 street trees, plus taking out the stumps cost  
20 250,000. So, take 250,000, 79, and multiply that  
21 times all the trees needed. What is the number that  
you actually need to do a parallel or faster process  
than this nine-year thing that everybody I know  
hates, just so you know.

2           And then the issue of Local Law 84 of  
3 2013 that we put into, and this is climate related,  
4 we put into that planning process, and I think you're  
5 saying that, that trees are part of air and water and  
6 all the issues regarding climate, and I think that's  
7 correct, I just want to double check. Those are my  
8 four questions.

9           COMMISSIONER SHIMAMURA: Great. Okay. So,  
10 I'm going to try to do all of them, save for one, and  
11 then pass that one to MOCEJ. I think that last one is  
12 all for her.

13           OkAy. So, let me just, the easy one at  
14 first is that the 1,800 number that we referenced in  
15 the recent storm of 3-1-1 complaints, all of those  
16 were storm related-complaints.

17           COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: For this recent  
18 storm.

19           COMMISSIONER SHIMAMURA: Just this recent  
20 storm.

21           COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Okay.

          COMMISSIONER SHIMAMURA: Now there were  
some duplicates, so ultimately that resulted in 1,200  
inspections that needed to come in place, so there  
were some duplicates, and from those 1,200, we had 47

2     downed trees in streets, so those were our top  
3     priority, get those streets clear, make sure that  
4     emergency vehicles can go through, and then I believe  
5     nine were large trees or limbs that fell onto  
6     property, and those were our next priority.

6             COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: But those 47 will  
7     not be replaced unless it's within the, you know,  
8     whatever, location.

8             COMMISSIONER SHIMAMURA: Yeah. We would be  
9     looking to plant those within our Tree Planting Plan.

10            COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Okay. That's the  
11     thing we don't like. Okay. Go ahead.

11            COMMISSIONER SHIMAMURA: I'll go to that  
12     one next. And of course, within our season, so we  
13     wouldn't be planting anything right now.

14            COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: No. I understand.  
15     I got that part.

15            COMMISSIONER SHIMAMURA: So, I mean, I  
16     definitely hear you on the nine-year timeframe. I am  
17     very proud of us for looking at the larger picture  
18     here --

18            COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: I agree.

19            COMMISSIONER SHIMAMURA: -- but I  
20     understand the frustrations around nine years being  
21

2 too long of a time, so what I can tell you is that we  
3 are constantly looking at ways that we can speed this  
4 up. We are constantly trying to hold ourselves  
5 accountable for not being stuck in a system that just  
6 is because it's always been this way, and instead are  
7 trying to --

8 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: I understand.

9 COMMISSIONER SHIMAMURA: -- look  
10 creatively at this.

11 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: I call it the  
12 parallel process.

13 COMMISSIONER SHIMAMURA: I will certainly  
14 look into --

15 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Okay.

16 COMMISSIONER SHIMAMURA: -- your  
17 suggestion, but I will point out that it's not just  
18 about planting new trees, so that 250,000-dollar  
19 number, what I'd point out is that what we're doing  
20 is it's planting trees plus. It's expanding those  
21 tree beds, it's taking out those stumps.

COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: The 250 included  
all that. The 250,000 included all of that, just so  
you know. Every bit of it.

2           COMMISSIONER SHIMAMURA: And then one more  
3 and then I'll pass over to my colleagues at MOCEJ but  
4 thank you for being a tree hugger, thank you for  
5 being a tree lover. What I'd say is that you can  
6 actually still get involved in addition to hosting  
7 stewardship events which I know that you do. We are  
8 still in the process of doing our decennial tree  
9 count, so if your office would like to host a tree  
count event where we're counting trees, categorizing  
trees.

10           COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: I only want to  
11 count them if they're going to be planted. Otherwise,  
I do not want to plant to count them.

12           COMMISSIONER SHIMAMURA: We are certainly  
13 planting, but we'd love to have your participation  
14 and then I'll pass over to, oh.

15           CHIEF DRURY: And then sorry, just  
16 quickly, you mentioned about tree debris and I'll  
17 just clarify that. That is a shared responsibility  
18 between DSNY and Parks following serious storms.  
19 Tree, just along with leaf and yard waste can be left  
20 out as part of the City's Organic Recycling Program  
for sure. Obviously, sometimes there are larger  
limbs.

2 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: These are huge  
3 limbs, huge limbs, so that would be.

4 CHIEF DRURY: So, those would be 3-1-1  
5 requests that are tracked and then I guess, you know.

6 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Somebody will  
7 figure it out.

8 CHIEF DRURY: I know you love your  
9 parallel paths. You know that's something that both  
10 DSNY and Parks sort of, you know, we coordinate for  
11 sure but those are sort of jointly responsible I  
12 would say.

13 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Okay.

14 CHIEF CLIMATE OFFICER YEUNG: And thank  
15 you, Council Member, for your question about trees  
16 and the role that they play in addressing our climate  
17 crisis. So in 2025, thank you for Council Member  
18 support in passing Local Law 149 which, you know,  
19 amended the Comprehensive Climate Stability Plans.  
20 That did make sure that trees are part of that  
21 mandate. As many of us have mentioned here today,  
trees are a really critical aspect of how we address  
climate change. They provide heat resiliency and  
necessary shade during heat waves, they capture storm  
water, they clean our air, they're better for our

2 mental health, they're better for quality of life,  
3 and so we are really excited to make sure that trees  
4 are an integral part of our green infrastructure.

5 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: The only thing I  
6 need, not now, is the total cost it would cost to do  
7 every single vacant tree pit plus stump removal. What  
8 is the total cost? Thank you.

9 CHAIRPERSON HANKERSON: Thank you, Council  
10 Member.

11 I want to acknowledge Council Members Lee  
12 and Restler who we've been joined by.

13 And now I want to go over to Brooklyn,  
14 Council Member Narcisse.

15 COUNCIL MEMBER NARCISSE: Thank you. Like  
16 Gale, I love trees and it's a necessity for me. So  
17 first, congratulations.

18 And with all that, I want to say, because  
19 what are the primary reasons for the delay of  
20 pruning? I heard both of my Colleagues talking about  
21 it. Is this staffing shortage, contractor capacity,  
or budget constraint or something else? Because it's  
a problem in my community.

COMMISSIONER SHIMAMURA: Sure. Thank you  
so much for your question. I would just say that one,

2 there is such a thing as too much pruning as my  
3 husband always reminds me because I tend to pick too  
4 many things up of our home plants, but it also is  
5 something that we've already been committed to  
6 pruning at one every seven years, and so I would  
7 suggest that that actually is still meeting the  
8 industry standard. We typically don't prune any more  
9 than that just because then we start to risk the  
10 health of the tree. So every seven years, you should  
11 see your trees pruned. That is what we're meeting,  
12 the mark that we're meeting and we're doing so  
13 primarily through enlisting contractors to help us do  
14 that kind of neighborhood block pruning. Anything  
15 that's specialty, anything that's a little bit more  
16 of an emergency situation, anything that's requiring  
17 additional assistance, that's where you see our  
18 in-house team go in there because we have that  
19 expertise, we have that skillset that we're able to  
20 address some of those more specific conditions. But  
21 your typical pruning, your constituents should see us  
in their neighborhoods every seven years, which is  
industry standard.

COUNCIL MEMBER NARCISSE: Some of them  
goes beyond the seven years, but anyway.

2 ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER OSBORNE: If you'd  
3 like, I can add just a little bit to that, which is  
4 that through our tree risk management approach, those  
5 requests that we receive for pruning in between that  
6 seven-year cycle, those requests are evaluated,  
7 they're ranked according to priority category A  
8 through D, with A being the most urgent, and those  
9 work orders and priority categories, A through B, we  
10 respond to within seven or 28 days, respectively, 99  
11 percent of the time. So, the most urgent conditions  
12 are addressed very quickly. We understand that there  
13 are other conditions that are --

14 COUNCIL MEMBER NARCISSE: There are other  
15 conditions.

16 ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER OSBORNE: -- there  
17 are real conditions that we don't get to as quick as  
18 some people would like.

19 COUNCIL MEMBER NARCISSE: So, my office  
20 receive a lot of calls on those trees because you  
21 know, as we have so many trees, but I would have  
another question too. After Sandy, we lost so many  
trees, but I haven't seen that replacement yet. We're  
talking about since 2012. So, I want to know where we  
are. That's a private conversation because we need

2 trees in our community. I have some of the trees,  
3 right? The resident complained about them. There's a  
4 hazard. We can tell they're hazard, right? But yet  
5 when the Park come to inspect them, they always find  
6 them in fair conditions. And when we have a storm,  
7 sure enough, they will fall down and damage, which is  
8 we call it penny wise, dollar foolish. We should push  
9 to fix that so we don't spend more money at the end.  
10 Can you explain how Parks define fair condition? What  
11 metrics that you use? What's the process? Because you  
12 say fair condition, but my eyes telling me this is  
13 crazy.

14 COMMISSIONER SHIMAMURA: Absolutely. So, I  
15 want to address the first part of your question and  
16 then I'll look to our Assistant Commissioner to talk  
17 through the details. And what I'll say is that I'm so  
18 grateful for your question because I want you to be  
19 able to articulate to your constituents what rating  
20 system is used and the industry standards that we're  
21 using so that everybody can understand the same  
metrics that we're using. It's really important to  
me. And when it comes to planting, we absolutely are  
happy to make sure that we get you a schedule of when  
your plantings are coming into your District. We want

2 your constituents to be excited about this. We want  
3 them to see that we're delivering for you and this  
4 neighborhood so we're happy to come back to you with  
5 that.

6 But I'm going to look to Ben to give you  
7 very specifics around what fair means.

8 COUNCIL MEMBER NARCISSE: And when a tree  
9 come out or fail, whatever the reason, when do we get  
10 another one, the replacement? Do we replace them  
11 automatically or something that -- yeah, go ahead.

12 ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER OSBORNE: Sure. So,  
13 I'll respond to that last question first and then go  
14 back to your question about fair condition. So, as  
15 the Commissioner described our Neighborhood Tree  
16 Planting Program, that is the primary driver of the  
17 timeframe for when we are planting trees. So, it will  
18 depend on exactly where that tree is on what block it  
19 is in terms of when it would be replaced. There's not  
20 a specific time based on when a tree is removed or  
21 fails.

22 In terms of what we mean when we say a  
23 tree is in fair condition and how that affects what  
24 is going to happen, that's just a very qualitative  
25 description. If somebody calls about a tree and

2 they're concerned about the safety from that tree, we  
3 look at the entire tree. We look at whether it has  
4 any dead branches, any decay, poor structural issues,  
5 and each of those potential issues is given a full  
6 risk assessment that looks at the likelihood of that  
7 tree or part failing, the likelihood of it falling  
8 onto people or property and the consequences should  
9 that occur, and that gives a risk rating for that  
10 condition. Now, if the tree's in fair condition and  
11 we see a branch that has a risk rating that  
12 determines work should be done, we're going to prune  
13 that tree. We'll schedule it for pruning. If the  
14 tree's in poor condition and we see similar types of  
15 problems, we may consider removing the tree instead.  
16 So, I realize it's a little bit confusing, this kind  
17 of fair, good, poor condition because that's not  
18 determining whether or not work is performed and  
19 maybe driving the type of work we decide to do so I  
20 think we could be a little bit more clear about that  
21 in our communications.

18 COUNCIL MEMBER NARCISSE: And so my time  
19 is coming to an end.

20 What are the eligibility requirements for  
21 the Trees and Sidewalk Program? And are there plans

2 to expand it so homeowners don't have to pay out of  
3 pocket when the roots cause sidewalk damage? And  
4 especially, I have a lot of seniors in my community  
5 that are living on tight budgets. So, what can we do?

6 ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER OSBORNE: Sure. So,  
7 yeah. We understand this is something we hear about  
8 with frequency, right? So, the Tax Class One  
9 properties in New York City are eligible for the  
10 Trees and Sidewalks Program if the roots of a tree  
11 under Parks jurisdiction have damaged the sidewalk.  
12 So, those are one- to three-family residential  
13 properties. When we receive a request for that  
14 program, we perform a rating. We send an inspector  
15 who performs a rating that's based on the size and  
16 number and health of the existing trees, the extent  
17 and severity of a tripping hazard that may be  
18 present, and generators of foot traffic in the area,  
19 subway stations, churches, schools, et cetera, and  
20 that all rolls up into a rating that may be up to  
21 100, anywhere from one to 100. It's a very popular  
program and the resources are limited. So, with the  
current funding levels that we have, we're able to  
repair sites that are rated 90 and higher across the  
city and, depending on the number of sites in a given

2 area, some sites that are rated lower. And we  
3 acknowledge that that leaves some legitimate issues  
4 unaddressed. It's important to note, however, that  
5 property owners are not liable in these cases for  
6 tripping hazards resulting from the roots of City  
7 trees, and the City is not holding those property  
8 owners financially responsible. You know, should they  
9 receive a violation for other defects on their  
10 sidewalk from DOT, any portion damaged by the tree,  
11 DOT would not assess the property owner for, and they  
12 would not issue a violation only for root damage from  
13 City trees, and our program is free. So, while this  
14 is a real concern --

15 COUNCIL MEMBER NARCISSE: It is.

16 ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER OSBORNE: --

17 property owners are not liable for these conditions  
18 and nobody is forcing them to be financially  
19 responsible.

20 COUNCIL MEMBER NARCISSE: Thank you. And  
21 Madam Commissioner, again, congratulations. And I  
hope we can improve in the construction when it comes  
to Parks. That's another story so we'll talk. Thank  
you.

2 CHAIRPERSON HANKERSON: All right. Really  
3 briefly, while we still have quorum, I'm going to  
4 jump to Southern Brooklyn to Council Member  
5 Santosuosso, who's on Zoom.

6 COUNCIL MEMBER SANTOSUOSSO: Good morning.  
7 Can everybody hear me?

8 Okay. First of all, thank you so much,  
9 Chair, and thank you to the Commissioners for being  
10 here today. Congratulations as well.

11 I want to just start by saying, I have  
12 the experience of being someone who has dealt with  
13 forestry issues from the perspective of working in a  
14 Council Member's office and being a Council Member,  
15 but also someone who worked at the Law Department and  
16 was a tort division attorney where I handled some of  
17 the cases that result from things like fallen  
18 branches or when suits are brought against the City  
19 and homeowners for sidewalks that are lifted by tree  
20 roots so, I bring that dual perspective. So, I'm  
21 going to be mostly talking about tree maintenance in  
my questions and a little bit about sort of the costs  
at every step. My understanding based on data that  
was given to me by New Yorkers for Parks, and maybe  
you said this in your testimony, I'm sorry if I

2 missed it, but is that NYC Parks has a backlog of  
3 more than 20,000 uninspected tree conditions and  
4 35,000 unaddressed work orders. And while a new tree  
5 costs about 3,600 dollars to plant and takes years to  
6 mature, so maintaining our existing street trees is  
7 particularly important and also cost-effective. And  
8 so, I want to just first ask, I know you said that  
9 there are 60 foresters in the Department. How many  
10 inspectors are there or is that captured within the  
11 foresters number?

12 COMMISSIONER SHIMAMURA: Sure. Hi, Council  
13 Member. Thank you so much. I hope you can hear me  
14 okay.

15 Thank you so much for your question. I'll  
16 just give some confirmation of some of the numbers  
17 that you referenced and then I'll look to our  
18 Assistant Commissioner who oversees our Forestry Unit  
19 to give you confirmation on the exact staffing  
20 numbers. So yes, it is true. I've referenced it  
21 earlier too that we do have a backlog of tree risk  
orders here. That backlog is around 34,000 tree risk  
work orders. We also have 17,000 uninspected service  
requests that includes the kind of more of the Trees  
and Sidewalks Program that you were referencing. I

2 will just say that while this backlog does exist, the  
3 requests that are coming in are hopefully not all in  
4 that extreme high-risk category. They're not the sort  
5 of situations where we would see them as an emergency  
6 situations. All of these requests that are coming in  
7 that have not been fully inspected have been screened  
8 at a high level to make sure that we are still  
9 responding to those very serious immediate emergency  
10 situations. Where we see this backlog exists is in  
11 those categories C and D levels. So, in the rating  
12 system that we use is those kind of more moderate  
13 level risks that are still very serious, but not  
14 those in extreme emergencies.

15 Now, I want to get to your other question  
16 around staffing. So, I'm going to pass it over to our  
17 Assistant Commissioner to tell you the exact staffing  
18 levels.

19 ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER OSBORNE: Thank  
20 you, Council Member, for those questions. And just  
21 quickly on the numbers, one more thing. You  
referenced the cost of tree planting. In Fiscal Year  
2022, that the average cost for tree planting was  
3,550 dollars. That's actually come down quite a bit.  
It is currently 2,900 dollars citywide. So that's an

2 18 percent reduction. Actually adjusted for  
3 inflation, that's 37 percent of a reduction.

4 To your question about staffing, the 60  
5 foresters we have, those are inspectors. However, we  
6 do have some people in other titles that serve in an  
7 inspection role as well. Some of our climber pruners  
8 perform inspections and supervisors and handful of  
9 other people, but the bulk of our inspections are  
10 performed by the 60 foresters.

11 COUNCIL MEMBER SANTOSUOSSO: Understood.

12 And so, and I just want to say, Commissioner, and I  
13 totally appreciate that we prioritize complaints as  
14 they come in for the most urgent, but I think we get  
15 a lot on our end of C and D category complaints that  
16 feel urgent to the constituent, and then sometimes  
17 when we have an intense storm result in the  
18 constituent calling our office and saying, well, I  
19 tried to put this limb that was hanging on Parks  
20 radar, but they said it wasn't going to be inspected  
21 until 2027. So, if we're united in the goal of, I  
mean, I guess that's the question is, would you all  
in a perfect world where the funding was there, would  
you want to have more staff in order to conduct more  
inspections? Is the number of inspectors really

2 what's holding the process up? Like what could we do  
3 to help you get to a place where you're not just your  
4 A and Bs, but your C and Ds were getting inspected  
5 with in a more timely manner?

6 COMMISSIONER SHIMAMURA: Thank you again  
7 for the question. Thank you. And yes, I will call it  
8 a partnership. I very much appreciate the continued  
9 advocacy. As lead of this agency, I will always  
10 welcome more resources. More is more in this case,  
11 but I will also say that I will also defend the work  
12 that our staff is continuing to do right now because  
13 what they're doing with finite resources that we have  
14 is frankly incredible. And so I would always welcome  
15 more resources. I will also say that I think that we  
16 need to be responsible for looking critically at  
17 ourselves and at the processes we have. That's why  
18 this neighborhood tree planting approach came up  
19 because we have to look at internally at our own  
20 processes and question to ensure that we're being  
21 responsible and as resourceful as possible with the  
resources that we are given. So, while I'm happy to  
talk about and happy to welcome additional resources,  
I'm also happy to do, I think, arguably the harder  
work of looking at ourselves retrospectively and

2 trying to understand and question whether or not the  
3 processes that we're currently undergoing are still  
4 the best use of the resources that we have, and  
5 that's what we'll continue to do.

6 CHAIRPERSON HANKERSON: Commissioner and  
7 Council Member, I'm sorry, we lost quorum so we have  
8 to go off of the Zoom now. I'm sorry, Council Member.

9 COUNCIL MEMBER SANTOSUOSSO: That's okay.  
10 That's okay. I have separate questions for part of my  
11 District. I will follow up individually. And again,  
12 congratulations and thanks for the time.

13 COMMISSIONER SHIMAMURA: Absolutely. We  
14 look to follow up with you.

15 CHAIRPERSON HANKERSON: Council Member  
16 Nurse.

17 COUNCIL MEMBER NURSE: Thank you. Thank  
18 you, Chair, and congratulations on your first  
19 hearing, And congratulations on your appointment, you  
20 as well.

21 I wanted to ask a question about, just  
kind of like, I know under Mayor de Blasio we have  
the Cool Neighborhoods Plan, and I've never heard  
anything since about it. And just wondering, is that  
still something we're working towards? And if so,

2 kind of what is a status and are there target  
3 neighborhoods? What would make a complete cool  
4 corridor and how would New Yorkers know?

5 COMMISSIONER SHIMAMURA: Sure. I'll just  
6 briefly say a few things from the Parks perspective  
7 and look to our partners at MOCEJ.

8 Thank you for the question. Parks play a  
9 pretty important role in overall providing cooling  
10 centers and allowing for New Yorkers to get some  
11 relief from extreme heat. And we know last summer it  
12 was, at least at one day, 109 degrees on the ground,  
13 extremely dangerous. So, I'll say that, of course,  
14 today in this hearing we're talking about trees and  
15 the cooling effect that tree canopy can play on  
16 buildings, and that is certainly what is beating the  
17 drum behind us as we look towards releasing the Urban  
18 Forest Plan. But I will also say that we're very  
19 proud to be cooling centers at our rec centers. We're  
20 very proud to be providing cool relief at our beaches  
21 and pools when we're not dealing with --

18 COUNCIL MEMBER NURSE: But do you have,  
19 just because of time, what is your interaction in  
20 terms of filling in those corridors? Is there a  
21 strategic plan in terms of direction? I know about

2 the program, so I know what pieces you all play. I'm  
3 more just looking for where we are.

4 CHIEF DRURY: It might be easiest for  
5 Commissioner Osborne to kind of characterize this,  
6 but I think in short, I think you're talking about in  
7 terms of the tree related --

8 COUNCIL MEMBER NURSE: Yeah. The tree  
9 canopies, for sure.

10 CHIEF DRURY: Totally understood. I think  
11 the best, there's sort of a transition where the  
12 goals that were set out by Cool Neighborhoods are  
13 being achieved, and Commissioner Osborne can speak to  
14 that.

15 ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER OSBORNE: Yeah. In  
16 fact, Cool Neighborhoods was a de Blasio initiative  
17 but it followed on an earlier kind of equity-focused,  
18 initiative of Trees for Public Health. And equity  
19 remains our kind of primary driver of how we focus  
20 our tree planting. And so Cool Neighborhoods is based  
21 on the DOHMH's HVI index, the heat vulnerability  
index, and so we are still on target to complete the  
survey and planting of HVI 5 and 4, the two highest  
HVI areas throughout the city by the end of 2027. So,  
that's still the driver of our planting. Our

2 Neighborhood Tree Planting Program is built around  
3 it.

4 COUNCIL MEMBER NURSE: Okay.

5 And thank you for the question, Council  
6 Member. It's good to see you again.

7 I am really excited to make sure that in  
8 our new Administration, we do have a very  
9 comprehensive approach to heat resiliency that looks  
10 across all different aspects of what it takes to make  
11 sure people can stay safe during heat waves. It  
12 includes obviously our tree canopy coverage and all  
13 the work that our Parks Department friends are doing,  
14 but it also includes our work with DOT to think about  
15 the public right-of-way. It includes thinking about  
16 outdoor cooling centers and how they pair with indoor  
17 cooling centers. So, as you know, I just started, but  
18 rest assured, I'm excited to be developing with my  
19 team what will be a comprehensive heat resiliency  
20 strategy and making sure that we can think very  
21 intentionally about how to make sure that our high  
heat vulnerable neighborhoods are safe.

COUNCIL MEMBER NURSE: Okay.

CHIEF CLIMATE OFFICER YEUNG: So, look  
forward to getting back to you.

2 COUNCIL MEMBER NURSE: Yeah. We'd love to  
3 just see where we are and how we can help achieve the  
4 targets. I know also how our discretionary pots can  
5 help you all help move those targets further along so  
6 thank you for that.

7 And that was really my only question. The  
8 final comment I have is, and I'm looking forward to  
9 meeting with you, Parks Commissioner, I have a Queens  
10 Park and I have Brooklyn Parks, and the discrepancy  
11 between how they are maintained is night and day. So,  
12 my Queens Park, Highland Park, well-maintained, has a  
13 whole crew. Obviously, it's a larger park. But my  
14 Brooklyn Parks, I'm just constantly, constantly  
15 wanting more. And I really think that this  
16 Administration needs to put money in our maintenance  
17 workers so that we have enough people to take care of  
18 our parks. These are public safety spaces. These are  
19 places for respite when people can't afford to turn  
20 on their AC. They need to be clean. They need to be  
21 safe. Trash needs to be picked up. Toilets need to be  
restocked. And frankly, sometimes that only happens  
when I make a personal call, and that cannot be the  
standard so, we really need the resources behind it  
this cycle because it is a public safety measure.

2 It's not just trees and loveliness. It's actually  
3 places where people are gathering. And I find the  
4 difference between the two unacceptable so thank you.  
5 And I know we're working for it. I know you all are  
6 at the helm now. But it's an ongoing problem that  
7 doesn't seem to get relief.

8 COMMISSIONER SHIMAMURA: Thank you so  
9 much. Nobody, based on where they live, should be  
10 receiving any difference in services when it comes to  
11 our parks so we look forward to working with you on  
12 that.

13 CHAIRPERSON HANKERSON: Thank you. We're  
14 going to go back to Queens. Council Member Krishnan.

15 COUNCIL MEMBER KRISHNAN: Thank you so  
16 much, Chair. First of all, congratulations, Chair, on  
17 a great first hearing. An important one too. And  
18 looking forward to many more. And good to see all the  
19 parks groups here as well. And congratulations,  
20 Commissioner, on your first hearing and your great  
21 work too.

22 I unfortunately am out of time because  
23 I've got to run to another meeting at City Hall, but  
24 I'll turn my questions into comments, which is just  
25 to say, I appreciate very much all Parks' work and

2 attention to this really important issue. I think  
3 you're hearing from all of us too, how critical the  
4 care is of street trees in our city. I understand  
5 also the importance of this organized plan, and I do  
6 see the merit to it too. One thing I think we should  
7 all work on and keep in mind together is, on the  
8 seven-year cycle, obviously things happen in between  
9 where adjustments need to be made on tree issues that  
10 come up or neighborhoods that need more trees more  
11 quickly too so I do hope we can consider ways to,  
12 even in that cycle, because seven years is a very,  
13 very long time. And I think even for our constituents  
14 and for us, it's just very difficult to explain why  
15 it will take that long to get the trees in. So, I do  
16 think Parks having flexibility on how to navigate  
17 that is really important.

18 And the second piece I'll just mention  
19 too, and I know we'll talk about this more as well in  
20 the future, is just expanding the pool of contractors  
21 that Parks uses too. We've done a lot around some of  
the problematic ones in the past that the agency  
still works with, but it's my hope that we all can  
work together to come up with ways to expand that  
pool. Because if you do that, there's more people,

2 more contractors in the pipeline, a better ability to  
3 respond more quickly to tree emergencies that come  
4 up. It benefits all of us all around. So that's what  
5 I'll say, but it's so good to see you all. Thank you  
6 for your work. And thank you to all the Parks groups  
7 who are here too. And see you again soon.

8 Thank you, Chair, as always.

9 CHAIRPERSON HANKERSON: Thank you. Thank  
10 you, Council Member.

11 We're going to jump to Council Member  
12 Restler.

13 COUNCIL MEMBER RESTLER: Oh, great.  
14 Brilliant. Thank you. Congratulations, Commissioner.  
15 Nice to see your team.

16 I would just like to take a second to  
17 recognize Paul Lozito, who went so above and beyond  
18 at the end of last year to help us get our Cool Homes  
19 for All legislation done. The team did a phenomenal  
20 job at MOCEJ, and I'm just truly grateful for Paul in  
21 particular, for Elijah, for everybody who worked so  
incredibly hard, and teams at many other agencies as  
well, HPD, DEP, et cetera, Law Department who really  
worked around the clock to get it done. So, thank

2 you. That was a big deal. We won't forget. I'm  
3 excited to work together on implementation.

4 Like Gale, I'm a tree hugger too, and I  
5 just want to say congratulations to the Chair.

6 Excited to work together with you here. I'm a tree  
7 hugger too. In District 33, we are in the process of  
8 filling every single available tree bed with a brand  
9 new tree and want to thank the Parks Department for  
10 their partnership on that. We will be done with that  
11 initiative by the end of 2026, so that is a big,

12 exciting deal. We've been raising funds from local  
13 neighbors to support planting new trees. We do tree  
14 care events all across our District, multiple times  
15 in every neighborhood, every year, to encourage more  
16 neighbors to adopt a tree and take care of them on a  
17 regular basis. We are now starting a new initiative  
18 to get planters with trees out into areas where we  
19 can't plant trees because of underground

20 infrastructure and the like. But I do want to come  
21 back to a point that Gale raised and others raised.

I'm generally concerned about just the state of  
affairs in our Parks Department. I've heard from  
staff in Brooklyn Parks that we haven't had fewer  
staff in 40 years. In the Adams' Administration, we

2 saw a 40 percent decline in part-time Park staff,  
3 which are so essential to maintaining the conditions  
4 in our parks. We need a deeper investment in Parks,  
5 and we didn't see it yet in prelim, but that's just  
6 the beginning of the budget process, so I'm eager for  
7 us to work together, but this has to be a priority  
8 for the Speaker. I know it's a priority for our  
9 Chair, and we need it to be a priority for the  
10 Administration because coming by once every nine  
11 years to prune in a community district, on a single  
12 block in a community district, it just doesn't work.  
13 I mean, when I go out to my community boards and tell  
14 them, if you live in Northern Greenpoint, and Parks  
15 was there last year, and it's time to prune again,  
16 it's going to be another eight years until they're  
17 back, people, I mean, it's just, that's not a  
18 response that I can get away with. So, generally,  
19 would be very eager to understand how we're doing,  
20 what your orientation is to the part-time workforce  
21 in particular, for how we can build out support in  
the Parks Department. Do you have a plan for how to  
increase staffing as we begin the budget process now?

COMMISSIONER SHIMAMURA: Thank you so much  
for the question. Thank you for your advocacy, and

2 for your continued partnership on all things related  
3 to trees.

4 While it is still early in the budget  
5 process, what I can say is that we are in near  
6 constant communication with our leadership, with this  
7 Administration, on what additional resources look  
8 like, and on the significance of the work that we're  
9 doing. So, while it is early on, I can say with a  
10 strong degree of certainty that this Administration  
11 deeply understands the impact of what our tree canopy  
12 is doing, the impact of what our foresters are doing,  
13 and kind of largely, as you referenced, the impact of  
14 what maintenance and operation, and the true service  
15 that we provide all New Yorkers.

16 COUNCIL MEMBER RESTLER: You know, I think  
17 that, I know that the Parks Department has been  
18 trying their best to do as much as you can with less  
19 over these last four years, but it's just, we're at  
20 the breaking point, and there's a need for more  
21 resources. You know, when we look at the trees pruned  
22 numbers, just as an example, you know, looking back  
23 in the PMMR data that came out yesterday, we're  
24 looking at, you know, for FY25, for the four-month  
25 actuals, I think hitting 28 percent of our goals the

2 last four months of FY25, and the first four months  
3 of FY26, hitting 16 percent of our goals. We're just  
4 not on pace to be where we need to be, and you're not  
5 yet responsible for that, for the goals that we  
6 failed to hit in the previous Administration. That's  
7 not on you, but we have to fix them moving forward,  
8 and we're going to start holding ourselves  
9 accountable as we look ahead. So, I really hope for a  
10 deep and committed partnership to bring more  
11 resources to the Parks Department, because if we  
12 don't add more money in this budget, we're going to  
13 continue to see dirtier parks, we're going to  
14 continue to see substandard conditions, and you know,  
15 I'm on the phone every day. I was talking to folks  
16 from Parks this morning, who are great, and I  
17 appreciate all of our parkies, but they do not have  
18 the resources to maintain the parks and the  
19 conditions we deserve. So, I am concerned. I think  
20 that, you know, the data and the outcomes are not  
21 where they should be. Pruning was just an example I  
just picked off, but if there are not more staff, you  
know, we're going to have a really tough summer.

COMMISSIONER SHIMAMURA: Sure. Thanks

Council Member, and if I just may, with reference to

2 the PMMR data, and I may look to our Assistant  
3 Commissioner, just because it's important, as all the  
4 advocates in the room will surely take a look at that  
5 data, I just want to point out that some of those  
6 pruning numbers were because I believe we had two  
7 contractors who ultimately decided to pull out of  
8 their relationship with Parks, so there was a passing  
9 away of one of the founders, I believe, of one of  
10 those contractors. So, some of that work was just due  
11 to the fact that we're bringing on new contracts into  
12 the realm of things. If you're looking at that  
13 planting data, of course, it's kind of pre-planting  
14 season, so those numbers are very low. Due to this  
15 new system that we have, we have been seeing kind of  
16 record number highs, and I expect that to be the  
17 case, but there is a little bit of, I definitely hear  
18 you on all things related to our maintenance numbers  
19 and staffing numbers, but I do want to just point out  
20 that some of that PMMR data is because those dips  
21 were just, frankly, because of these funky contractor  
shifts that were happening this summer.

19 COUNCIL MEMBER RESTLER: And I think that,  
20 you know, our previous Chair, Krishnan, highlighted  
21 the right point, I think there's an opportunity for

2 us to try to bring more folks in to the fold here as  
3 contractors. We've been really eager, we work with  
4 great non-profits that I think are eager to figure  
5 out a way into this space, like Big Reuse and others.  
6 I know this is complex work, I know that it is not an  
7 easy thing for folks to take on, but I think putting  
8 real resources into how do we build that bench and  
9 bring in more folks that are reputable, that are  
10 deeply invested in our communities that I think can  
11 do the work more affordably, those are great outcomes  
12 for all of us, so I hope that's something we can  
13 explore together and do more mini forests and other  
14 fun things that we've been doing at District 33. I'm  
15 excited to connect with you further, and we have a  
16 lot of big parks ideas that we're hoping to advance  
17 together. So, thank you for your testimony today, and  
18 excited for your leadership at the Department.

19 CHAIRPERSON HANKERSON: Thank you, Council  
20 Member Restler.

21 So, we're going to go on to the second  
round. Before I jump to my Colleagues, I have two  
questions, one from Council Member Sanchez, who was  
online, and the final question from Council Member  
Santosuosso.

2           This is from Council Member Pierina  
3 Sanchez. Most, if not all, of Council District 14  
4 falls within neighborhoods identified as  
5 environmental justice communities. The City's Urban  
6 Forest Management Plan highlights that areas like  
7 ours have fewer healthy trees and greater exposure to  
8 heat and environmental stress. In recent years, major  
9 storms have also damaged trees across the District.  
10 Can the Parks Department speak specifically to the  
11 current health of the tree canopy in the West Bronx,  
12 including around the Jerome Park Reservoir, a  
13 neighborhood landmark lined with beautiful mature  
14 trees, several of which have unfortunately been lost  
15 in recent storms, and what in the City's plan, both  
16 at the reservoir and more broadly, to address storm  
17 damage and ensure timely re-plantings so our  
18 community is not left with declining canopy coverage?

19           COMMISSIONER SHIMAMURA: Yes. Thank you so  
20 much for the question. So just, we'll look to our  
21 partners at MOCEJ to comment specifically on tree  
canopy in the Council Member's District, if you have  
that information. But what I will say is, again, we  
do prioritize, when it comes to new plantings, those  
HVI 4 and 5 neighborhoods, we're looking to have

2 fully planted out those neighborhoods by the end of  
3 2027, and then doing this more comprehensive approach  
4 throughout the entire city. So, I'm happy to look at  
5 that information to make sure that we are aligned  
6 with, if there are any HVI 4 and 5 areas within the  
7 Council Member's District, which I believe there are,  
8 then those should be fully planted out by 2027.

9 When it comes to storm response, before I  
10 pass it over to MOCEJ, what I would say is, again,  
11 I'm very proud of the Parkies who responded to our  
12 storm within the first 72 hours, having cleared all  
13 of the trees that were blocking streets, dealing with  
14 a little over 1,800 service requests, and then  
15 finally now just finishing up the last of those  
16 requests, not too far out from the actual end of that  
17 storm. We are constantly looking at ways to, of  
18 course, improve service to New Yorkers, so happy to  
19 take back any additional feedback, but overall, I'm  
20 very happy and satisfied with the response of how  
21 Parkies stood up and responded to this storm.

18 CHIEF CLIMATE OFFICER YEUNG: Yeah. Thank  
19 you so much for the question on behalf of Council  
20 Member Sanchez. You know, of the 1,200 acres of her  
21 District, we do see that there's 20 percent tree

2 canopy cover there. That's obviously not where we  
3 want to be in the future, but the good news is that  
4 we did see pretty significant net gain in tree canopy  
5 coverage in those last five years between 2017 and  
6 2021, so we are excited to build on that expansion of  
7 tree canopy, and as the Commissioner has mentioned  
8 before, are making sure that we are prioritizing  
9 environmental justice neighborhoods and areas that  
10 need it the most. So, Upper Manhattan and the Bronx  
11 have actually seen some of the greatest gains in tree  
12 canopy coverage citywide, and we want to continue  
13 that trend definitely.

14 CHAIRPERSON HANKERSON: All right. Thank  
15 you.

16 And a question from Council Member  
17 Santosuosso. Coney Island is one of the waterfront  
18 communities hit by Sandy, where tree canopy and  
19 street tree count has not caught up since, and street  
20 trees are an important element of resiliency in terms  
21 of soil retention and heat reduction. My  
understanding at last reference is that Coney Island  
is due for a major street planting in the next one to  
two years. Is that still on track?

2           COMMISSIONER SHIMAMURA: I will have to  
3 take feedback and make sure that that is still the  
4 case, but I'll look to our Assistant Commissioner  
5 unless he wants to provide any additional  
6 information. What I'll say though is that your  
7 Council offices, our community board should be  
8 notified before ahead of planting, so you should have  
9 that information. We don't want anybody to be  
10 surprised, and in fact, we want people to celebrate  
11 when trees are coming into their neighborhood. So as  
12 a form of practice, we do regularly communicate that  
13 to constituents and to our leadership, but I'm happy  
14 to get back with more specifically where Coney Island  
15 is looking like in our planting plan unless you would  
16 like to add anything else, Assistant Commissioner.

17           ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER OSBORNE: No. I  
18 don't have that information at hand, so we'll have to  
19 follow up with that.

20           CHAIRPERSON HANKERSON: Okay. I just have  
21 a couple of questions kind of continuing in the  
spirit of former Chair Krishnan and Council Member  
Restler. Public reporting and official statements  
have raised concerns that major New York City Parks  
contractors, including Dragonetti Brothers

2 Landscaping and Griffins Landscaping, continue to  
3 receive significant City work after serious legal  
4 issues. What is DPR's standard for deciding when a  
5 tree planting or maintenance contractor remains a  
6 responsible vendor after criminal, labor, or  
7 environmental violations? What factors does DPR  
8 consider in that decision, and under what  
9 circumstances would DPR recommend suspension,  
10 termination, or renewal of that contract?

11 COMMISSIONER SHIMAMURA: Thank you so much  
12 for the question. I am aware, although I'm relatively  
13 still new, I am aware of these concerns with past  
14 contractors, and I'm certainly looking to get more up  
15 to speed on the specific situation that you  
16 referenced. In general, and on a very high level, DPR  
17 works very closely with our partners at MOCS, the  
18 Mayor's Office of Contract Services, I hope that's  
19 the right, MOCS, as well as the Law Department and  
20 other sister agencies to ensure that all of the  
21 contractors and vendors that we do use are, of  
course, in accordance with laws and other rules and  
regulations. And so, from what I understand, that has  
continued to be the case. We have not engaged in any  
sort of other vendors that have not followed those

2 rules and regulations, and are also happy to also  
3 work with other agencies, including the Department of  
4 Investigations and others, to ensure that every kind  
5 of contractor that we're working with is in  
6 accordance, is following all rules and regulations.  
7 I'm going to look to our Assistant Commissioner to  
8 give any more background on this one, because he was  
9 here for longer, but happy to, of course, just look  
10 into further, and looking forward to getting up to  
11 speed on this myself.

12 CHAIRPERSON HANKERSON: We'd appreciate  
13 that.

14 ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER OSBORNE: Thank you  
15 for the question. And as the Commissioner said, we  
16 work very closely with the Department of  
17 Investigation and MOCS to ensure that our vendors are  
18 compliant with agency contracting policies. So, in  
19 the case of these vendors, they've been engaged in  
20 monitorships, monitoring agreements, through DOI. And  
21 through those monitoring agreements, DOI is keeping a  
closer eye on their business practices. And so, as  
long as these vendors are compliant with DOI's  
monitoring agreement, the approach is to continue the  
existing relationships with them.

2 CHAIRPERSON HANKERSON: So, given that,  
3 what integrity and compliance checks does DPR use for  
4 tree planting and tree maintenance contractors before  
5 award, or even considering renewal? And what actions  
6 can the Department take if a contractor's compliance  
status changes mid-contract?

7 COMMISSIONER SHIMAMURA: I'll just start,  
8 and then I'll pass it back over to you. So, one, I'm  
9 thankful for the question, because I was thinking  
10 earlier that I wanted to add this to make sure that  
11 you understood that we also are looking very much to  
12 diversify our contracts. We've taken a number of  
13 steps over recent years to look towards awarding more  
14 contracts, M/WBE groups to smaller contracting firms  
15 to really diversify the scope of those contracts. And  
16 that really is to ensure, of course, always, that we  
17 are delivering services as quickly and as effectively  
18 as possible, but it's also to make sure that we're  
19 not exhausting the market in so many ways, and  
20 exhausting the industry to ensure that we're looking  
21 closely at the work that these contractors can do,  
and being creative around who we think can do this  
work, and bringing new folks into the fold. And I  
think that, ultimately, and as we look to diversify

2 those contracts, we're actually seeing a lower cost  
3 for tree planting, we're seeing more effective work.  
4 So, these efforts to diversify those contracts are  
actually paying off already.

5 CHAIRPERSON HANKERSON: Would you mind  
6 speaking more to those efforts?

7 COMMISSIONER SHIMAMURA: Sure, of course.  
8 And I'll look to our Assistant Commissioner, who's  
been leading that.

9 ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER OSBORNE: Sure. So,  
10 I spoke earlier about the reduction in our tree  
11 planting costs that we've seen since FY22, and that  
12 is a direct result of some minor adjustments to our  
13 specifications and contracts, but really primarily  
14 due to increased vendor recruitment. And so, we've  
15 worked with Small Business Services, we've attended  
16 vendor outreach fairs, we've had info sessions for  
17 contractors who maybe have a little bit of experience  
18 in tree planting work, specifically, but weren't sure  
19 they were ready to scale up to City contracts. We've  
20 used the M/WBE procurement method to bring in smaller  
vendors to kind of start small, some of whom have  
successfully competitively bid on some of the bigger  
contracts. So, we started that effort with tree

2 planting because we had seen an increase in tree  
3 planting costs and we knew that we needed to focus  
4 there. We've turned those types of efforts in the  
5 last couple of years to our tree maintenance program.  
6 And so, we've started similar types of outreach  
7 efforts to tree care companies. It's a different type  
8 of work from tree planting, so it's often different  
9 companies that do this work. And as the Commissioner  
10 said, just in the last few months, really, we've  
11 started to see new bidders on our tree maintenance  
12 contracts, you know, tree pruning, tree removal, pest  
13 and disease treatment, these types of things, as well  
14 as bidders who had not been involved for many years  
15 coming back. So, it's early in those efforts, but  
16 we're starting to see an increase in the number of  
17 vendors on these.

18 CHAIRPERSON HANKERSON: How many of your  
19 recent tree maintenance contracts are classified as  
20 M/WBES?

21 ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER OSBORNE: I don't  
know. We'll have to get back to you on that. I don't  
have that breakdown here.

CHAIRPERSON HANKERSON: Okay. Couple more  
questions, and then I'm going to turn it back over.

2 Does DPR track the hourly rates  
3 contractors pay tree pruners and related workers? And  
4 if so, how do those rates compare to what the City  
5 pays similar workers?

6 ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER OSBORNE: Because  
7 those are not prevailing wage contracts, we do not  
8 track the rates on that type of work.

9 CHAIRPERSON HANKERSON: Okay. What  
10 penalties or contract consequences does DPR use when  
11 a contractor provides false or misleading compliance  
12 information, and have those penalties been used on  
13 tree planting or tree maintenance contracts in recent  
14 years?

15 COMMISSIONER SHIMAMURA: I'm happy to give  
16 kind of one response, and then look to our Assistant  
17 Commissioner for more information. But ultimately, we  
18 work very closely with City Law, with MOCS, with the  
19 Department of Investigations on all things related to  
20 any sort of infractions that are found to be with any  
21 sort of contractor. Really and truly, our bread and  
butter is making sure that this work gets done to New  
Yorkers, but we look heavily and work with our other  
partners here to ensure that there is compliance. And  
if there is an infraction, we are looking to those

2 other partner agencies to help us determine kind of  
3 consequences of that, and then follow up, as our  
4 Assistant Commissioner had referred to in sort of a  
5 monitorship in the situation that you had referenced  
6 earlier. I'm going to look to you, Ben, to see if  
7 there's anything else you'd like to add.

8 ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER OSBORNE: The only  
9 thing I'd like to add is that, you know, Parks  
10 contracting practices are not Parks alone. We're  
11 following the City's, you know, contracting rules,  
12 you know, in every way. So, when it comes to  
13 background checks, when it comes to compliance, you  
14 know, Parks contracting units, which, you know, I'm  
15 not a part of, do perform, you know, a certain  
16 background check, but then we do, you know, work with  
17 Law and DOI and MOCS for a more thorough vetting and  
18 compliance.

19 CHAIRPERSON HANKERSON: Final question  
20 from me, and I'm going to turn it over to Council  
21 Member Banks and Council Member Brewer.

How concentrated is DPR's tree planting  
and tree maintenance work among its top vendors,  
including firms such as Dragonetti Brothers  
Landscaping and Griffins Landscaping? What percentage

2 of work is done by DPR's top three and top five  
3 vendors, and what is DPR doing to reduce  
4 over-reliance on a small number of vendors?

5 COMMISSIONER SHIMAMURA: And while I'm  
6 going to look to our Assistant Commissioner to see if  
7 he has any of that information handy, I'm going to  
8 guess that we're going to have to get back to you on  
9 some of those other components of it. We have some  
10 data available here, but any questions that we don't  
11 have answers to, we're happy to get back to you on.

12 ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER OSBORNE: Yeah. I'm  
13 happy to kind of respond in somewhat general terms,  
14 which is that, you know, Dragonetti remains a  
15 significant vendor for both tree planting and tree  
16 maintenance and Griffins for tree maintenance. As  
17 we've discussed earlier, we've put a lot of effort  
18 into diversifying and recruiting more vendors, but  
19 we'll be happy to get back to you with the details on  
20 the breakdown of how much each of those vendors  
21 helps.

CHAIRPERSON HANKERSON: Okay. I appreciate  
that.

I'm going to turn it over to Council  
Member Banks and Council Member Brewer.

2 COUNCIL MEMBER BANKS: Thank you, Chair.

3 Just want to go back to some of my early  
4 questioning, particularly when it comes to Green  
5 Thumb responsibility and timelines, and also just  
6 want to note also that my District has the most Green  
7 Thumbs probably throughout the entire city. When it  
8 comes to trees inside a Green Thumb garden, when it  
9 comes to damage, when there's a property that's  
10 adjacent to it, when it comes to buckling of fences,  
11 cracked grounds, root pressure, which entity, Green  
12 Thumb or Parks Forestry is responsible for  
13 maintenance, and what is the required response  
14 timeline?

15 ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER OSBORNE: Sure.

16 Yeah. I understand and appreciate that question, and  
17 of course, Green Thumb gardens are unique in that  
18 they're very close to people's homes in many cases.

19 So, we are one Parks Department, so I  
20 wouldn't really characterize it as Green Thumb versus  
21 Forestry being responsible. However, Forestry takes  
care of the trees, right?

COUNCIL MEMBER BANKS: So, Forestry's  
responsible if there's damage that's done or if a  
tree's protruded onto private property.

2 ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER OSBORNE: So,  
3 Forestry can take action in terms of maintenance of  
4 the trees.

5 COUNCIL MEMBER BANKS: So, when a  
6 complaint is put in, what's the timeline for a  
7 response then?

8 ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER OSBORNE: So, we  
9 will inspect any service request as quickly as we  
10 can, and we discussed the volume and the backlog of  
11 service requests that we carry right now, so I can't  
12 provide a precise timeline for any particular service  
13 request. As far as --

14 COUNCIL MEMBER BANKS: So it could take  
15 two, three, four, five, six, seven, eight, nine, 10,  
16 20 years?

17 ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER OSBORNE: To  
18 perform an inspection, no.

19 COUNCIL MEMBER BANKS: Well, but once it  
20 -- and this goes back to an issue of questions I had  
21 raised earlier, once inspection is done, and if we're  
not getting the response in a sense, or the rating  
that is needed to deal with the situation, who steps  
in when the constituent is saying and giving evidence

2 that their property's being damaged by this tree that  
3 is in the Green Thumb?

4 COMMISSIONER SHIMAMURA: Yeah. So, let me  
5 just say, so what I believe that our Assistant  
6 Commissioner is trying to get at is that it really  
7 depends on the type of complaint that's coming in.  
8 Anything that is of significant, severe damage, or  
9 risk of damage, we are addressing as expeditiously as  
10 possible, and particularly, we have that rating  
11 system. But of course, we understand that there is a  
12 bit of backlog when it comes to those moderate and  
13 kind of middle-range complaints that are coming in,  
14 and certainly then, I don't want your constituents or  
15 frankly anybody to feel that they are just  
16 complaining into a void where there's no --

17 COUNCIL MEMBER BANKS: Well, that's what  
18 it seems like.

19 COMMISSIONER SHIMAMURA: Right, and that's  
20 why I'm going to say that certainly we're an agency  
21 that's people-powered, so whether it's talking to our  
Green Thumb partners, which we do regularly, or it's  
talking to homeowners, or it's talking to our  
leadership at community boards or with you, Council  
Member, we are happy to walk through other

2 alternatives. We're happy to talk through what  
3 options are available and costs associated with it.  
4 So, I'd say we're happy to follow up with you  
5 directly to make sure that in this case that we lay  
6 out the options that are available, either that's,  
7 whether that's through Green Thumb taking action,  
8 Forestry taking action, or any other entity and what  
9 the timeline is.

8 COUNCIL MEMBER BANKS: We'll give you  
9 cases that exist.

10 COMMISSIONER SHIMAMURA: Sure.

11 COUNCIL MEMBER BANKS: That it's already  
12 on the radar of Parks Department or the Forestry  
13 unit, and there's been no action, or not to the  
14 satisfactory of the need of the constituent, and it's  
15 particularly on Glenmore Avenue where you have a host  
16 of Green Thumbs that exists, and we have examples of  
17 damage being done to private property, and the  
18 resident has over and over said nothing's being done.  
19 So hopefully we wanted to highlight this today, and  
20 hopefully even get some action on that.

19 When it comes to claims versus repairs,  
20 when a homeowner is directed to file a claim with the  
21 Comptroller for damages caused by Parks managed

2 trees, what documentation, inspection notes,  
3 findings, evidence of root intrusion, et cetera, does  
4 the Parks provide to support legitimate claims?

5 ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER OSBORNE: I'm happy  
6 to take that question, and thank you for that  
7 question. Okay. So, just a point of clarification,  
8 Parks would never direct a property owner to file a  
9 claim, but that certainly is an option.

10 COUNCIL MEMBER BANKS: But it is, okay.

11 ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER OSBORNE: Yes. And  
12 I would, to an extent, defer to the Comptroller as to  
13 what type of documentation they may accept or may  
14 recommend. However, Parks is happy to provide an  
15 assessment of the condition. Sometimes it's just  
16 simply a request for correspondence. We can write a  
17 letter saying, this is what we observed. When it  
18 comes to sidewalks, because it's a much more common  
19 type of concern, we have an established system. If a  
20 property owner is looking to undertake repair to  
21 their sidewalk, it's damaged by a City tree, they  
want guidance, or they are looking to file a claim  
with the Comptroller, or both, the inspection records  
that we provide a recommendation for a repair and

2 also documentation as far as what portion of the  
3 sidewalk is damaged by a tree.

4 COUNCIL MEMBER BANKS: Okay. And last  
5 question, Chair, and thank you.

6 Does the Parks Department coordinate with  
7 DOT, DEP, Con Edison, National Grid, or other  
8 agencies when trees obstruct the street lights,  
9 contact structures, or create infrastructure risks?  
10 And I know this touches on, you know, in Brooklyn,  
11 we've been having a lot of brownouts and blackouts  
12 that has been taking place, and sometimes it starts  
13 either in a manhole, or it starts from, it's topical,  
14 starts from the lines, the electric lines. What is  
15 being done, is there any type of coordination?

16 COMMISSIONER SHIMAMURA: Yes, very much  
17 so. On multiple different levels. So, on an  
18 agency-to-agency basis, we are in constant  
19 communication. We have regular interactions. On the  
20 staff level, we have regular interactions. And then  
21 during storms and during extreme weather events, we  
are even more so in truly constant communication  
through this kind of real-time task force that takes  
place that then helps us track using the resources of  
Emergency Management, DSNY, DOT, and others to

2 address and react and respond to situations as they  
3 arise. Would you like to add anything else to that?

4 ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER OSBORNE: Yeah.

5 Specifically because you focused on brownouts, power  
6 concerns. I want to note that Con Edison is  
7 responsible for the clearance of trees, whether  
8 they're City trees or private trees, around their own  
9 infrastructure, but we have a very, very close  
10 relationship with Con Ed. We actually have  
11 applications where we share data back and forth. Con  
12 Edison refers conditions to us that they see may be a  
13 concern with respect to the health of the tree near  
14 their equipment. We refer conditions to them if we  
15 see something that is potentially putting their  
16 equipment at risk.

17 COUNCIL MEMBER BANKS: Okay. So, that's  
18 the coordination. Okay, got you. So, Con Edison is  
19 responsible for clearing.

20 ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER OSBORNE:

21 Absolutely.

COUNCIL MEMBER BANKS: Okay. Thank you.

ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER OSBORNE: Some  
people may see trucks passing by, pruning around the  
wires, and then they may see our trucks passing by,

2 pruning for something different. They're on kind of  
3 distinct cycles. But yeah, Con Edison has a very  
4 specific cycle for pruning for clearance of their  
equipment.

5 CHAIRPERSON HANKERSON: All right. Thank  
6 you.

7 Let's bring it back to Manhattan. Council  
8 Member Brewer.

9 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Thank you very  
much.

10 I saw the numbers for the tree risk  
11 issues, 34,000, and then sidewalk tree program,  
12 17,000. But what's the backlog of trees to be  
13 planted? Do you have that number? In other words, an  
14 assessment maybe from your map or whatever, including  
15 the 47 that just died in the storm, et cetera, et  
16 cetera. How many trees have vacant pits in the City  
of New York?

17 ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER OSBORNE: Well,  
18 that number of trees that we could plant or plan to  
plant is a constantly evolving number.

19 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Yeah. There might  
20 be a vault there. I got it.

21 COMMISSIONER SHIMAMURA: Sure.

2 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: I know about the  
3 vaults.

4 ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER OSBORNE: Well, a  
5 vacant pit is not necessarily a planting space. Some  
6 trees may have been planted in tree beds decades ago  
7 in locations, whether there's a new conflict or just  
8 because our standards have evolved that space is no  
9 longer viable.

10 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Okay.

11 ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER OSBORNE: In  
12 addition, we don't need a tree bed in order to plant.  
13 So, through our neighborhood tree planting approach,  
14 we're looking down an entire block. We are looking at  
15 every square inch of that block for where a tree  
16 could be planted based on our standards, whether  
17 there's an existing tree bed or not.

18 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Okay. Is this on  
19 your map? I know you have a tree map, would that  
20 information be on the map? I'm trying to get a number  
21 to multiply 2,900. I'm trying to get a number so I  
can multiply it and figure out how much we need for  
our trees.

ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER OSBORNE: Okay. So,  
the Tree Work Hub shows our upcoming plantings.

2 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Okay, but not  
3 where there are pits.

4 ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER OSBORNE: The  
5 question of how many trees could be planted in the  
6 entire city, I think that's what you're looking to  
7 get at.

8 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Yes.

9 ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER OSBORNE: So, we  
10 have done an estimate, that would be an estimate. I  
11 don't have that number in front of me, but we would  
12 be happy to follow up.

13 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Okay. What I'm  
14 trying to say is we all should be aiming for  
15 something for your tree planting program. Obviously  
16 more contractors would help, but you are talking  
17 about the most popular topic in New York City, so we  
18 would love to see some action on it.

19 CHIEF DRURY: And then just quickly,  
20 ma'am, I just want to interject and say that we have  
21 baseline capital funding in place for the tree  
planting program.

COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: For all?

CHIEF DRURY: Specifically for the plan  
that we have designated.

2 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Yeah. I don't like  
3 that plan.

4 CHIEF DRURY: Sure.

5 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Okay. I'm just  
6 making it clear I don't like that plan.

7 CHIEF DRURY: But however, that end total,  
8 regardless of the timeline that it will take, the  
9 funding is in place.

10 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Yeah. I need this  
11 parallel plan number. I'm working on my parallel  
12 plan.

13 CHIEF DRURY: Fair enough. We'll be happy  
14 to get you whatever information you need.

15 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: The other thing is  
16 just in terms of pickup for the recent storm. I know  
17 you said Sanitation and Parks, they'll figure it out.  
18 Will they figure it out at 3-1-1? I just worry when  
19 you say Parks and Sanitation, because I don't know  
20 who's going to do it. And I got people complaining,  
21 you know.

22 ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER OSBORNE: So,  
23 whether there's a storm or not --

24 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Right.

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2 ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER OSBORNE: -- the  
3 best way to report any problem with the tree is  
4 3-1-1.

4 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Okay.

5 ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER OSBORNE: That  
6 feeds directly into our database.

7 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Into Parks? And  
8 then you decide if it's DSNY or you.

8 ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER OSBORNE: Yes. And  
9 when we activate the Downed Tree Task Force for a  
10 large storm through New York City Emergency  
11 Management, that pulls in multiple other agencies,  
12 depending on the conditions and what those other  
13 agencies are doing.

13 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Okay.

14 ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER OSBORNE: And  
15 through NYCEM's Downed Tree Task Force, we feed work  
16 orders to other agencies who are coming in to help,  
17 and they feed their reports back to us, so it's a  
18 very tightly --

18 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: That's fabulous.

19 And then, finally, what's that program  
20 called that you mentioned that you, because, you  
21 know, in my neighborhood, the trees bend the

2 sidewalk, people trip. Fine, they're still alive. But  
3 then the problem is then the neighbors, my neighbors,  
4 want to tear down the tree. I do not. So, what's the  
5 name of that program that could perhaps fix the  
6 problem so that I don't have to deal with tripping  
7 and I don't have to deal with tearing down the tree?  
8 Does it have a name, the one that you described?

9 ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER OSBORNE: The  
10 Parks' Trees and Sidewalks Program.

11 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Parks' Trees and  
12 Sidewalks.

13 ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER OSBORNE: Trees and  
14 Sidewalks.

15 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Thank you. I will  
16 be utilizing that program. Thank you very much.

17 CHAIRPERSON HANKERSON: I just want to  
18 take a point of privilege to say I want to be like  
19 Council Member Brewer when I grow up. So, I just want  
20 to say that.

21 Going to the great Borough of Staten  
Island, Council Member Morano.

COUNCIL MEMBER MORANO: The Borough of  
Parks, Chairman. The Borough of Parks.

CHAIRPERSON HANKERSON: This is true.

2 COUNCIL MEMBER MORANO: Thank you very  
3 much, and thank you, Chairman, and congratulations  
4 for a very, very successful first Committee hearing.  
5 It's clear, based on the amount of preparation you've  
6 done today, that the Speaker made a great choice in  
7 selecting you to Chair this Committee.  
8 Congratulations as well to Council Member Banks for  
9 having the wisdom to ask questions before you figured  
10 out where the timer was.

11 Commissioner, thank you not only for your  
12 testimony, but congratulations on a terrific  
13 appointment. It seems like the Mayor couldn't have  
14 chosen a better candidate than you. I'm really  
15 looking forward to hosting you in the Borough of  
16 Parks and showing you around some of the great parks  
17 in my District.

18 Staten Island, as you may already know,  
19 has one of the highest levels of tree canopy in the  
20 city. Under the new data-driven planting strategy  
21 that prioritizes heat-vulnerable neighborhoods, can  
you assure Staten Islanders that we won't see  
reductions in tree maintenance, pruning, or stump  
removal services because our Borough already has a  
higher canopy?

2           COMMISSIONER SHIMAMURA: Yes, I can. Our  
3 Tree Planting Plan is separate than our tree pruning  
4 plan. Those are two separate entities, even though we  
5 prioritize our heat-vulnerable neighborhoods, that  
6 does not mean we are leaving the rest of the city  
7 behind. This plan actually ensures that we are  
8 looking comprehensively across our city to make sure  
9 that everywhere is planted, but we also understand  
10 the importance, as mentioned in my testimony, of  
11 continued regular pruning. The continued maintenance  
12 of our tree canopy, of which Staten Island has a  
13 beautiful one, requires regular pruning, and we're  
14 very committed to following through on that. Would  
15 you like to add anything else about the pruning in  
16 Staten Island?

17           ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER OSBORNE:

18 Certainly. So, yes, our routine pruning, our  
19 seven-year block pruning cycle continues. We continue  
20 to encourage Staten Islanders, along with all New  
21 Yorkers, to report any issues of concern that they  
see (INAUDIBLE) so that we can respond in between  
that cycle. I would add, with respect to Neighborhood  
Tree Planting, that we will be servicing, through  
that program, a portion of each community district. I

2 know Staten Island has three, on at least once in  
3 every three-year period, but also that that  
4 Neighborhood Tree Planting program is adding some  
5 capacity for tree and stump removal. We're able to  
6 use the capital dollars with our tree planting  
7 contracts to perform some additional removal of dead  
8 or dying trees and stumps as we go through and plant,  
9 so it's adding some service.

10 COUNCIL MEMBER MORANO: Thank you. And  
11 Commissioner, at the risk of being somewhat  
12 duplicative of what Council Member Brewer asked, I  
13 think it bears repeating, just because it's such a  
14 big issue in my District. A frequent complaint from  
15 homeowners in my District is the sidewalk damage  
16 caused by tree roots. Just to be clear, what steps is  
17 the Parks Department taking to reduce root damage to  
18 sidewalks when planting new trees?

19 COMMISSIONER SHIMAMURA: Thank you for  
20 your question. And I'll look to Ben to give you more  
21 specifics, but as we've continued to maintain this  
22 urban trees that we have here, we've learned a lot of  
23 lessons and have evolved in what we understand to be  
24 the best practices around tree maintenance, and so  
25 whereas you used to see maybe smaller tree beds that

1 were maybe four by four in size, you won't see those  
2 anymore. You'll see these expanded tree beds that  
3 will allow for better root growth, healthier trees,  
4 and hopefully less destruction to our sidewalks.

5 That's just one example, but I'll look to our  
6 Assistant Commissioner to give you more examples of  
7 how we've continued to evolve in our thinking of when  
8 we're planting new, that we're doing so with keeping  
9 in mind all the infrastructure that we're butting up  
10 against, but also the overall health and longevity of  
11 these trees.

12 ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER OSBORNE: Yeah. I  
13 would just add that we're even more thoughtful than  
14 we were in decades past about the species or  
15 cultivars of trees that we plant. We no longer plant  
16 trees that we've learned to be real repeat offenders  
17 with sidewalk issues, such as the Bradford Callery  
18 pears and certain types of maples, so just thinking  
19 about the species more carefully in this space.

20 COUNCIL MEMBER MORANO: I appreciate the  
21 update on the damage that the recent storms did to  
the trees. Does the Department proactively identify  
older or compromised trees that may be more likely to

2 fall during storms and maybe even remove them before  
3 they become a hazard?

4 COMMISSIONER SHIMAMURA: While we are in  
5 the midst of our fourth tree census, which this year  
6 will include this sort of LiDAR technology that will  
7 be tracking the shape, growth, heights, type, of  
8 course, and all these other kind of details around  
9 each street tree, the truth is that all types of  
10 trees are unfortunately susceptible to extreme storms  
11 and extreme weather, so no, I don't believe, and I'll  
12 look to our Assistant Commissioner, we don't  
13 proactively go out to remove any of these trees or  
14 branches before a storm. We also, frankly, a lot of  
15 these times, these storms come pretty quickly, and  
16 the reason why we don't do any work during storms, of  
17 course, is that we have some really strict  
18 restrictions around putting guys in cherry pickers or  
19 anything else like that when extreme weather, this  
20 last one had gusts of up to 60 miles per hour winds.  
21 It would be way too much for our guys to go out there  
beforehand when these winds are starting to pick up  
and then do that work beforehand. I think our best  
approach is still that kind of regular interval of

2 tree pruning that happens on a seven-year basis. You  
3 want to add anything to that?

4 ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER OSBORNE: Just the  
5 seven-year pruning that the Commissioner referred to,  
6 it includes a full inspection of every tree on every  
7 block, so we have trained inspectors who are  
8 performing a risk assessment on each one of those  
9 trees, so those trees that are safe to remain at that  
10 time will be pruned under that routine maintenance,  
11 but those trees that are declining or have serious  
12 defects are given an even more thorough inspection  
13 and may be removed, so there is that kind of  
14 proactive inspection as we prepare for our block  
15 pruning. In between that cycle, we rely on the public  
16 to report defects.

17 COUNCIL MEMBER MORANO: One more, if I  
18 may, briefly, Chairman.

19 When a new tree is planted for a block,  
20 how are residents notified, and is there any  
21 opportunity for homeowners to provide input about the  
location?

COMMISSIONER SHIMAMURA: Sure. For our  
kind of comprehensive planting, your office should be  
notified as well as the community board about when

2 plantings are set to take place. You'll also see when  
3 the trees are actually put in, you'll see little tags  
4 on them saying I'm a new tree or something like that,  
5 and I believe that we're coming out with additional  
6 messaging to put on homeowners' doors and things like  
7 that to remind them that this is coming or that work  
8 is being done on their street. In terms of a  
9 selection of specific trees, unfortunately, we don't  
10 at this point. We're very limited in our ability to  
11 work directly with homeowners on maybe the type of  
12 tree or the location of these trees, because our  
13 mandate is really to plant in as many plantable  
14 locations as possible, and oftentimes, our decisions,  
15 as Council Member Brewer mentioned, are driven by  
16 things that nobody can see, the infrastructure  
17 beneath the ground, the kind of clearance with other  
18 sister agencies, and that sort of work. When I was  
19 Manhattan Borough Commissioner, I had residents who  
20 all they wanted were cherry trees in every location,  
21 and that's also not something that we can provide. We  
really look at the type of species of trees very  
closely to look at what are the other trees in the  
area, what can contribute to this kind of urban  
ecology that's going on in this space, what are the

2 trees that are likely to survive in the climate  
3 there, so a lot of those decisions ultimately guide,  
4 they're data-driven and research-driven, but they  
5 guide the decisions on where we plant trees and the  
6 type of trees that we plant, although we're also very  
7 happy, as I mentioned to Council Member Banks, I  
8 would love for your constituents to have a direct  
9 relationship with us. I want to hear their concerns  
10 and are able to explain these kind of concerns to our  
11 team, but also find ways that they can also be  
12 involved in caring for their trees on any given block  
13 or being involved with our agency in other ways.

14 COUNCIL MEMBER MORANO: Thanks very much.

15 CHAIRPERSON HANKERSON: Thank you.

16 I just want to say, again, thank you to  
17 the Commissioner and the leadership at Parks and  
18 Administration for being here today. The goal of this  
19 Committee moving forward is to build a collaborative  
20 relationship so that not only are we protecting our  
21 trees, but our green spaces, our parks, our  
recreation spaces, and ensuring that every community  
has access to it, and so, again, thank you so much.  
As you know, our thing is parks are for everyone, so

2 we're going to do that together. Thank you,  
3 Commissioner.

4 At this time, we're going to open the  
5 hearing for public testimony.

6 I want to remind members of the public  
7 that this is a formal government proceeding and that  
8 decorum shall be observed at all times. As such,  
9 members of the public shall remain silent at all  
10 times.

11 The witness table is reserved for people  
12 who wish to testify. No video recording or  
13 photography is allowed from the witness table.  
14 Further, members of the public may not present audio  
15 or video recordings as testimony, but may submit  
16 transcripts of such recordings to the  
17 Sergeant-at-Arms for inclusion in the hearing record.

18 If you wish to speak at today's hearing,  
19 please fill out an appearance card with the  
20 Sergeant-at-Arms and wait to be recognized. When  
21 recognized, you will have two minutes to speak on  
today's hearing topics: Ensuring the Long-Term Health  
and Growth of the City's Tree Stock.

If you have a written statement or  
additional written testimony you wish to submit for

2 the record, please provide a copy of that testimony  
3 to the Sergeant-at-Arms.

4 With that, we're going to call our first  
5 panel, and thank you so much for your patience with  
6 us today. Lynn Kelly, Executive Director of New York  
7 Restoration Project; Nisaya Price (phonetic), City  
8 Parks and Partnership for Parks; Sarah Balistreri,  
9 City Parks Foundation; Alia Soomro, New York League  
10 of Conservation Voters.

11 And joining by way of Zoom, Kathy Park  
12 Price, New Yorkers for Parks.

13 Lynn, you're good to start.

14 LYNN BODNAR KELLY: Thank you.  
15 Congratulations.

16 I'm Lynn Bodnar Kelly. I'm the Executive  
17 Director of New York Restoration Project. I am no  
18 stranger to this table and delighted to be here  
19 again. I would say, as this is your first hearing, I  
20 would please encourage members of the Administration  
21 to stay and listen to the testimony of all of the  
advocates that have stayed in this room as we  
continue through this budget process.

So, simply put, NYRP knows trees. For  
more than 30 years, we've planted trees, renovated

2 community gardens, restored parks, and expanded  
3 access to green space in our city. Together with the  
4 Parks Department, we actually launched and completed  
5 million trees, and this historic partnership was  
6 completed in 2015. As climate change intensifies, I  
7 think it's no secret, trees are our frontline way of  
8 defending ourselves and strengthening our  
9 biodiversity. And that's why today, and you can sign  
10 up on our website now, we give away free trees every  
11 year to New York City residents. This year, we're  
12 giving away 3,700 approximately trees. And I was told  
13 as of an hour ago, over 75 percent have already been  
14 claimed. So, get your tree now. We also do it in  
15 partnership with Council Members. We do a tree  
16 giveaway with Council Member Krishnan as well as  
17 Council Member Restler. So, next year, if you'd like  
18 to partner with us, you're welcome. I'm not going to  
19 go through why, because you're going to hear it from  
20 my colleagues about why tree canopy is so important  
21 in New York City, but I was doing some simple math  
while we were discussing the question about the nine  
years. Why does it take Parks Department nine years?  
Let's just do some simple math. If there are 18,000  
inquiries or complaints or backlog on the books of

2 trees, and there are only 60 foresters, and the  
3 average U.S. worker works 250 days a year, that means  
4 that each of these foresters really has 1.1 a day  
5 that they would have to, and they can't get sick, and  
6 they can't take vacation. So, this is a function of  
7 resources. The Parks Department simply needs more  
8 resources. They're not miracle workers. Together with  
9 all of us (TIMER CHIME) as advocates, we wish to work  
10 with you in your new role. Congratulations, and  
11 you'll see me here again.

12 CHAIRPERSON HANKERSON: Thank you. Looking  
13 forward to working with you as well.

14 SARAH BALISTRERI: I just wanted to  
15 clarify, Nisaya Price from City Parks Foundation is  
16 my colleague, but she is not testifying in person  
17 today, and she was here, but is not present.

18 So, I am Sarah Balistreri, the Urban  
19 Forest Program Senior Manager at Partnerships for  
20 Parks, a public-private partnership between Parks  
21 Department and City Parks Foundation. Thank you so  
much for calling this hearing and for the opportunity  
to testify.

New York City has already taken an  
important step toward a greener future by passing

1 Local Laws 135 and 148, which established the Urban  
2 Forest Plan, and set a much-needed goal of equitably  
3 expanding tree canopy to 30 percent. In developing  
4 the Urban Forest Plan, City Parks Foundation has been  
5 partnering with New York City Parks and the Mayor's  
6 Office of Climate and Environmental Justice to plan  
7 community engagement, to use our extensive subject  
8 matter expertise to synthesize research and data  
9 analysis, and to act as fiscal sponsor for the Urban  
10 Forest Plan. Through Partnerships for Parks, we have  
11 coordinated large-scale community engagement efforts,  
12 including input sessions in all five boroughs where  
13 we heard New Yorkers' concerns and hopes for the  
14 future of New York City's urban forest. We also held  
15 focus groups with dedicated tree stewards and  
16 released a questionnaire which gathered thousands of  
17 responses in seven languages. To date, we've engaged  
18 more than 8,000 New Yorkers across all five boroughs,  
19 and what we're hearing is clear. People care deeply  
20 about trees, and they know their neighborhoods best.  
21 That's why Partnerships for Parks is now translating  
community input into community action. We're  
incorporating support for tree stewardship throughout  
our programs, providing training, supplies,

2 grassroots grants, and networking opportunities to  
3 community volunteers who dedicate their time, effort,  
4 and passion to caring for our neighborhood trees.

5 Community input and volunteerism are vital to this  
6 work, and Partnerships for Parks is proud to lead it.

7 But without dedicated funding for implementation, the  
8 City relies heavily on advocates and volunteers to

9 enact the plan. We cannot expand and protect our  
10 urban forest without investing in the workforce

11 required to plant, maintain, and steward it, and New  
12 York City Parks is already chronically understaffed.

13 We stand ready to partner with City leaders to turn  
14 this plan into sustainable action, but it will  
15 require increased funding, expanded staffing, and a

16 long-term commitment to our City's trees and those  
17 who steward them. Thank you very much.

18 CHAIRPERSON HANKERSON: Thank you. Do you  
19 mind if I ask you a question?

20 SARAH BALISTRERI: Sure.

21 CHAIRPERSON HANKERSON: You mentioned  
22 trainings. Can you just tell me the type of trainings  
23 that are offered, and how can folks sign up?

SARAH BALISTRERI: Absolutely.

Partnerships for Parks Technical Assistance Program

2 for many years has offered a variety of trainings to  
3 those who steward and activate our park spaces, and  
4 we're now expanding that to those who steward our  
5 street trees as well. There are workshops ranging  
6 from budget 101 to how to access grants if you're a  
7 grassroots group to even sort of group leadership  
8 development and hands-on stewardship skills. Those  
9 are just a few examples, and people could easily find  
10 them by Googling Partnerships for Parks and looking  
11 for the Partnerships Academy series. Open to  
12 everyone, free of charge.

13 CHAIRPERSON HANKERSON: Thank you.

14 ALIA SOOMRO: Good afternoon. My name is  
15 Alia Soomro, and I'm the Deputy Director for New York  
16 City Policy at the New York League of Conservation  
17 Voters. Congratulations, and thank you, Chair  
18 Hankerson, as well as Members of the Parks Committee  
19 and for the opportunity to testify today.

20 Our City's park system increases quality  
21 of life, promotes climate resilience, provides good  
union jobs, and fosters social and economic growth in  
every borough. As co-founders of the Play Fair for  
Parks Coalition, along with New Yorkers for Parks, DC  
37, and over 400 organizations, NYLCV demands a City

2 budget that gives New York City's Parks the fair  
3 funding they deserve. NYLCV is also a member of the  
4 Forest for All New York City Coalition, and this is a  
5 coalition of over 140 organizations committed to  
6 protecting, maintaining, and expanding the City's  
7 urban forest.

8 First and foremost, if we are to maintain  
9 and grow our City's park system, invest in our  
10 workforce, increase tree canopy, and prepare our open  
11 spaces for climate change, elected officials must  
12 increase the City's Parks budget. We appreciated that  
13 the Mayor promised to increase the Parks budget to 1  
14 percent, but we were disappointed in the preliminary  
15 budget, and obviously, it's preliminary, so we are  
16 hoping that the City Council and the Admin by the  
17 adopted budget will increase the City's Parks budget.  
18 Right now, it's 0.5 percent of the City's budget. So,  
19 as we're going through the budget process, we believe  
20 that there is an opportunity to rebuild an agency  
21 that was crippled by decades of disinvestment, and  
more recently, four years of disproportionate PEGS  
cuts.

Moreover, the City's urban forests and  
natural areas provide countless environmental and

2 social benefits to city residents. This includes  
3 reducing urban flooding, managing stormwater runoff,  
4 which keeps pollutants out of waterways, and very  
5 importantly, mitigating extreme heat, which impacts  
6 low-income and communities of color especially. So  
7 along with the Forest for All Coalition, we were a  
8 strong supporter of Local Law 148 of 2023, which the  
9 Council passed, requiring the City's first Urban  
10 Forest Plan so we're very excited to see this plan,  
11 and just wrapping up, we're very excited to work with  
12 the Council, the Admin, as well as Parks advocates  
13 here today to get the Parks Department the fair  
14 funding they deserve and see the urban forest grow.  
15 Thank you.

16 CHAIRPERSON HANKERSON: Thank you. Alia, I  
17 just want to say I was very disappointed with the  
18 preliminary budget as well so I share that sentiment.

19 Lynn, do you mind if I call you Lynn?

20 LYNN BODNAR KELLY: Please.

21 CHAIRPERSON HANKERSON: I just want to go  
back to your testimony. You had mentioned that New  
Yorkers are able to request a tree. Where can they  
request?

2 LYNN BODNAR KELLY: You can go right now  
3 on your cell phone to our website, and it's on our  
4 landing page.

5 CHAIRPERSON HANKERSON: You mind just  
6 moving the mic up? I want them to hear this at home.

7 LYNN BODNAR KELLY: Yeah. If you would  
8 like to request a free tree, there are some rules.  
9 You have to plant it or use it in New York City. You  
10 have to be a New York City resident, but you can go  
11 right on our website. It's right on the homepage on  
12 the landing page, and you register right there. It's  
13 a really simple form, and we have many different  
14 varieties of native species, and I'm told today  
15 there's still pawpaws left, so you can get fruit  
16 trees, and all kinds of flowering trees, and  
17 blueberry bushes this year. We've expanded. We've  
18 went to bushes a little bit over trees, but it's  
19 incredibly popular program, and we give you all the  
20 instructions. If you've never planted a tree before,  
21 or you've never cared for a tree, we can show you how  
to do it, so novices are welcome.

22 CHAIRPERSON HANKERSON: Are folks limited  
23 to one?

2 KATHY PRICE PRINCE: Yes, because it's a  
3 hot commodity.

4 CHAIRPERSON HANKERSON: I know. I won't  
5 tell my grandmother. She'll get upset.

6 LYNN BODNAR KELLY: But next year, what I  
7 will say is, if you would like to host a free tree  
8 giveaway in your District, come to us early, and we  
9 can come out to you with the trees, work with a  
10 volunteer even, or other organizations in your  
11 District, and make sure that they get in your  
12 constituents' hands. And like I mentioned, Council  
13 Member Krishnan and Council Member Restler took us up  
14 on that this year.

15 CHAIRPERSON HANKERSON: Thank you.

16 LYNN BODNAR KELLY: You're welcome.

17 CHAIRPERSON HANKERSON: All right. We're  
18 going to jump to the Zoom room.

19 Okay. Kathy Park Price. Hi, Kathy.

20 KATHY PARK PRICE: Hello, Council Member  
21 and Chair Hankerson, thank you so much to you and the  
Parks Committee for the opportunity to testify.  
Congratulations on your first hearing, and I  
appreciate your statements about the disappointment  
in the preliminary budget, and echo Alia Soomro's

2 comments as well. As you know, we'll be at the March  
3 23rd preliminary budget hearing, rallying for a  
4 fully-funded parks budget in advance of the  
5 preliminary budget hearing.

6 My name is Kathy Park Price, and I'm the  
7 Director of Advocacy and Policy at New Yorkers for  
8 Parks, a 118-year-old advocacy organization that  
9 fights for our high-quality, fully-funded parks and  
10 open spaces for every New Yorker. As Alia mentioned,  
11 we also help lead the Play Fair for Parks Coalition  
12 made up of more than 450 organizations across the  
13 city that support our park system.

14 For many New Yorkers, trees are the part  
15 of the park system that we encounter most often in  
16 our daily lives, even if someone does not step into a  
17 park or plaza on any given day. As the Parks  
18 Commissioner noted during her testimony, trees are  
19 literally part of our City's infrastructure and need  
20 the same care and maintenance just like our streets,  
21 sidewalks, and sewers do. Tree-related issues are one  
of the most common reasons residents contact 3-1-1,  
and right now there are more than 30,000 unresolved  
service requests for tree care citywide. During the  
most recent winter storm alone, nearly 2,000

2 tree-related service requests were submitted. These  
3 numbers reflect a system under strain. While the City  
4 continues to plant new trees, which is wonderful and  
5 much needed, there are not enough forestry staff to  
6 keep up with the inspection and handle preventative  
7 care. Mature trees require consistent maintenance to  
8 stay healthy and safe.

9 SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: Time has expired.

10 KATHY PARK PRICE: Okay. I'll just quickly  
11 wrap up. We urge the Council to restore and baseline  
12 forestry staffing at Parks so the agency can address  
13 service backlogs and care for the trees we already  
14 have, invest in maintenance and pruning, and fully  
15 fund the implementation of the forthcoming Urban  
16 Forest Plan. Thank you.

17 CHAIRPERSON HANKERSON: Thank you, Kathy.

18 All right. We're going to call our next  
19 panel. We're going to start with Obed Holzinger from  
20 Natural Areas Conservancy; Merrit Birnbaum from  
21 Riverside Park Conservancy; Tami Lin Moges, the  
Nature Conservancy; and Kathryn Mercier. If I  
mispronounced your name, please pronounce it  
correctly in the microphone. I do apologize.

2           OBED HOLZINGER: Thank you, Chair, and  
3           congratulations. My name is Obed Holzinger, and I'm  
4           the Executive Director of the Natural Areas  
5           Conservancy. I want to thank you and the Committee  
6           for the opportunity to testify here today. The  
7           Natural Areas Conservancy is the citywide non-profit  
8           that works with New York City Parks Department to  
9           study, steward, and advocate for the protection of  
10          New York City's 20,000 acres of forested natural  
11          areas and wetlands. We heard a lot about street trees  
12          and landscape parks. I'm here also to speak about  
13          these landscapes that are central to the future of  
14          our city's urban forests. Our forests contain nearly  
15          five million of the city's seven million trees,  
16          meaning that achieving the citywide 30 percent canopy  
17          cover target required by Local Law 148 will not be  
18          possible without protecting and actively managing  
19          these natural areas. In 2018, the Natural Areas  
20          Conservancy and New York City Parks created the  
21          Forest Management Framework, a 25-year roadmap to  
            address the ecological threats facing these forests.  
            However, to date, the City has allocated only 21  
            percent of the funding needed to implement this plan,  
            and funding has been inconsistent year to year. This

2 has resulted in the loss of staff and delays in  
3 critical forest management work. Our most recent  
4 ecological assessment conducted with New York City  
5 Parks in 2024 shows troubling signs of decline.  
6 Invasive vines were present at 92 percent of forest  
7 plots surveyed, and the forest mid-story is showing a  
8 decline in native trees, both indicators that  
9 long-term forest regeneration is at risk. With  
10 stronger and more consistent investment in forest  
11 management and staffing, New York City Parks can  
12 address these threats and (TIMER CHIME) protect the  
13 forests that provide critical benefits to climate  
14 resilience, public health, and biodiversity. We look  
15 forward to discussing the budgetary and staffing  
16 needs necessary to ensure these landscapes receive  
17 the care they need at the preliminary budget hearing  
18 later this month. Thank you so much.

19 MERRIT BIRNBAUM: Hi, Chair Hankerson.

20 Thank you for holding this hearing. My name is Merrit  
21 Birnbaum. I'm President and CEO of Riverside Park  
22 Conservancy. We partner with NYC Parks to steward six  
23 miles of parkland along the Hudson River, which  
24 includes approximately 26,000 trees and 27 acres of  
25 natural areas.

1  
2 Riverside Park is a case study in what is  
3 happening to New York City's urban forest because  
4 much of our canopy is aging out all at once. A huge  
5 share of our mature trees were planted during the  
6 Robert Moses era of the 1930s, including some of our  
7 park's most iconic features like the alleys of London  
8 Plane trees. These features are beautiful, but they  
9 represent large monocultures, trees of the same  
10 species, the same age, reaching the end of their  
11 natural life together with no clear succession plan.  
12 Now you add climate change and an overwhelmed  
13 forestry operation and you get a public safety  
14 problem. In Riverside, we routinely see dead limbs  
15 and deteriorating trees sit for months, sometimes  
16 longer, because the system can only address the most  
17 immediately dangerous conditions. And with NYC Parks  
18 Forestry headcount at its lowest levels ever, even  
19 danger is now being triaged. So here are three recent  
20 examples. At our very active pickleball courts,  
21 numerous dead limbs were reported in early June. They  
are still unpruned with two potentially lethal limbs  
coming down and falling directly on the courts,  
luckily, when no one was there. This is since they  
were first reported. A dead tree was marked for

removal at Hippo Playground, and then it came down on its own shortly afterward during peak season use.

After this most recent blizzard, we have been clearing fallen limbs in our park, the Conservancy Staff, for 10 days straight. One very large tree came down that we were unable to clear on the path by River Run Playground, and it still remains right now to this day on the path. It appears to be unstable and people are still walking underneath it while it awaits removal. It's only a matter of time before danger becomes death in a system that is forced to operate with this level of (TIMER CHIME)

underfunding. So, the solution is simple. Stop forcing emergency triage as the operating model. Fund the staffing so that NYC Parks Forestry can prune and manage its risks proactively, not after something falls. Our admirable colleagues at the City Parks Foundation are about to release the Comprehensive Urban Forest Plan as rightly mandated by the City Council, but without any funding for the staff and resources to carry it out, we are doomed to continue the cycle of canopy loss and forest degradation that is becoming our City's legacy. A tree takes decades to grow and a fraction of a second to fall, so let's

2 fund the forest workforce that's needed to heal the  
3 forest. Thank you.

4 CHAIRPERSON HANKERSON: Just two brief  
5 questions before we move to the next person. How many  
6 individuals, if you have this data, how many  
7 individuals are on the Conservancy staff?

8 MERRIT BIRNBAUM: The conservancy staff  
9 has about 60 full-time staff.

10 CHAIRPERSON HANKERSON: 60 full-time  
11 staff.

12 Has the conservancy had to hire private  
13 contractors for tree maintenance?

14 MERRIT BIRNBAUM: Yes, on a limited basis.  
15 We ourselves do not have an arborist on staff. Tree  
16 work, as I've described, is extremely dangerous, and  
17 we don't have the insurance or the capacity to carry  
18 it out as a private conservancy. We have been able to  
19 hire contractors and we have started more and more  
20 hiring contractors using private dollars to do  
21 pruning, particularly when we've been unable to get  
responses to immediate dangerous situations. So right  
now, we're looking to appeal to a donor to fund block  
pruning at the Pickleball situation that has been of  
great concern to us.

2 CHAIRPERSON HANKERSON: Thank you. Thank  
3 you for that.

4 TAMI LIN MOGES: Okay. Congratulations,  
5 Chair Hankerson, and I'm thrilled that your first  
6 hearing is about trees, so thank you so much to you  
7 and the Committee for holding this hearing and for  
8 the opportunity to testify. My name is Tami Lin  
9 Moges. I am the Director of the Nature Conservancy's  
10 New York City program. The Nature Conservancy is the  
11 world's largest conservation organization. We have  
12 90,000 members across the state and 35,000 of whom  
13 reside in New York City.

14 The Nature Conservancy has produced a lot  
15 of research on the urban forest and canopy analyses  
16 over the years. We're also a leading member and  
17 convener of Forest for All NYC, a coalition of over  
18 200 organizational members. We work to increase  
19 investment in the urban forest and to expand tree  
20 canopy to 30 percent citywide by 2035 in an  
21 ecological manner. The Coalition also hosts the  
annual City of Forest Day, which is attracting tree  
stewardship and tree care events every single year in  
October. In order to ensure the long-term health and  
growth of the City's tree stock, it is vital to

1 double the New York City Parks budget and to commit  
2 full funding to the New York City Urban Forest. The  
3 New York City Urban Forest contains over 7 million  
4 trees on public and private property and provide a  
5 multitude of environmental and health benefits. To  
6 reach the 30 percent canopy goal that is required by  
7 Local Law 148, the City will need to protect and  
8 maintain existing trees and plant new trees. Now,  
9 I'll focus a little bit more on the maintenance  
10 aspect. Investing in regular maintenance of existing  
11 trees is critical. The Nature Conservancy's analysis  
12 of LIDAR data to determine canopy changes between  
13 2010 and 2021 has shown that canopy has increased.  
14 That is the good news. But from 2017 to 2021, we  
15 estimate that as much as 90 percent of that tree  
16 canopy growth was from existing trees, rather than  
17 from trees that were newly planted. This is even  
18 higher than previous estimates of 87 percent between  
19 2010 and 2017. This finding really reinforces the  
20 importance of protecting and regularly maintaining  
21 existing trees, especially because private property  
does not have any legal protections or incentives for  
tree planting, care, or replacement. As the Mayor's  
Office gets ready to release the 10-year Urban Forest

2 Plan this spring, we would like to see increased and  
3 baselined funding for the urban forest, especially  
4 for critical maintenance staff for the trees and  
5 workforce (TIMER CHIME) training programs. We commend  
6 the City's previous commitments, but the latest  
7 budget of cutting 33 million dollars from the  
8 preliminary budget is not in line with that  
9 commitment and does not set up the Urban Forest Plan  
10 for success. Thank you to the Committee for the  
11 opportunity to testify, and we'd love to continue to  
12 work with you.

13 CHAIRPERSON HANKERSON: Thank you. Just  
14 really quickly, does the Conservancy have any data or  
15 reports on potential health benefits that are  
16 directly related to canopy growth?

17 TAMI LIN MOGES: Yes. We actually have a  
18 full report here, which we'll be giving to you  
19 shortly, and if there's any specific information,  
20 we'll be happy to point those out.

21 CHAIRPERSON HANKERSON: Great minds think  
alike. Look at that.

TAMI LIN MOGES: There's definitely a lot  
of health benefits and environmental benefits, and

2 that's why trees are really critical for the future  
3 climate adaptability of the city.

4 CHAIRPERSON HANKERSON: Thank you.

5 KATHRYN MERCIER: Good afternoon. My name  
6 is Kathryn Mercier, and I am Deputy Director of  
7 Queens Forestry. I'm currently off the clock and here  
8 representing Chapter 7 of Local 375 of DC37. Our  
9 Chapter represents over 400 Parks Department  
10 employees, including foresters, landscape architects,  
11 and City research scientists.

12 Our Chapter found it important to testify  
13 at this meeting today because so many of us work  
14 maintaining and growing our urban forests here in New  
15 York City. The fundamental challenges we want to lay  
16 out today are chronic understaffing of permanent  
17 civil service lines, along with the increase in the  
18 use of consultant staff and private contractors,  
19 which together have resulted in our urban forest  
20 maintenance being more expensive than it needs to be,  
21 and much essential work that would preserve our urban  
forest going undone. We maintain that consultants and  
contractors are too expensive. For example,  
consultant arborists perform much of the same work  
that foresters do, but the City pays approximately 90

2 dollars per hour for these consultants, while  
3 foresters' salary and fringe benefits is  
4 approximately 60 dollars per hour, only two-thirds  
5 the cost. Under many programs, capital dollars are  
6 paying for these consultants, work that a forester  
7 could otherwise be doing. We also maintain that  
8 consultant and contractor work standards are more  
9 inconsistent than permanent staff because they do not  
10 receive the same training and do not have the  
11 opportunity to retain institutional knowledge like  
12 permanent employees do. This often in turn creates  
13 additional work for our members. Finally, we maintain  
14 that there is essential forestry maintenance going  
15 undone due to understaffing. For example, there is  
16 insufficient oversight for work on or near trees.  
17 Even when contractors apply for and receive tree work  
18 permits, staff do not have the capacity to perform  
19 regular site inspections, which would be able to  
20 correct problems before (TIMER CHIME) they lead to  
21 tree damage or destruction --

18 CHAIRPERSON HANKERSON: You can continue.

19 KATHRYN MERCIER: -- which can be common  
20 on construction sites. Chapter 7 members have been  
21 asked to do more with less for too long to the

2 detriment of our urban forests. We believe a fully  
3 staffed permanent Parks workforce is crucial to  
4 preserve and grow our urban canopy.

5 CHAIRPERSON HANKERSON: Thank you. I do  
6 have some questions for you, but for the sake of time  
7 -- give me one second. It's first hearing, so I have  
8 to make sure I'm doing things right. My team will  
9 grab your contacts. I do have some follow-up  
10 questions, particularly regarding Queen's Forestry.  
11 Thank you.

12 We're going to call the next panel. We're  
13 calling Lucy Koteen of Friends of Fort Greene Park;  
14 Taige Rambarran, Trees New York; Mark Cousinets  
15 (phonetic), Big Reuse; Angelise Zwingermanis  
16 (phonetic). She left? Okay. Did I say her name  
17 correctly? I was close.

18 LUCY KOTEEN: Are you ready?

19 CHAIRPERSON HANKERSON: I'm ready whenever  
20 you are.

21 LUCY KOTEEN: Oh, sorry. This is what I'm  
talking about. Do you see all these trees? See any  
here? No. That's what the Parks Department wants to  
do, or did in the past, anyway.

2 Hi. I'm Lucy Koteen. I live in Fort  
3 Greene. Good day, everybody. Thank you, Council  
4 Member Morano for sticking around. I'm here as a  
5 member of Friends of Fort Greene Park, supporting --

6 CHAIRPERSON HANKERSON: I'm sorry. Before  
7 you continue, can I see the images? I couldn't see  
8 that far.

9 LUCY KOTEEN: Thrilled.

10 CHAIRPERSON HANKERSON: Understood. Thank  
11 you.

12 LUCY KOTEEN: Okay. Yeah, I'm here as a  
13 member of Friends of Fort Greene Park, supporting the  
14 continuation and preservation of the urban forest in  
15 Fort Greene Park. The capital project, which  
16 originated in 2015, is not compliant with the City's  
17 stated goal to increase tree canopy 30 percent by  
18 2035. It includes removing 78 mature, healthy trees  
19 with large canopies, 58 of them in an environmental  
20 justice area that will result in reduced carbon  
21 sequestration, worsen air pollution, increase storm  
water runoff, and increase the already high asthma  
rates. The northwest sector of the park sits directly  
across from a large NYCHA complex and is used as the  
backyard by the residents who live there. The

1 targeted project area includes 13,000 square feet of  
2 green space, which would be replaced with a 43-foot  
3 hardscape plaza. An entire generation will be harmed  
4 by worsened air quality and increased heat island  
5 effect during the 20 to 30 years it takes for new  
6 trees to reach their full potential to mitigate air  
7 pollution. The entire lower quadrant is covered in  
8 shade in the summer. Our organization has needed to  
9 file many FOIL requests and several lawsuits against  
10 the City in order to receive information that should  
11 have been readily available to the taxpaying public.  
12 This has been costly to the community and to the  
13 City. It is time to scrap this detrimental  
14 24-million-dollar project. Forensic for Green Park  
15 has designed a practical counterproposal that  
16 delivers the objectives of making the needed repairs  
17 to the deteriorated sidewalk, drainage systems,  
18 recreational facilities, and creating new  
19 accessibility without destroying trees or remodeling  
20 the historic Olmstead Park. This will create a  
21 positive way to save money and provide the necessary  
maintenance needed in the park, which has been  
lacking for decades. The money saved can be used for  
improvements in other parks. And you can see the

2 proposal on the website, which I have listed here,  
3 and more information. And we look forward to meeting  
4 with you, Chair Hankerson, to give you more details  
5 than two minutes allowed. Oh my God, I'm under time,  
6 fantastic. Anyway, thank you and congratulations on  
7 your position, and we would really love to work with  
8 you in the future. Thank you.

9 CHAIRPERSON HANKERSON: Thank you so much.  
10 I look forward to meeting with you all as well.

11 TAIGE RAMBARRAN: My name is Taige  
12 Rambarran, and I am an Environmental Educator at  
13 Trees New York. Thank you, Chair Hankerson and Parks  
14 Committee Members, for the opportunity to speak  
15 today.

16 For the past 15 years, Trees New York has  
17 expanded and maintained the City's tree canopy  
18 through planting, stewardship, education, and  
19 community participation. This work continues to be  
20 vital today as we face the growing impacts of climate  
21 change, including extreme heat, increased flooding,  
and decreased air quality. Our urban forest is one of  
the greatest resources to help us keep New York City  
healthy and thriving in the face of these challenges.  
Today, as a member of the Forest for All NYC

coalition, we respectfully call on the City Council to support the implementation of the Urban Forest Plan and the achievement of 30 percent canopy goal. In 2025, Trees New York hosted events across the boroughs to promote the upcoming Urban Forest Plan and to engage New Yorkers directly, gathering their feedback, ideas, and aspirations for the City's urban forest. From these conversations, it's clear that community members are deeply concerned about the inequitable distribution of canopy coverage across the city and the future their neighborhoods may face if these disparities remain unresolved. This sentiment was echoed by more than 2,450 New Yorkers who attended City of Forest Day 2025, an annual day of events dedicated to celebrating our City's urban forest. This movement continues to build momentum with participation increasing from 89 events in 2024 to 130 events in 2025. Out of that celebration, I was able to connect with a teacher at South Brooklyn Community High School in Red Hook, a neighborhood where tree canopy coverage has historically been lower than the citywide average. There, I had the opportunity to engage with students who might not otherwise think about the importance of trees in the

1 city. By the end of our in-class lesson and  
2 stewardship activity, I could see a shift in the  
3 students' perspectives. Students who had never  
4 considered the role of trees were excited to be  
5 outside caring (TIMER CHIME) for them. They began  
6 asking questions about soil health and said they  
7 would share what they learned with their friends. Not  
8 only does uneven distribution of tree canopy leave  
9 low canopy communities especially vulnerable to  
10 worsening public health outcomes and compounding  
11 environmental inequities, it also prevents young  
12 people from connecting meaningfully with the world  
13 around them. And I say this as a former city kid  
14 myself that without equitable access to green  
15 infrastructure, students are not only  
16 disproportionately exposed to climate risks, but are  
17 also less likely to see their neighborhoods as spaces  
18 where they have agency and belonging. With funding  
19 for the Urban Forest Plan, Parks and other agencies  
20 in partnership with groups like Trees New York and  
21 the Forest for All NYC coalition can expand  
education, stewardship, and workforce development  
initiatives that build long-term capacity to care for

2 our City's trees. Thank you again for the opportunity  
3 to speak.

4 CHAIRPERSON HANKERSON: All right. We're  
5 going to call our final panelist, two in-person.  
6 Let's start with Joan Reutershan as well as Louis  
7 Cox. And joining by way of Zoom, Hayley Gorenberg and  
8 Christopher Leon Johnson.

9 JOAN REUTERSHAN: Should I start?

10 CHAIRPERSON HANKERSON: Yes.

11 JOAN REUTERSHAN: Okay. Congratulations  
12 Commissioner Hankerson, Chairperson of this important  
13 Committee. My name is Joan Reutershan. I've lived in  
14 New York City for 60 years, 43 in Fort Greene,  
15 Brooklyn. In addition to my family and friends and my  
16 cats, New York City's urban forest is my great love.  
17 Personally, I'm a Parks Department Super Steward. I  
18 organized in the early 2000s the planting of 200  
19 trees in New York City's gray zones as a result of a  
20 lawsuit for idling City tourist buses. And for eight  
21 years, I've worked with a group of street tree care  
people in Manhattan at First Presbyterian Church. And  
I am a member of a group called Friends of Fort  
Greene Park, and we have an urgent suggestion for the  
City Council that will help the City reach the goal

2 of 30 percent canopy by 2035. Rethink the capital  
3 plan for Fort Greene Park, the northwest corner,  
4 which calls for the elimination of 78 trees and green  
5 spaces. Please preserve the continuous grove of  
6 mature trees that extends from this northwest  
7 entrance of Fort Greene Park to the top of the  
8 monument steps. Preserve the London Plane branches  
9 that meet and greet each other like a cathedral that  
10 let in enough sun for the green space below. Maintain  
11 the grassy mounds, the beloved playground for the  
12 community. Protect 11 thriving Zelkova trees on the  
13 steps of the monument in Fort Greene Park with shade  
14 runners and nurture wildlife and protect the triangle  
15 of honey locusts shading the bus stop at Myrtle and  
16 St. Edwards. This grove as it is, is an urban forest.  
17 It's an urban treasure. And it's the backyard of the  
18 residence of adjacent Walt Whitman and Ingersoll  
19 NYCHA houses, as well as my favorite area of the  
20 park, to which I come for an experience of nature in  
21 this city. It needs maintenance, but not a redesign.  
(TIMER CHIME) Friends of Fort Greene Park has fought  
to keep the magnificent trees and green spaces for 10  
years. Our alternative plan is on our website and you  
will have it with my testimony. It is less expensive

2 and would enable funds to be spent for other  
3 environmental justice areas. We have a new  
4 Administration, a new parks Commissioner, and it's  
5 time to rethink this capital plan for Fort Greene  
6 Park. Thank you.

7 CHAIRPERSON HANKERSON: Thank you. And I'd  
8 like to say I love Fort Greene Park. I've been to a  
9 few concerts and events there, so.

10 JOAN REUTERSHAN: Oh, yes. Please meet  
11 with us.

12 CHAIRPERSON HANKERSON: Absolutely.

13 JOAN REUTERSHAN: And come, we'll take you  
14 for a tour of the park and show you exactly the areas  
15 we're talking about.

16 CHAIRPERSON HANKERSON: Would love that.

17 JOAN REUTERSHAN: They're so beautiful.

18 CHAIRPERSON HANKERSON: Thank you.

19 JOAN REUTERSHAN: Thank you. And  
20 beneficial.

21 CHAIRPERSON HANKERSON: We're joined by  
Hayley Gorenberg on Zoom, I think.

HAYLEY GORENBERG: Yes. Thank you. Thank  
you.

CHAIRPERSON HANKERSON: How are you?

2 HAYLEY GORENBERG: I am very pleased to be  
3 here. Thank you very much. To quote the Once-ler, who  
4 after the Lorax departed, left us to speak for the  
5 trees, unless someone like you cares a whole awful  
6 lot, nothing's going to get better, it's not. And  
7 that means taking protections from the books where  
8 they sleep, nice and cozy, and putting them to work.

8 I'm Hayley Gorenberg, civil rights and  
9 anti-bullying advocate and volunteer with Friends of  
10 Mount Prospect Park. We formed in crisis after Mayor  
11 Adams announced a large concrete skateboard facility  
12 would soon occupy this beloved neighborhood park's  
13 central green space oval. We thought irreplaceable  
14 shade trees planted mid-century in a park officially  
15 eligible for the National Register were protected,  
16 but despite reams of City provisions and opposition  
17 from thousands of New Yorkers and a roster of darn  
18 impressive organizations, concrete construction that  
19 arborists tell us will damage if not kill stately  
20 shade trees is apparently barreling ahead.

18 Construction on top of and cutting through network  
19 root systems growing for decades. A new heat island  
20 bankrolled with more than 11 million dollars of  
21 public money. Brooklyn ranks low for green and

2 canopy. Heat islands sicken and kill us. Green space  
3 and tree canopy are free AC, routinely more than 10  
4 degrees cooler. Trees boost our health and correlate  
5 to lower violence. Brooklyn also has the most skate  
6 sites, very inequitably distributed and many in poor  
7 condition, but New York City Parks is cutting,  
8 threatening, and damaging trees. Near-endangered  
9 Mount Prospect, in another park that is officially  
10 disadvantaged, the City is chopping down some of very  
11 few trees. A community member asked me sincerely  
12 whether Parks is cutting their healthy trees because  
13 City leaders think that Black children need more  
14 direct sunlight. So, there is a vast chasm between  
15 what's on the books and what's happening. (TIMER  
16 CHIME) We can have great tree policies in this city,  
17 but our leaders really need to lean into it a lot  
18 more than they do for real --

19 SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: Thank you. Your time  
20 expired.

21 HAYLEY GORENBERG: -- because if we don't  
experience justice, what leaders say doesn't matter  
much.

2 CHAIRPERSON HANKERSON: Thank you, Haley,  
3 and thank you for your fight for environmental  
4 justice. It is necessary. Thank you.

5 Christopher Leon Johnson.

6 CHRISTOPHER LEON JOHNSON: Yeah. My name  
7 is Christopher Leon Johnson. Thanks for having this  
8 hearing, Mr. Hankerson, first time doing it.

9 Okay. I want to make this clear that the  
10 City Council need to understand that they be real  
11 careful of a certain person that really runs the  
12 Parks. She ran DOT, her name is Kathy Park Price,  
13 she's a lobbyist. So, of course, they will try to  
14 find a way to take away the tree. They want to try to  
15 save the trees, so they can put the cover of the bike  
16 lanes like that when it comes to the tree guards and  
17 stuff like that. I want to make this clear that,  
18 look, there's a lot we can't do to save the trees. We  
19 need paper in this city. The city, we still use  
20 paper. And many of these lobbyists, the consultants,  
21 love using paper. And they love to give the City  
Council paper, 25 sheets of paper to every Council  
Member every time they have a, it's like a Committee  
hearing, just like this. I'm not saying it  
personally, but this is the truth. There's a lot we

2 can't do to save the trees in the City of New York.

3 But it's sad that they take away the trees, which

4 hurts the people that are old and people that needs

5 that shade in the summertime. I mean, I love shade. I

6 mean, I love to have that shade, but thing about the

7 trees that it hurts to the development. It cuts to

8 the potential development. So, of course, they want

9 those trees out the door. But going forward, Mr.

10 Hankerson, I think that you should be doing a way

11 better job than Mr. Shekar Krishnan. Shekar was

12 captive to Kathy Park Price, and look what happened

13 to the city with everything she was doing under the

14 parks. She still don't do to this day. And she feels

15 that because you're younger than Mr. Shekar Krishnan,

16 and Mr. Sir, you don't have any children, she feels

17 that she could treat you like you're a child. So be

18 careful, Mr. Hankerson, when you're running this

19 Committee and be careful of the lady that spoke, the

20 Asian lady, Kathy Park Price, because she's going to

21 try to think, she going to think that you're Shekar

Krishnan and she can run you over like a child. So be

careful, brother. I know you're going to do well. I

know you're going to do a way better job than Shekar

2 Krishnan, but to be careful of (TIMER CHIME) Kathy  
3 Park Price because she thinks --

4 SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: Thank you. Your time  
5 has expired.

6 CHAIRPERSON HANKERSON: Thank you, Mr.  
7 Johnson. Your time has expired. Thank you so much.

8 CHRISTOPHER LEON JOHNSON: Thank you.

9 I believe that was all of our witnesses.  
10 Council Member, would you like to say any final words  
11 before I close?

12 COUNCIL MEMBER MORANO: No. My compliments  
13 on a terrific hearing, and it's great to see so much  
14 enthusiasm from the public and such well-informed  
15 witnesses.

16 CHAIRPERSON HANKERSON: Thank you.

17 And, again, I want to say thank you to  
18 all of the folks that testified, the advocates, to  
19 the Parks Department, and the Administration --

20 Oh, I'm sorry. We have one more person,  
21 one more person.

22 We're going to ask Louis Cox to -- are  
23 they on Zoom?

24 COMMITTEE COUNSEL SARTORI: Yeah. They're  
25 on Zoom.

2 CHAIRPERSON HANKERSON: Okay. Louis, are  
3 you ready?

4 LOUIS COX: Yes. I'm ready when you are.

5 CHAIRPERSON HANKERSON: Okay. Free to go.

6 LOUIS COX: Hi. My name is Louis Cox. I  
7 was born and raised in New York, so I've been here 36  
8 years, and now they started cutting down some trees  
9 in my neighborhood, and I used to just kind of assume  
10 the Parks Department takes care of it, someone else  
11 takes care of it, and then one day I realized that  
12 that wasn't necessarily true. I'm very lucky to have  
13 a tree in my backyard that my father planted. I  
14 started getting worried about it. I wanted to do  
15 something about it. I didn't want to mess it up, and  
16 I was able to get a citizen pruner license through  
17 Trees New York. Since then, I have become the Tree  
18 Planting Coordinator for the Cobble Hill Tree Fund.  
19 We've planted 25 trees in the last year. I am also a  
20 Director on the Cobble Hill Association, which is an  
21 organization that pays for the maintenance of Cobble  
Hill Park. And what I've realized is that the Parks  
Department is chronically underfunded. It's sort of a  
running joke. People, three years to get a new tree,  
chronically underfunded. What I realized is that when

2 I actually meet individual Parks Department  
3 employees, they're all very nice, very qualified  
4 people who want to do everything they can to help.  
5 They just don't have enough employees to meet the  
6 needs, but what I'm sort of saying is that I  
7 shouldn't exist. You know, I'm a volunteer. It's a  
8 non-profit tree planting program, and it's wonderful  
9 that volunteers step up to do this, but it shows that  
10 there's a budget gap, and so within that, I just  
11 wanted to sort of make my voice heard and advocate  
12 for more funding for Parks, because what I  
13 consistently find is that people really appreciate  
14 the trees. They want more trees, and they want them  
15 taken care of, and what I find with the pruning  
16 contracts is that it's a subcontractor. You know,  
17 it's like when you have your house work done, they  
18 send someone who sends someone, and you know, they  
19 paint the wrong wall the wrong color, and it's so  
20 important to have a project manager there sort of  
21 checking up, because the Parks Department itself has  
very good guidelines. If you read them, they make a  
lot of sense, but when you have contractors and  
subcontractors that are (TIMER CHIME) sort of, I  
think the City law --

2 SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: Thank you. Your time  
3 has expired.

4 LOUIS COX: -- requires the Parks  
5 Department to take the lowest bid, and so that level  
6 of quality is very important, and funding is the  
7 thing that will solve that. Thank you so much.

8 CHAIRPERSON HANKERSON: Louis, thank you  
9 for your testimony.

10 All right. With that, that brings our  
11 first hearing to a close. Again, thank you to  
12 everyone who testified. I look forward to working  
13 with each and every one of you to ensure that New  
14 York City's Parks are for everyone. Have a good day.

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C E R T I F I C A T E

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World Wide Dictation certifies that the foregoing

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transcript is a true and accurate record of the

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proceedings. We further certify that there is no

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relation to any of the parties to this action by blood

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or marriage, and that there is interest in the outcome

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of this matter.

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Date April 30, 2026

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