

COMMITTEE ON PARKS AND RECREATION

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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 20, 2025

Start: 1:09 p.m.

Recess: 4:57 p.m.

HELD AT: COMMITTEE ROOM - CITY HALL

B E F O R E: Shekar Krishnan, Chairperson

COUNCIL MEMBERS:

David M. Carr  
Robert F. Holden  
Linda Lee  
Julie Menin  
Mercedes Narcisse  
Vickie Paladino  
Sandra Ung

OTHER COUNCIL MEMBERS ATTENDING:

Christopher Marte  
Gale A. Brewer  
Alexa Avilés  
Lincoln Restler

A P P E A R A N C E S

Sue Donoghue, Commissioner of New York City  
Department of Parks and Recreation

Jennifer Greenfeld, Deputy Commissioner for  
Environment and Planning

Margaret Nelson, Deputy Commissioner for Public  
Programs and Community Engagement

Unidentified Administration member

Max Barton, Union Representative from Laborers  
Local 1010

Dilcy Benn, President of Local 1505

Will Hiron, Labor's Local 1010 Liuna

Joseph Puleo, President of Local 93

Bismark Ghanny, High Line Fellows

Jasiah Vega, High Line Fellows

Aniyah Nicole Cameron, High Line Fellows

Nachelle Johnson, High Line Fellows

Evander Tomaschett, High Line Fellows

Adam Ganser, Executive Director of New Yorkers  
for Parks

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

Deborah Kirshner, Vice President of External Relations at Prospect Park Alliance

Tamar Renaud, New York State Director of Trust for Public Land

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

Roxanne Delgado, Founder of Friends of Pelham Park

Lynn Kelly, Executive Director of New York Restoration Project and Co-Chair of Parks and Open Space Partners

Emily Walker, Senior Manager of External Affairs at the Natural Areas Conservancy

Victoria Dearborn, representing Tami Lin-Moges, who is the Director of the Nature Conservancy's Cities Program in New York

Tessa Huxley, volunteer for the Sarah Roosevelt Park in the Lower East Side

Allie Ryan, self

Karen Horvat, President of NYC Tree Pit Services

Sally Burns, Planning Associate for Union Square Partnership

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

Heather Lubov, City Parks Foundation

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

Rosamond Fletcher, Executive Director of the Fort  
Greene Park Conservancy

Michael Davis, community garden member at East  
Harlem Rodale Community Garden

Giulietta Fiore, Historic House Trust of New York  
City

Herbert Brooks, ropes course facilitator at Alley  
Pond Park in Queens

Constance Lesold, self

Isabel Friedman, Environmental Health Advocate at  
the Natural Resources Defense Council

Romke Hoogwaerts, self

Roberto Sosa, self

Alejandra Ng, Assistant Director of New York  
Junior Tennis and Learning's Community Tennis  
Programs

Christopher Leon Johnson, self

George Sands, Friends of Mount Prospect Park

2 SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: Good afternoon, good  
3 afternoon. This is a microphone check for the  
4 Committee on Parks and Recreation, done on March 20,  
5 2005. Recording done by Ginnelle Yearwood. It's  
6 recorded in the Committee Room.

7 SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: Quiet, please. Thank  
8 you. Good afternoon. Welcome to the New York City  
9 Preliminary Budget Hearing on the Committee on Parks  
10 and Recreation.

11 Also, please silent all electronic  
12 devices at this time.

13 Please do not approach the dais.

14 If you have any questions, please raise  
15 your hand, and one of uh, the Sergeants-at-Arms, will  
16 kindly assist you.

17 Thank you very much for your kind  
18 cooperation.

19 Chair, we're ready to begin.

20 CHAIRPERSON KRISHNAN: [GAVEL] Good  
21 afternoon, everybody, and welcome to the Parks and  
22 Recreation Committee's hearing in the New York City  
23 Council on the Fiscal 2026 Preliminary Budget and the  
24 Preliminary Mayor's Management Report for the  
25 Department of Parks and Recreation. My name is Shekar

2 Krishnan, and I am the Chair of the Parks and  
3 Recreation Committee. I would like to acknowledge my  
4 fellow Council Members who are present here today.  
5 Council Member Marte, Council Member Carr, Council  
6 Member Brewer, and I know others will be joining as  
7 well.

8           Today, we will be hearing from the  
9 Department of Parks and Recreation on its Fiscal 2026  
10 Preliminary Budget, which totals 640.4 million  
11 dollars. While it is an increase of about 22.4  
12 million dollars since adoption, this is still nowhere  
13 near the budget that the Parks Department of New York  
14 City deserves. It is nowhere near the goal of 1  
15 billion dollars that Mayor Adams campaigned on four  
16 years ago and has consistently broken that promise,  
17 and it is nowhere near what other large cities across  
18 America devote to their parks budget every year. If  
19 we want to be serious about investing in the well-  
20 being of New Yorkers, if we want to be serious about  
21 investing in New Yorkers' public health as well as  
22 mental health, then we need to take the steps towards  
23 improving our parks, making them safer and cleaner,  
24 and you do that by investing in them, not by cutting  
25 their budget.

2           There are still major gaps in the  
3 Department's funding, specifically with regard to  
4 Urban Park Rangers, PEP officers, and natural areas  
5 funding. Let's look at this very clearly. If we want  
6 our parks to be safe, if we want them to be clean, if  
7 we want to protect our trees and our forests from the  
8 wildfires that we have seen happen across our city,  
9 then we need to invest in our Parks workers and the  
10 areas of the budget that care for these things. The  
11 Urban Park Rangers, the PEP officers, and our  
12 forestry funding capture perfectly the fact that we  
13 need to do far more to invest in those areas of the  
14 Department to make our parks safer, cleaner, and  
15 greener. But as of January, the reality is that we do  
16 not have enough staff to cover the entire 30,000  
17 acres of New York City parks. As of January, there  
18 were less than 300 PEP officers covering all the  
19 parks across New York City. Nowhere near the  
20 headcount that is needed to provide protection for  
21 park goers and keep our parks safe.

22           Additionally, we have been fighting for  
23 Urban Park Rangers to receive permanent funding so  
24 that 50 City employees don't have to worry about  
25 potentially losing their job every year. We have seen

2 on the federal level the way in which the budget of  
3 the National Park Service is being decimated and the  
4 impact that it has had on our rangers on the federal  
5 level. Here in New York City, we are still fighting  
6 to protect our Parks budget. Our Urban Park Rangers,  
7 50 of them every year, are relying on the City  
8 Council to fund them from year to year. That is  
9 unacceptable. Supporting our Parks workers not only  
10 ensures our parks are taken care of, but investing in  
11 these workers and their jobs ensures that they can  
12 provide for their family, pay their rent or mortgage,  
13 and pay for childcare, and that can only happen if  
14 and when this Mayor joins the City Council in  
15 investing in workers and their jobs. If it were up to  
16 this City Council alone, their jobs and many more  
17 would no longer be at the discretion of yearly budget  
18 negotiations. That is not the way to run an agency's  
19 budget in New York City.

20 We need good paying, stable jobs for New  
21 Yorkers. Working in our Parks Department can provide  
22 that path so long as we invest in those jobs, and  
23 these temporary one-year allocations of funding, or  
24 one-shots, are no way to sustain good paying, stable  
25 jobs. It is no way to show our investment and

2 gratitude for the Parks workers who care for our  
3 green spaces every single day of the year, rain,  
4 shine, or in the snow.

5           What I hope to show throughout this  
6 budget hearing is that our parks are severely  
7 underfunded and, year after year, we are here  
8 highlighting how essential our parks are to the well-  
9 being of our city, to the livability of our city, and  
10 yet we are battling cuts from this City Hall in  
11 budget after budget that we are fighting to replace.  
12 We are heading in a direction that scares me and my  
13 constituents and should scare all New Yorkers.

14           If we care about our city and its well-  
15 being, if we want to make sure every community in New  
16 York City thrives, then we need to prioritize our  
17 Parks Department and its budget. The Fiscal 2026  
18 Preliminary Budget includes 23.5 million dollars in  
19 new needs for FY 2026, 173,000 other adjustments and,  
20 thankfully, no PEGs, but I will say again, we cannot  
21 be operating from this mindset of scarcity. But we  
22 are here reflecting on the fact that we don't have  
23 cuts. Where every budget fight we engage in is  
24 finding ways to replace cuts. We are not moving  
25 forward, we are actually moving backwards. And so

2 while there are no cuts to the Department this year,  
3 the fact is the gigantic cuts over the prior years  
4 have set this Department back on the work it is able  
5 to do for our green spaces across the city, and that  
6 is no way our city should be managed or run.

7           Now there are several new needs in this  
8 plan, including an expansion of the Second Shift  
9 Program that we fought for last year, as well as an  
10 expansion of the Swim Safety Program, which will  
11 improve our children's ability to safely use our  
12 beaches and pools. There is also funding for the  
13 Shirley Chisholm Park positions, as well as tree bed  
14 rat mitigation. The Committee looks forward to  
15 hearing testimony about the FY 2026 Preliminary Plan,  
16 and in these areas in particular, Second Shift  
17 Program, lifeguards, and most fundamentally the  
18 headcount of workers in the Parks Department.

19           Before we begin with the testimony, I  
20 would like to thank Council Staff for their hard  
21 work, our Finance Team of Chima Obichere, Jack  
22 Storey, and Michael Sherman, our Committee Staff,  
23 Christopher Sartori and Patrick Mulvihill, and my own  
24 Staff, Greg and Chanel Martinez.

2 I also want to acknowledge that we have  
3 several other Council Members join us as well,  
4 Council Member Julie Menin and Council Member Linda  
5 Lee.

6 And I will now ask the Committee Counsel  
7 to go over some procedural items and swear in the  
8 representatives from the Parks Department.

9 COMMITTEE COUNSEL BYNUM: Good afternoon.  
10 Please raise your right hand.

11 Do you affirm to tell the truth, the  
12 whole truth, and nothing but the truth before this  
13 Committee and respond honestly to Council Member  
14 questions?

15 COMMISSIONER DONOGHUE: I do.

16 UNIDENTIFIED: : I do.

17 COMMITTEE COUNSEL BYNUM: Thank you.  
18 Please state your name and position for the record  
19 when you begin, and you may begin when you're ready.  
20 Thank you.

21 COMMISSIONER DONOGHUE: Great. Thank you.  
22 Good afternoon, Chair Krishnan and Members of the  
23 Parks Committee and other Members of the Council, and  
24 importantly, happy first day of spring. My name is  
25 Sue Donoghue, Commissioner of the New York City

2 Department of Parks and Recreation. I'm pleased to be  
3 here today to testify regarding the agency's Fiscal  
4 Year 2026 Preliminary Budget, and I am also pleased  
5 to be joined by several members of my incredible  
6 agency senior staff leadership with me today.

7           New York City Parks plans, maintains, and  
8 cares for over 30,000 acres of green and open space,  
9 encompassing 5,000 individual properties, ranging  
10 from playgrounds and beaches to community gardens and  
11 natural areas, and over 5.7 million trees. We provide  
12 tens of thousands of recreational and educational  
13 public programs throughout the year, including free  
14 classes and programs offered in our recreation  
15 centers, Shape Up NYC fitness classes hosted in  
16 locations all over the city, Kids in Motion  
17 children's programming in our playgrounds led by our  
18 playground associates, and nature walks and other  
19 educational programs provided by our Urban Park  
20 Rangers in our parks, natural areas, and our nature  
21 centers. I want to thank the Council for its  
22 continued support of our City's open spaces over the  
23 past year, and for championing the importance of  
24 parks for all New Yorkers. Thank you for allowing us  
25 the opportunity to discuss the agency's Preliminary

2 Budget and to provide an overview of our efforts over  
3 the past year to continue delivering on our mission  
4 to build and maintain a restorative and thriving park  
5 system.

6           Parks are essential and touch every facet  
7 of our daily lives. Just as we invest in better roads  
8 and sewers, we must invest in our parks to help  
9 safeguard our city's present and future. Unlike other  
10 forms of urban infrastructure, parks evolve and  
11 change over time, but their importance to New Yorkers  
12 remains consistent. Our parks need to be clean and  
13 safe, green and resilient, and supported by engaged  
14 and empowered New Yorkers. By creating clean and safe  
15 public spaces, we can make our communities more  
16 secure, providing young people with accessible  
17 outlets for fun and active play, while giving  
18 neighbors places to connect, swap stories, and build  
19 community. With green and resilient spaces, New  
20 Yorkers can experience all the health benefits, both  
21 mental and physical, of time out in the great  
22 outdoors, and our city will be better prepared to  
23 withstand the challenges of climate change. And by  
24 engaging New Yorkers in the care of our shared green  
25 spaces, we can strengthen our civic community,

2 counteract the loneliness crisis, and empower people  
3 of all backgrounds to advocate for the resources they  
4 need.

5           With all this in mind, in June of 2024,  
6 we released Vital Parks for All, investing in New  
7 York City's living infrastructure. The agency's 3.2-  
8 billion-dollar plan to improve existing park  
9 facilities, equitably deliver new resources to  
10 underserved communities, and equip New Yorkers with  
11 the information they need to better enjoy, celebrate,  
12 and support their parks. Through this plan, we are  
13 undertaking ambitious initiatives, expanding bathroom  
14 access, upgrading our citywide network of public  
15 pools, expanding our tree canopy, growing our  
16 greenways, promoting public safety, empowering  
17 grassroots action, and expanding recreation center  
18 access. In conjunction with the plan, we have also  
19 developed the Vital Parks Explorer, a digital map  
20 available on our agency website that empowers New  
21 Yorkers with information regarding how their  
22 neighborhood compares to the citywide average on  
23 critical components of a vital park system, including  
24 dog runs, greenways, volunteer groups, park rule  
25 enforcement, and more. Additionally, New Yorkers can

2 get information about their local park's vital signs,  
3 including a park condition score, recent investment,  
4 upcoming events, and volunteer opportunities. This  
5 data can help New Yorkers better understand and  
6 appreciate the open space resources they have and  
7 better advocate for what they need. We have been  
8 introducing New Yorkers to this new strategic  
9 framework and these new tools through various public  
10 events and briefings, and we welcome the Council's  
11 partnership in helping New Yorkers learn more about  
12 their park system.

13           We're focusing on keeping New Yorkers  
14 engaged and informed because it's so important to  
15 sustaining our park system. In 2024, we celebrated  
16 getting a record number of volunteers involved in  
17 their local parks through our Let's Green NYC  
18 initiative. Since the start of the campaign in 2023,  
19 we have engaged nearly 850,000 New Yorkers,  
20 volunteers in park stewardship and engagement  
21 activities. This ambitious effort to encourage New  
22 Yorkers to participate more deeply in the care of our  
23 shared green spaces also included an inventive online  
24 directory to help New Yorkers find the volunteer  
25 opportunities that best align with their interests,

2 channeling their enthusiasm and their energy in the  
3 most productive direction.

4           Fostering and shepherding New York's love  
5 for parks requires hard work and dedication from  
6 every corner of our agency, but especially the staff  
7 leading Partnership for Parks, our unique public-  
8 private partnership with City Parks Foundation, which  
9 is our primary mechanism to support and champion  
10 neighborhood park volunteers by giving them the tools  
11 they need to advocate and care for their neighborhood  
12 parks and green spaces in a dedicated, sustained way.  
13 From planting a record number of trees along our city  
14 streets to launching the biggest investment in our  
15 public pools in decades, 2024 was a milestone year  
16 for our city's living infrastructure.

17           I'm extremely grateful to all of the  
18 park's employees, volunteers and partners who have  
19 helped make our city greener, safer and more livable  
20 in the past year. So, I'd like to briefly mention a  
21 few of our highlights and successes. Despite a  
22 persistent lifeguard shortage that has affected  
23 municipalities across the country, we were able to  
24 safely welcome more than 8 million visitors to our  
25 beaches and pools during the 2024 season. This was

2 made possible thanks to our dedicated and focused  
3 efforts to increase lifeguard recruitment, which  
4 resulted in a 43 percent increase in new recruits  
5 over the 2023 beach season. In addition to an  
6 extensive lifeguard recruitment campaign, the City  
7 reached a new agreement with DC37, enabling closer  
8 collaboration and improvements to our lifeguard  
9 recruitment and training processes, and we're  
10 building on that foundation as we are already well  
11 into our lifeguard recruitment drive for the 2025  
12 beach and pool season. To expand New Yorkers' access  
13 to swim safety skills and vital relief from the heat,  
14 we also launched Let's Swim NYC, a capital investment  
15 of more than 1 billion dollars for building,  
16 improving and protecting New York City's public pools  
17 over the course of five years, the largest investment  
18 in swim infrastructure since the 1970s. We are also  
19 well into construction on the 92-million-dollar Mary  
20 Cali Dalton Recreation Center on Staten Island and  
21 the 141-million-dollar Shirley Chisholm Recreation  
22 Center in Brooklyn, both of which are utilizing an  
23 innovative design-build approach led by our sister  
24 agency colleagues at DDC. Last November, the design  
25 for a new 90-million-dollar recreation center at

2 Walter Gladwin Park in the Bronx was the recipient of  
3 an award for excellence in design from the Public  
4 Design Commission, and we're very excited to see that  
5 incredible project moving forward.

6 As part of the Fiscal Year 2025 budget  
7 adopted last June, the Administration also dedicated  
8 160 million dollars to completely rebuild the beloved  
9 Brownsville Recreation Center, which had fallen into  
10 serious disrepair. Just last month, we were proud to  
11 join our agency partners in announcing the  
12 Administration's creative and bold vision for  
13 transforming an underutilized site in Manhattan's  
14 Hudson Square neighborhood into a vibrant, community-  
15 focused, mixed-use development, which will include a  
16 multi-floor recreation center to provide year-round  
17 recreation, health, and wellness opportunities for  
18 community members of all ages and abilities.

19 Beyond expanding recreation access to New  
20 Yorkers through brand-new, state-of-the-art  
21 facilities, these projects represent hundreds of  
22 millions of dollars in major investments in public  
23 health and safety, providing safe and affordable  
24 spaces and strengthening community bonds. We also  
25 help New Yorkers enjoy our green spaces more

2 comfortably with investments in our public amenities,  
3 making sure no one has to cut their time in a park  
4 short just because nature is calling. In 2024, we  
5 installed new baby-changing tables in over 1,200 park  
6 restrooms across the city, providing a vital amenity  
7 for parents looking to keep their little ones happy  
8 and healthy. And it's not just kids and parents who  
9 are getting relief. Together with our partners across  
10 the Administration, we launched an ambitious  
11 initiative to build new restrooms and renovate  
12 existing restrooms throughout the five boroughs, some  
13 of which are utilizing creative modular designs to  
14 help us provide public restrooms faster and at a  
15 lower cost. As stewards of our city's natural  
16 resources, we work year-round to keep the five  
17 boroughs' diverse ecosystems healthy and thriving,  
18 from our wild natural areas and forests to the urban  
19 tree canopy along our city streets. In the face of  
20 extreme heat, the environmental benefits of tree  
21 cover have never been so evident. In 2024, we planted  
22 nearly 18,000 new trees along streets and in  
23 landscaped areas of parks, the most since Fiscal Year  
24 2016, and with a special focus on neighborhoods  
25 impacted by high heat vulnerability. To continue that

1 momentum in a more efficient and strategic manner, we  
2 have unveiled the Neighborhood Tree Planting Program,  
3 a new planting strategy that will help us plant even  
4 more trees and further expand our focus on equity by  
5 prioritizing the most vulnerable neighborhoods. Over  
6 the next decade, through this new block planting  
7 strategy, baseline capital funds are in place for the  
8 agency to ensure that every viable and appropriate  
9 location for hosting a street tree gets inspected and  
10 planted, along with other tree-related streetscape  
11 improvements.  
12

13           Turning to the specific topic for this  
14 hearing, the Fiscal Year 2026 preliminary expense  
15 operating budget for NYC Parks is 640 million  
16 dollars, a 22-million-dollar increase over the  
17 agency's Fiscal Year 2025 annual budget. This  
18 financial plan demonstrates the Administration's  
19 ongoing commitment to promoting equitable investments  
20 in a greener, healthier city and giving our agency  
21 the resources we need to continue getting the job  
22 done, delivering core services and keeping our city  
23 parks clean and safe. The plan includes 5 million  
24 dollars in new baseline funding for aquatics and  
25 lifeguard staff, allowing us to partner with NYC

2 schools to expand our existing Swim for Life and  
3 Learn to Swim programs at school pools, so that more  
4 children can learn water safety and swimming skills  
5 to keep them safe.

6           We're also receiving 1 million dollars in  
7 new dedicated funding for rat mitigation in street  
8 tree beds. This is another important step forward in  
9 this Administration's effort to clean up the city and  
10 reduce the presence of rodents, alongside the  
11 unveiling of creative new parks trash receptacles  
12 designed specifically for pizza boxes, limiting the  
13 food available to rodents, as well as a 2-million-  
14 dollar investment last November, which will allow our  
15 agency to containerize our curbside trash collection  
16 with over 9,000 lockable street trash bins.

17           We're also excited to be expanding our  
18 second shift evening and weekend park maintenance  
19 strategy, with over 12 million dollars in new  
20 baseline funding for staff to clean 100 additional  
21 busy park hot spots when they're being most heavily  
22 used. This builds upon the initial wave of second  
23 shift maintenance funding provided in the most recent  
24 Fiscal Year 2025 adopted budget, which will provide  
25 weekend and evening coverage at a total of 200

2 separate locations in 121 of our busiest parks. We're  
3 in the process of recruiting and interviewing these  
4 new hires and are aiming for full deployment by mid-  
5 April as the weather begins to warm and our busiest  
6 season gets underway.

7           The agency has a 10-year capital plan of  
8 over 10 billion dollars, representing 424 million  
9 dollars in new capital for projects, including the  
10 reconstruction of the iconic Passerelle Pedestrian  
11 Bridge in Flushing Meadows-Corona Park, which serves  
12 as a primary entrance into the park for countless  
13 visitors every year, as well as close to a dozen  
14 incredible park investments across the city that were  
15 included last year as part of this Administration's  
16 landmark City of Yes Housing and Economic Opportunity  
17 Initiative.

18           Our Capital Division staff works  
19 tirelessly, advancing hundreds of projects, many of  
20 which were made possible with generous discretionary  
21 funding from this Council to build and improve our  
22 parks and playgrounds in a timely and efficient  
23 manner. We pride ourselves on our creative designs,  
24 which are shaped by public input so that these spaces  
25 can best serve the local community. This design

2 approach is a cornerstone for the capital projects  
3 being advanced through the Community Parks  
4 Initiative, our signature Equity-Driven Investment  
5 Program through which Parks enhances green spaces in  
6 underserved neighborhoods. Through this initiative,  
7 we are both using data-driven methodology and working  
8 with communities to create thriving public spaces.  
9 Over the past decade, we have reimagined and  
10 reconstructed 67 CPI projects for local neighborhood  
11 parks and have another 40 projects actively underway.  
12 Over half a billion dollars of capital funding for  
13 rebuilding parks and playgrounds that haven't seen  
14 significant investment in decades. Through a  
15 partnership with the CUNY Graduate School of Public  
16 Health, we have assessed the positive health and  
17 social impacts of CPI, and this study has been  
18 extended to research the impact of local programming  
19 and activation in our CPI parks on quality of life  
20 and well-being so that we can best understand how  
21 quality parks can benefit everyone in our  
22 communities. We'll be making some exciting new CPI  
23 project announcements in the near future, so stay  
24 tuned, and we look forward to inviting you to many

2 more community input meetings, groundbreakings, and  
3 ribbon-cuttings as these projects progress.

4 In closing, I want to thank my entire  
5 team at the Parks Department for their continued hard  
6 work and dedication to our mission. I'm honored and  
7 grateful to be able to lead this agency. I also want  
8 to thank the Council for the opportunity to work with  
9 each of you to continue improving our parks and open  
10 spaces for all New Yorkers. We look forward to  
11 continuing our close partnership with the Council to  
12 create a bright, green future with a more equitable,  
13 inclusive, and resilient park system. We'd now be  
14 happy to answer any questions that you may have.

15 CHAIRPERSON KRISHNAN: Well, thank you so  
16 much, Commissioner, for your testimony and for your  
17 leadership of the Parks Department.

18 Before we get started, I also want to  
19 just recognize that we've been joined also by Council  
20 Member Ung and Council Member Holden virtually, and I  
21 also want to thank our Committee Counsel for today,  
22 Natasha Bynum, for your great work as well. And  
23 Council Member Avilés has also joined us as well.

24 So for this hearing, because we have a  
25 number of Members here, too, I'm going to ask, and

2 Council Member Restler is walking in right now, too.  
3 Late, but still here. Sure, sure. But, you know,  
4 because the number of Council Members here, too, what  
5 I'll do is I'll ask a couple categories of questions,  
6 and then turn it over to my Colleagues, and then I'll  
7 come back for more of my questions and keep going  
8 back and forth like that.

9           So just taking a step back, Commissioner,  
10 we've every year had to, unfortunately, do this  
11 budget dance battle with City Hall, as I mentioned  
12 before, not over investments, but over cuts, and then  
13 reversing those cuts, and every year, we're going  
14 through that cycle and making no progress, and if  
15 anything, we've slid backwards than moved forward.  
16 Zooming out, we know that there are no cuts in this  
17 plan, but there are also no restorations to the  
18 disastrous and damaging cuts that we have seen over  
19 the last several years to the Parks Department, and  
20 there are no proposals to reverse the profound and  
21 harmful impact those cuts have had on this agency.  
22 We've seen hundreds of positions reduced, many  
23 programs delayed or outright eliminated as "cost-  
24 saving measures," but we know in reality they are  
25 just harming and hampering this Department's ability

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2 to do its job, and that has undoubtedly impacted our  
3 green space, our workers, and the City's ability to  
4 care for them. Looking back over the last several  
5 years, isn't it true that in total, the Parks  
6 Department has lost about 700 positions, give or  
7 take, because of these cuts?

8                   COMMISSIONER DONOGHUE: Thank you, Council  
9 Member Krishnan, for the question. And it is the case  
10 that in order to meet our agency PEG-saving targets  
11 implemented both in November '23 Financial Plan, and  
12 the January '24 Financial Plan, it was necessary to  
13 reduce existing vacant year-round positions as well  
14 as future vacancies that will be created through  
15 attrition so the agency remains in a hiring slowdown.  
16 And yes, after the agency fulfills its savings  
17 targets, the total PEG will amount to roughly the 700  
18 positions you mentioned. But we are pleased to note,  
19 as you said at the beginning, the new FY26  
20 Preliminary Budget does include significant baseline  
21 headcount increases for specific agency efforts,  
22 second shift expansion, swim safety, staffing for the  
23 soon-to-be-open Shirley Chisholm Rec Center, so  
24 important adds to areas that are helpful for the  
25 agency.

2 CHAIRPERSON KRISHNAN: Understood, but as  
3 you recognized too, we are still 700 positions short.  
4 And in fact, if you go back to the FY23 Preliminary  
5 Plan, I'm just going to briefly read here, 250  
6 positions cut in the FY23 Preliminary Plan, 200  
7 positions cut in the FY23 November Plan, 118  
8 positions cut in the FY24 November Plan, 375  
9 positions cut in the FY25 Preliminary Plan. Cuts  
10 after cuts after cuts, whatever metric you look at it  
11 by, I mean that's well more than 700, but however you  
12 look at it, we have seen the agency's positions being  
13 reduced tremendously. On top of that, for years now,  
14 the agency has been subject to a two-for-one hiring  
15 freeze, which means that you all cannot hire one  
16 worker unless two leave the Department. Is that  
17 correct?

18 COMMISSIONER DONOGHUE: It's true, Council  
19 Member, that there's a two-for-one citywide hiring  
20 freeze is in place for many agencies, including  
21 Parks, as the City continues to deal with economic  
22 constraints. However, many positions related to  
23 public safety or similar needs are exempt from this  
24 broader hiring restriction. But the two-for-one  
25 hiring restriction is not particularly impactful for

2 Parks as we're already subject to PEG-saving targets  
3 from expected attrition so the agency will remain  
4 kind of in a hiring slowdown so it's not just the  
5 two-for-one, it's more meeting the PEG attrition  
6 targets.

7 But, as I said, there are, importantly,  
8 certain positions that are exempt from that, PEP,  
9 recreation, engineers that are exempt from that.

10 CHAIRPERSON KRISHNAN: But the vast  
11 majority of positions in Parks are still subject to  
12 the hiring freeze, right?

13 COMMISSIONER DONOGHUE: Yes. It's the  
14 hiring freeze in addition to our PEG target that we  
15 have to meet that is really about savings through  
16 attrition so when people leave, not being able to  
17 hire them.

18 CHAIRPERSON KRISHNAN: So 700 positions  
19 lost, the inability to hire for many of those  
20 positions, and the impact on the headcount as a  
21 result, the impact on the hiring of workers has been  
22 drastic. Have you had conversations with OMB about  
23 both the cuts, the loss of positions, as well as the  
24 hiring freeze, and what have those conversations been  
25 like?

2           COMMISSIONER DONOGHUE: You know, at this  
3 time of year, as you all know, Council Member, as the  
4 budget process moves forward, we're in continuous  
5 conversations with OMB and the Mayor's Office  
6 regarding our PEG savings targets and new needs, and  
7 that is an ongoing conversation and will be ongoing  
8 over the next few months, and I am incredibly proud  
9 of our dedicated workers and our agency staff, who,  
10 as you mentioned, are out there every day delivering  
11 on our mission to take care of the Parks Department.

12           CHAIRPERSON KRISHNAN: But what have been  
13 the substance of those conversations with OMB about  
14 filling the 700 positions lost, lifting the hiring  
15 freeze on Parks workers? What has been the substance  
16 of those conversations with the Budget Office for  
17 City Hall?

18           COMMISSIONER DONOGHUE: It is continuous  
19 back and forth in conversations about new needs that  
20 we've put forward and areas where we're seeing  
21 challenges and just ongoing conversations, as is  
22 always the case at this time of year.

23           CHAIRPERSON KRISHNAN: So, in Fiscal Year  
24 2024, what was the budgeted and actual headcount for  
25 full-time employees versus seasonal employees?

2 COMMISSIONER DONOGHUE: So in FY24, the  
3 total budgeted agency headcount for full-time  
4 employees was 4,755, and the budgeted headcount for  
5 seasonal full-time equivalents was 3,288.

6 CHAIRPERSON KRISHNAN: Commissioner, I was  
7 going to ask, do you believe that that is a  
8 sufficient amount of resources to run the Parks  
9 Department of New York City?

10 COMMISSIONER DONOGHUE: As I said, I'm  
11 really proud of our staff, and they do the best job  
12 they can with the resources they have available.

13 CHAIRPERSON KRISHNAN: Well, I fail to see  
14 how it's an adequate amount of resources to support  
15 the staff that no doubt are working extremely hard,  
16 but with a hiring freeze in place and hundreds of  
17 positions lost, and many seasonal positions, and not  
18 enough permanent lines, I fail to see how you all  
19 have the resources you need from this Mayor to do the  
20 job that you're supposed to do for our 30,000 acres  
21 of park space across New York City.

22 COMMISSIONER DONOGHUE: I do want to point  
23 out, Council Member, that our seasonal plan of 5,000  
24 seasonal employees is not subject to a two-for-one  
25 hiring freeze so we do bring on, at this time of year

2 in mid-April, extensive seasonal park staff to help  
3 us in the busiest time of year.

4 CHAIRPERSON KRISHNAN: Understood. Thank  
5 you.

6 Before turning it over to my Colleagues,  
7 I want to shift to another topic that's been the  
8 subject of much public discussion and attention  
9 recently. On November 3rd, the Parks Department  
10 issued an RFP for the management of the Wollman Rink  
11 in Central Park. This was after the Department turned  
12 down an offer by the Central Park Conservancy to  
13 replace the rink and provide additional improvements  
14 to the park with the largest private gift in its  
15 history. The RFP is now being pursued by the Trump  
16 Organization. While the Trump Organization managed  
17 the Wollman Rink for years, they were stripped of the  
18 privilege following the events of January 6th.

19 Commissioner, can you please provide a breakdown of  
20 the offer made by the Central Park Conservancy? Why  
21 was it rejected? What part of the operations would be  
22 funded by private donations? And what part by City  
23 dollars?

24 COMMISSIONER DONOGHUE: Thank you, Council  
25 Member, and I appreciate the question. I want to

2 start off by recognizing that, of course, the Central  
3 Park Conservancy is a really important partner of  
4 ours for over 40 years in the care and maintenance of  
5 Central Park, and we so appreciate their ongoing work  
6 and their incredible, incredible partnership in  
7 Central Park. In terms of Wollman Rink, for over 30  
8 years, the concession of Wollman Rink has been  
9 awarded via an open, competitive RFP process. We feel  
10 like that is very important to continue to do it in  
11 that manner. Like any entity, the Central Park  
12 Conservancy was eligible to submit a proposal in  
13 response to our RFP, and nothing would preclude CPC  
14 from making improvements around Wollman Rink, but we  
15 really felt it was important to put that out to  
16 competitive bid, as it has been for years and years  
17 in the past.

18 CHAIRPERSON KRISHNAN: But the Central  
19 Park Conservancy was offering 120 million dollars,  
20 which, to paraphrase the letter from the Conservancy  
21 to the Parks Department, to City Hall, they are not a  
22 corporation seeking to extract money from the  
23 government, but a non-profit partner looking to give  
24 money to the City. In fact, the largest gift ever in  
25 its history of 120 million dollars, requiring also 30

2 million in contributions from City government. But  
3 120 million far outweighs the amount the City would  
4 have to put in. Why was that offer rejected?

5           COMMISSIONER DONOGHUE: I can't comment on  
6 the proposed amount that they were going to  
7 contribute, but I do know that it would have also  
8 required an investment from the City, absolutely,  
9 just as with the Harlem Meer project, the City  
10 invested 60 million in that project, and so the  
11 offer, I wouldn't say, was rejected. We encouraged  
12 them to bid like everyone else, because this was  
13 going to go through a competitive bidding process. We  
14 felt that was the fairest way to do it.

15           CHAIRPERSON KRISHNAN: And why was the  
16 decision made to implement an RFP, competitive  
17 bidding process, here?

18           COMMISSIONER DONOGHUE: I'm sorry?

19           CHAIRPERSON KRISHNAN: Why was the  
20 decision made to issue an RFP and a competitive  
21 bidding process in this situation?

22           COMMISSIONER DONOGHUE: Because that was  
23 the manner that this has been bid out for years and  
24 years in the past, and we felt that a competitive  
25 public bidding process was the right way to go here.

2 CHAIRPERSON KRISHNAN: And when was that  
3 competitive bidding process announced?

4 COMMISSIONER DONOGHUE: I believe it was  
5 in September of last year.

6 CHAIRPERSON KRISHNAN: Or was it in  
7 November? Do you have the exact time when it was  
8 announced?

9 COMMISSIONER DONOGHUE: We can absolutely  
10 get you the exact timing of it, yes, absolutely.

11 CHAIRPERSON KRISHNAN: So that was the  
12 reason to do a competitive RFP. But isn't it a fact  
13 that Harlem Meer, which is a part of Central Park,  
14 just a bit away from Wollman Rink, was not put to a  
15 competitive bidding process, but was instead given  
16 over to Central Park with the same arrangement? They  
17 provided funding, the City put in funding for Harlem  
18 Meer. Isn't that the case? That was done by a sole  
19 source, not a competitive bidding process.

20 COMMISSIONER DONOGHUE: Yeah, those are  
21 very different concessions, Council Member. Very  
22 different revenue-generating opportunities, very  
23 different concessions. Central Park hadn't run a  
24 concession before like that, and so we wanted to give  
25 them an opportunity to run a concession. The Wollman

2 Rink is obviously a much more lucrative, high-  
3 profile. We felt that it was important to go through  
4 a public bidding process because of the difference in  
5 nature of those concessions and the revenue from  
6 those concessions.

7 CHAIRPERSON KRISHNAN: How much revenue  
8 did the Wollman Rink accrue for the City in FY23 and  
9 FY24?

10 COMMISSIONER DONOGHUE: I have that. In  
11 FY23, Wollman Rink paid more than 3.1 million in  
12 license fees to the City. In FY24, Wollman Rink paid  
13 more than 3.2 million in license fees to the City. It  
14 experienced nearly 300,000 admissions for '24 and '25  
15 ice skating season, and importantly, 11 percent of  
16 those admissions, nearly 30,000, were either free or  
17 discounted. By comparison, Council Member, FY20  
18 comparison Wollman Rink versus Lasker, Wollman in  
19 FY20 had 17 million in gross receipts. Lasker Rink  
20 had 1.3 million in gross receipts. So very different  
21 entities for sure.

22 CHAIRPERSON KRISHNAN: And do you have the  
23 date that the RFP was put up? I have here as reported  
24 in The City and other public media, the RFP was

2 announced, put up a request for proposals for Wollman  
3 on November 17th. Is that correct?

4 COMMISSIONER DONOGHUE: As stated, we're  
5 absolutely happy to get back to you with that date.

6 CHAIRPERSON KRISHNAN: Assuming it was  
7 November 17th as reported, that was a matter of days  
8 after the United States presidential election. Is  
9 that correct?

10 COMMISSIONER DONOGHUE: It absolutely is.  
11 But when we put out a request for proposals is based  
12 on that agreement ending, which is in 2026 and having  
13 enough time to go through the negotiation process.

14 CHAIRPERSON KRISHNAN: And prior to  
15 putting it out, when was the last time you all had a  
16 conversation with the Central Park Conservancy about  
17 its gift of 120 million dollars?

18 COMMISSIONER DONOGHUE: You know, we have  
19 regular conversations with the Central Park  
20 Conservancy. As I said, they're an important partner  
21 of ours. We talk to them all the time.

22 CHAIRPERSON KRISHNAN: It would be good to  
23 know for this Committee too, just to break down in  
24 the timeline of understanding when the RFP was  
25 issued. I know as well, Central Park Conservancy had

2 issued a letter to you all too, stating their  
3 intention to provide the gift as well and work with  
4 the Parks Department. Just the process of when those  
5 meetings happened, when was the last meeting in  
6 relation to when the RFP was announced would be  
7 helpful.

8                   COMMISSIONER DONOGHUE: Absolutely. And  
9 we're happy, Council Member, to get you that  
10 timeline. We'll provide that afterwards. Just to note  
11 that if the RFP was released November 17th, elected  
12 and Council Members were notified 30 days prior to  
13 that in October of that RFP going out so we can get  
14 you that timeline as well.

15                   CHAIRPERSON KRISHNAN: I appreciate it.  
16 Thank you.

17                   My next question is, has the Trump  
18 Organization made a formal offer to the Parks  
19 Department regarding the RFP? And if so, can you  
20 please provide a breakdown of the offer, private  
21 dollars versus public dollars?

22                   COMMISSIONER DONOGHUE: I'm unable to  
23 comment on this topic. In accordance with FCRC rules,  
24 the City does not comment on any ongoing solicitation  
25 or vendor proposal. But before finalizing any award,

2 the City will consider multiple factors, including  
3 the vendor's financial resources, their record of  
4 business integrity. But at this time, I can't comment  
5 on any specific proposals we've received.

6 CHAIRPERSON KRISHNAN: And how about the  
7 number of bids that you've all received for this  
8 project?

9 COMMISSIONER DONOGHUE: I also cannot  
10 comment. It's an ongoing negotiation.

11 CHAIRPERSON KRISHNAN: And my final  
12 question is, you are, in the Parks Department and  
13 City Hall, all aware that the Trump Organization has  
14 been convicted of 17 counts of criminal tax fraud and  
15 falsifying business records.

16 COMMISSIONER DONOGHUE: We are aware, yes.

17 CHAIRPERSON KRISHNAN: Thank you. I'll now  
18 turn it over to my Colleague for some questions  
19 before going back to more questions. Council Member  
20 Brewer.

21 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Thank you very  
22 much. Central Park is in my District. I live right  
23 across the street. So picking up on the Chair,  
24 because I know we're very upset about this. In 2021,  
25 I wrote a letter saying, why can't it sole source,

2 even before it went to related to Central Park  
3 Conservancy? So now I have my same question. Can we  
4 get rid of the RFP totally and do a sole source, as  
5 we're doing in the northern part of the District?  
6 They're willing to pay whatever the cost is.

7 COMMISSIONER DONOGHUE: Thank you, Council  
8 Member Brewer, for your question. I wasn't here in  
9 2021, so I can't speak to that.

10 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: I was around.

11 COMMISSIONER DONOGHUE: I'm sorry?

12 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: I was around.

13 COMMISSIONER DONOGHUE: I know you were.  
14 Yes, I know you were. I was not. So, we've already  
15 issued the RFP. It's already out there. So, at this  
16 point, are going to continue with our negotiations,  
17 and we're in the process of those negotiations.

18 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: We can't get rid  
19 of an RFP? You can't just say, sorry, this RFP is no  
20 longer?

21 COMMISSIONER DONOGHUE: At this point,  
22 we're not planning to do that, no.

23 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: We're going to  
24 keep working on that.

2 I just want to know some costs. How much  
3 does it cost? We all love our street trees, and in my  
4 area, we've been doing wonderful street tree how-to-  
5 take-care-of-it sessions, and people love it, so how  
6 much does it cost to, I guess, plant one? And then I  
7 understand your new program, but I assume that those  
8 of us who have allocated funding will get the street  
9 trees allocation. I want to make sure that that's  
10 clear. So how much does it cost? And then how long  
11 will this new plan take? Because we all want street  
12 trees.

13 COMMISSIONER DONOGHUE: Absolutely,  
14 Council Member, and I so appreciate your support and  
15 advocacy around our street trees. In terms of the  
16 cost, the citywide cost for FY25 to plant a street  
17 tree is 3,110 dollars. This represents a 12 percent  
18 reduction in street tree planting costs from FY2022.  
19 We're really pleased about that, and it's a testament  
20 to the hard work of our Forestry Division. They've  
21 done a number of things to bring that cost down,  
22 including bringing in multiple new contractors, M/WBE  
23 contractors, looking at every aspect, so we are  
24 seeing that cost come down.

2 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: I know it costs a  
3 bit. That's a lot. But I understand there's some  
4 union issues, and I'm very supportive of the union.

5 And then in terms of the fact that we put  
6 money in, those of us who did, we will get our  
7 allotment this year, and then I guess a new program  
8 kicks in. Is that how it works?

9 COMMISSIONER DONOGHUE: I'm going to just  
10 defer to Jennifer in terms of how that will work.  
11 Yes, she needs to be sworn in.

12 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Thank you.

13 COMMITTEE COUNSEL BYNUM: Please raise  
14 your right hand.

15 Do you affirm to tell the truth, the  
16 whole truth, and nothing but the truth before this  
17 Committee, and to respond honestly to Council Member  
18 questions?

19 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER GREENFELD: I do.

20 COMMITTEE COUNSEL BYNUM: Thank you. You  
21 may begin when you're ready.

22 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER GREENFELD: Thank you,  
23 Council Member, for that question. And, yes, we  
24 absolutely will honor the spending of the funding  
25 that we have right now that any Council Member has

2 already given us and committed to us. So that will be  
3 honored, and it's a transition period of about two-  
4 plus years until we get through that process.

5 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: All right. Thank  
6 you very much.

7 Okay, bathrooms also, they cost a  
8 fortune. I get one 5.4, another one 13 million, and  
9 then everything in between for the Parks Department.  
10 So, God, because you can put money in to renovate the  
11 wonderful playground, and you do a great job when  
12 that happens, but then the bathroom looks like hell,  
13 and it's not ADA. Do you have any money for  
14 bathrooms? You said in your testimony you have money  
15 for bathrooms.

16 COMMISSIONER DONOGHUE: We have a good  
17 deal of money for bathrooms, yes, Council Member, and  
18 I am...

19 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Put them in my  
20 Riverside Park and Saul Bloom Park, please.

21 COMMISSIONER DONOGHUE: We absolutely  
22 will. As I said in my testimony, we were pleased to  
23 announce last year our focus on better bathrooms, and  
24 we are building 46 new ones and renovating 36  
25 additional ones, so a huge investment in bathrooms.

2 But in addition to the investment we're making in  
3 bathrooms, I'm so proud of our capital team has just  
4 done enormous work in looking at all different ways  
5 to bring bathrooms online cheaper, faster. That's why  
6 we're looking at modular and trailers and the  
7 Portland Loo and many different options to decrease  
8 the per-unit cost of bathrooms.

9 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: My parks are all  
10 landmarks, so they're all landmarks, so they all have  
11 to be renovated. So, you're saying you have 36  
12 renovations. You can get us a list of those?

13 COMMISSIONER DONOGHUE: Absolutely. Yep,  
14 be happy to.

15 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Okay. And then in  
16 terms of the recreation centers, I love my recreation  
17 center. I got it funded at 14 million some years ago,  
18 many years ago. But when I'm there, signing up for a  
19 membership, I know this is Margaret's issue, when you  
20 sign up for a membership, it's paper. Can I put in  
21 some kiosks or something because it takes forever.  
22 First, you've got to find the clipboard. You can't  
23 find the clipboard. Then you can't find the paper.  
24 Can't find the paper. Then you've got to find a pen.

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2 Couldn't find the pen. (TIMER CHIME) This is not how  
3 to sign up. I can put in a kiosk if you like.

4 COMMITTEE COUNSEL BYNUM: Hi. Please raise  
5 your right hand.

6 Do you affirm to tell the truth, the  
7 whole truth, and nothing but the truth before this  
8 Committee, and to respond honestly to Council member  
9 questions?

10 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER NELSON: I do.

11 COMMITTEE COUNSEL BYNUM: Thank you. You  
12 may begin.

13 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Since it's a  
14 budget hearing, how much could we save by not doing  
15 paper?

16 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER NELSON: That I  
17 couldn't answer. We do have an online process, so  
18 people can actually get their memberships online.

19 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: At home.

20 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER NELSON: At home, yes.

21 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: But they all show  
22 up at the desk.

23 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER NELSON: But they can  
24 also do it in the center. We have our media lab, so  
25 they could do it at the media lab if they wanted to.

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2 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Okay. That doesn't  
3 happen, just so you know.

4 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER NELSON: We'll work on  
5 that.

6 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Thank you. Okay.  
7 Thank you. And then just finally, on the pools,  
8 you're paying for your pools, but also I have some  
9 schools that are being renovated. Is DOE paying for  
10 those? They have pools. Or are you paying for those  
11 pools?

12 COMMISSIONER DONOGHUE: The pools that are  
13 being...

14 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: The schools...

15 COMMISSIONER DONOGHUE: The DOE pools  
16 being renovated. That's coming out of DOE's budget.

17 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: In the schools?

18 COMMISSIONER DONOGHUE: Absolutely.

19 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Okay.

20 COMMISSIONER DONOGHUE: Yep. That's a  
21 great partnership, and they've been doing terrific  
22 work in getting more pools online, so that we can  
23 all...

24 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: It takes five  
25 years.

2 COMMISSIONER DONOGHUE: But it's an  
3 expensive process, yes, we know.

4 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Four to five  
5 years. I do not understand that.

6 West 96th Street has a house. It's a  
7 house. It's like a little house. Are you paying to  
8 renovate that? Can you update me on the West 96th  
9 Street Broadway house? It's a house. A little house.  
10 A little...

11 UNIDENTIFIED: We'll have to look into  
12 that...

13 COMMISSIONER DONOGHUE: We'll need to look  
14 into that one and definitely get back to you.

15 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Okay. And then  
16 just finally, lifeguards. Thank you, Iris, for the  
17 lifeguards. What's the status? I got some numbers.  
18 When are the elections taking place? And what's the  
19 status of Mr. Stein?

20 COMMISSIONER DONOGHUE: Thank you. And I  
21 want to second that thank you to First Deputy  
22 Commissioner Iris Rodriguez-Rosa. She's been doing  
23 yeoman's work on lifeguard and recruitment, and it's  
24 making a difference. And as I said in my testimony,  
25

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2 45 percent more new recruits last year, and we expect  
3 to exceed that this year.

4 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: How many do you  
5 need total, to have everything open, pools and  
6 everything?

7 COMMISSIONER DONOGHUE: 1,000.

8 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Okay. And how  
9 many? You had 800 last year or something?

10 COMMISSIONER DONOGHUE: Last year, we got  
11 to 930. We expect to be at 1,000 or over this year,  
12 and so we need 1,000 to be fully open.

13 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: When are the  
14 elections that lifeguards have? When do they take  
15 place?

16 COMMISSIONER DONOGHUE: I do not have the  
17 answer to that question, but we can get back to you  
18 on that.

19 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: It used to be in  
20 the winter when nobody was there. That was the reason  
21 that they didn't move. Mr. Stein, is he retired?

22 COMMISSIONER DONOGHUE: He has fully  
23 retired, yes.

24 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Thank you.

25 COMMISSIONER DONOGHUE: Yep.

2 CHAIRPERSON KRISHNAN: Thank you, Council  
3 Member Brewer.

4 Just to follow up before I turn it over  
5 to my Colleague for questions, but Commissioner, for  
6 lifeguards, and I do want to recognize our First  
7 Deputy Commissioner Rodriguez-Rosa who's done an  
8 amazing job, as you all have every year, to increase  
9 the number of lifeguards, recognizing that we're  
10 short of where we need to be. I thought we needed, in  
11 the past, from what we understand, about 1,400 to  
12 1,600 lifeguards. Can you just clarify, what is the  
13 number that we fully need to..

14 COMMISSIONER DONOGHUE: Yes, thank you for  
15 the question, and I'm happy to clarify. We need 1,400  
16 lifeguards to run a second shift at our pools. With  
17 1,000, we can fully open our pools and beaches. With  
18 1,400, we can run a second shift. It can do early  
19 morning, late evening, a second shift. That's the  
20 difference in those numbers.

21 CHAIRPERSON KRISHNAN: Sorry. With 1,000,  
22 what does that enable?

23 COMMISSIONER DONOGHUE: It enables our  
24 normal hours of 11 to 7 at pools and beaches. The

2 time is different. But yes, it allows our normal  
3 shift at beaches and pools.

4 CHAIRPERSON KRISHNAN: From 11 a.m.?

5 COMMISSIONER DONOGHUE: One shift.

6 CHAIRPERSON KRISHNAN: 11 a.m. to 7 p.m.?

7 COMMISSIONER DONOGHUE: Yes, at pools.

8 CHAIRPERSON KRISHNAN: Got it.

9 COMMISSIONER DONOGHUE: Beaches is  
10 different.

11 CHAIRPERSON KRISHNAN: Okay. Since we have  
12 quorum, and we have Council Member Holden on virtual...  
13 oh, sorry, I also want to recognize, before doing  
14 that, we have Council Members Narcisse and Paladino  
15 here as well. And because we still have quorum, I'm  
16 going to turn it over to Council Member Holden, who's  
17 on virtually, to ask his questions.

18 COUNCIL MEMBER HOLDEN: Thank you, Chair,  
19 for this, and thank you, Commissioner, for your  
20 testimony.

21 My first question is really, or my  
22 questions would be on forestry. You know, the City  
23 eliminated its usual 2.5 million allocation for  
24 forestry services, eliminating 50 critical positions  
25 that protect New York City trees and natural

2 resources. You know, is the Parks Department or the  
3 City prepared for the consequences of underfunding  
4 its forestry teams? What happens when storms hit and  
5 there aren't enough workers to clear dangerous fallen  
6 trees and so forth?

7           COMMISSIONER DONOGHUE: Thank you, Council  
8 Member, for the question. You're right that we did  
9 not receive that tree risk management funding. Two  
10 different things. Okay, I'm going to let our Deputy  
11 Commissioner for Environment and Planning, Jennifer  
12 Greenfeld, to answer this. Jennifer.

13           DEPUTY COMMISSIONER GREENFELD: Thank you,  
14 Council Member Holden. I'll just note that some of  
15 the words that the budget uses doesn't always align  
16 with our programs so it's a little bit confusing. I'm  
17 pretty sure what you're referring to is the one-shot  
18 funding that was those 50 lines that you're  
19 referencing. That funding goes towards our forest  
20 management framework, not the tree risk management  
21 program. The tree risk management program was a  
22 different PEG, and those people were never hired. It  
23 was cut before in that financial plan. Those folks  
24 were never hired, so it wasn't a loss of 55 people

2 for our tree risk management program. I just want to  
3 clarify.

4 COUNCIL MEMBER HOLDEN: Yeah, but we  
5 certainly don't have the personnel to care for our  
6 trees. Nobody can doubt that. If we had the money for  
7 those positions, we should have hired them, but since  
8 they weren't, we're still woefully understaffed. For  
9 instance, and this is separate and apart, but I got a  
10 constituent that asked for a tree in her area, and  
11 she got an email saying that New York City Parks has  
12 begun a cyclical block planting strategy where we no  
13 longer respond to service requests for tree planting.  
14 Instead, we have laid out a plan to plant the entire  
15 city on a cyclical basis, prioritizing the most heat-  
16 vulnerable neighborhoods first. In essence, what they  
17 were saying, so we expect to be planting in your area  
18 2033 to 2036. You can't make this stuff up. If I'm  
19 requesting a tree, I've got to wait over a decade to  
20 get my tree planted?

21 COMMISSIONER DONOGHUE: Yes, Council  
22 Member Holden, it is true. We did revamp our tree  
23 planting program, and it is mostly with a focus on  
24 efficiency. With the new program, what we're able to  
25 do is plant, as you said, whole blocks at one time

2 and not only deal with the planting of the tree, but  
3 with stump removal so that it will be a notable  
4 difference in those neighborhoods as we're able to  
5 plant those trees. It's not just one-off and sending  
6 contractors spread across the city, but really making  
7 sure that we're using that street tree planting money  
8 in the most efficient way and also being able to  
9 create a very visible difference in the streets where  
10 we're planting by dealing with every single item on  
11 that block. Yes, it will take longer, but it's a way  
12 that we can ensure that every single Council district  
13 will have access to newly planted trees, but also  
14 improvements to their block wholesale with removing  
15 stumps, with taking care of issues on individual  
16 blocks, and doing it hopefully more efficiently and  
17 more effectively for neighborhoods.

18 COUNCIL MEMBER HOLDEN: It's not  
19 acceptable on any level to wait until 2036 to get a  
20 tree planted in any area of the city, so I think that  
21 needs to be revisited, certainly if we have more  
22 funding. Chair, do I have a couple of minutes or a  
23 minute left?

24 CHAIRPERSON KRISHNAN: Sure, yes.

2 COUNCIL MEMBER HOLDEN: Okay, one other  
3 question on capital projects. The City completed 37.5  
4 fewer capital projects compared to the previous year.  
5 New York City Parks struggled to keep up with its  
6 projects, and instead of increasing funding, the  
7 Administration is dragging its feet. We are going to  
8 see playgrounds, pathways, and facilities  
9 deteriorate. I know this goes into certainly funding  
10 and budget, but what does the Administration think it  
11 does not need to reinvest in keeping our parks up to  
12 date and certainly usable? (TIMER CHIME) The fact  
13 that our capital projects are taking, I know you'll  
14 say they're not taking longer, but I believe they  
15 are, and I think they're way over cost and out of  
16 line with the rest of certainly contractors who are  
17 doing similar work and private work. But again, with  
18 37.5 fewer capital projects completed, what are we  
19 doing to address that in parks?

20 COMMISSIONER DONOGHUE: Thank you, Council  
21 Member, for the question. You're right, it can take a  
22 long time, it can be difficult, but we have been  
23 really pleased to be part of Capital Process Reform  
24 Task Force that the Mayor started early on in the  
25 Administration. We have looked at all different ways

2 to improve our capital process, working with City  
3 agencies, working on every single aspect of where we  
4 can speed things up. You're right, too, that it is  
5 often more expensive than private contractors, but  
6 that's because of the City rules and regulations that  
7 we're following around prevailing wages and things  
8 like that that are important, and we have had an  
9 enormous increase in capital funding, not decrease in  
10 capital funding in this Administration. As I said in  
11 my testimony, we had significant increases in the  
12 most recent budget year in capital funding, the  
13 Passerelle Bridge in Queens, several significant  
14 large capital projects in our budget, for sure.

15 UNIDENTIFIED: And I'll just add as a  
16 technical consideration that the number I believe  
17 you're citing is a reference to the Preliminary  
18 Mayor's Management Report, which reports on completed  
19 projects in the first four months of this Fiscal  
20 Year, and that number changes from year to year, and  
21 it's frankly more of an index of the types of  
22 projects where they are, so that number will vary  
23 from year to year so it's not exactly apples to  
24 apples, I guess, is the argument. At any given time,  
25 we have close to 600 or more capital projects either

2 being designed into procurement, being constructed,  
3 being opened, right, so that is sort of a pipeline of  
4 projects that is consistently moving, so a snapshot,  
5 if you will, of the first four months of any given  
6 Fiscal Year. I don't think we'd see as particularly  
7 meaningful in the broader context.

8 COUNCIL MEMBER HOLDEN: Thank you, Chair.

9 CHAIRPERSON KRISHNAN: Thank you. Just  
10 following up on Council Member Holden's questions  
11 too, in the Forestry Division, we had a hearing  
12 recently around wildfires across the city. We know  
13 that they did immense harm to our urban forest last  
14 fall. We will see them again going forward. So, to  
15 me, and I think to many of us here too, taking care  
16 of our trees, our tree canopy from our street trees  
17 to natural areas is incredibly important. What  
18 exactly is the staffing count for the Forestry  
19 Division within the Parks Department?

20 COMMISSIONER DONOGHUE: Yes, absolutely.  
21 So as Jennifer attested, there can often be confusion  
22 between our Forestry Division and our Natural  
23 Resources Division, but we have 220 full-time  
24 employees for our Tree Risk Management Division,  
25 which are the foresters, the inspectors, climbers,

2 pruners. And then in our Natural Resources Group,  
3 which cares for our natural areas, I know, Jennifer,  
4 you gave me that, We have 62 full-time positions,  
5 plus five agency-funded seasonal hires and 19 grant-  
6 funded seasonal staff.

7 CHAIRPERSON KRISHNAN: So, 220 managing  
8 our trees and caring for our trees, separate from the  
9 natural areas, but 220 full-time positions within our  
10 Forestry Division for our trees, right? That averages  
11 about 40 staff members per borough. For the entire  
12 borough, 40 staff members. Do you think that that is  
13 sufficient to care for our street trees and tree  
14 canopy across the city?

15 COMMISSIONER DONOGHUE: There is no doubt,  
16 as a Commissioner, we always welcome more resources  
17 to do our work, certainly, and that's where we rely  
18 so heavily on volunteers and partners and other  
19 entities we've worked really closely with to ensure  
20 more assistance and more help for our tree care  
21 across the city.

22 CHAIRPERSON KRISHNAN: But if we want to  
23 look at why it takes so long to care or plant trees  
24 or to take down trees in our city, it seems to me the  
25 first place to start is to look at how woefully

2 underfunded our Forestry Division is, how we simply  
3 don't have enough people to plant trees or care for  
4 them across the city. And to me, I'm shocked to,  
5 again, as I said, the three areas you can look at  
6 that are very important are PEP officers, Forestry  
7 Division, Urban Park Rangers. We have 40 full-time  
8 staff per borough to take care of all the trees in  
9 every single borough in New York City, which is  
10 unacceptable and shockingly low.

11 My next question is, for natural areas,  
12 we have 62 full-time employees in the Parks  
13 Department caring for our natural areas across the  
14 city. What would you say the acreage is of our  
15 natural areas across the city?

16 COMMISSIONER DONOGHUE: That we know. It's  
17 10,000 natural areas.

18 CHAIRPERSON KRISHNAN: 62 staff to take  
19 care of 10,000 acres of natural areas. Do you feel,  
20 Commissioner, that that is an acceptable level of  
21 adequate amount of staff to care for our 10,000 acres  
22 of natural areas?

23 COMMISSIONER DONOGHUE: As I stated  
24 Council Member, as a Commissioner, I'd always welcome  
25 more resources for the work that we do. And we've

2 been very creative in bringing in partners, and we  
3 have an important partnership with entities like the  
4 Natural Areas Conservancy, great volunteers who come  
5 out and help us to help us take care of those 10,000  
6 acres.

7 CHAIRPERSON KRISHNAN: I think the answer  
8 is no, that's severely inadequate. I just want to  
9 paraphrase, because I think that is the correct  
10 answer there on that one.

11 I just wanted to clarify two programs in  
12 particular that we talked about, Council Member  
13 Holden asked about. So, the Tree Risk Management  
14 Program, as I understand it, Deputy Commissioner,  
15 from your testimony, that program never got off the  
16 ground because it was created and then because of the  
17 PEG it was cut so no hires were made, or can you  
18 clarify what that meant exactly?

19 UNIDENTIFIED: So the proposed budget item  
20 you're referring to was an expansion of our existing  
21 tree risk management approach, right?

22 CHAIRPERSON KRISHNAN: But that expansion  
23 never got off the ground, correct?

24 UNIDENTIFIED: Correct.

2 CHAIRPERSON KRISHNAN: So it was funded,  
3 it was cut, so no hires were made to expand the Tree  
4 Risk Management Program.

5 UNIDENTIFIED: That is correct.

6 CHAIRPERSON KRISHNAN: And the Trail  
7 Formalization Program, I know there was a lot of back  
8 and forth with the Council and City Hall, this is  
9 something that City Hall has funded in the past, they  
10 did not do so, the Council picked it up, and we  
11 expected also that City Hall would continue funding  
12 it, they did not do so. How did Parks address the  
13 fact that that funding for the Trail Formalization  
14 Program was not there in the budget? What happened to  
15 the staff, what was the impact of that?

16 UNIDENTIFIED: So, Council Member, you're  
17 conflating, I think, two quite slightly different  
18 topics, so I'll just quickly clarify. So the Trail  
19 Formalization, as you noted, similar to the Tree Risk  
20 Management item, was an expansion of our existing, so  
21 we have staff that are doing Trail Formalization.  
22 This was a proposed expansion that was not able to  
23 move forward so that. What I believe you're referring  
24 to is a funding item that we've also referred to as  
25 the one-shot funding, which had been funded in

2 various ways over the last several years, some led by  
3 Council initiatives, other times by the  
4 Administration at the behest of the Council, but was  
5 not funded by either the Council nor the  
6 Administration in this most recent Fiscal Year.  
7 That's the Forest Management Framework work.

8 CHAIRPERSON KRISHNAN: Okay. Trying to  
9 keep them all straight. Got it, okay. But the bottom  
10 line is, how did all of these things impact the  
11 staffing in the Forestry Division overall? How did  
12 you all adapt to this?

13 UNIDENTIFIED: So there was a...

14 COMMISSIONER DONOGHUE: The staffing was  
15 intended to expand programming, expand trail  
16 maintenance programming. It just meant that we  
17 weren't able to do that expansion, hire or expand  
18 that programming.

19 CHAIRPERSON KRISHNAN: Sure.

20 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER GREENFELD: In  
21 addition, at the time that the financial plan came  
22 out for those sort of one-shot, we had about 27  
23 people on staff, and we were able to absorb almost  
24 all of them in our grant-funded programs through this  
25 Fiscal Year.

2 CHAIRPERSON KRISHNAN: Got it, okay. And I  
3 commend you all for doing so, too. I know that's  
4 something we had talked about.

5 Now, look, I think a lot of these issues  
6 when it comes to our tree canopy are the result of  
7 City Hall failing to fund the Forestry Division the  
8 way that it should. These numbers are unacceptably  
9 low. One thing I will note, though, and we'll hold a  
10 hearing on the tree canopy later on this year, too,  
11 but I do think, and I know I'm not the only one that  
12 thinks this, that the Parks Department really needs  
13 to evaluate the contractors that it's working with to  
14 manage our street trees. We had gone over before a  
15 contractor that was convicted on serious charges. I  
16 appreciate the steps the Parks Department has taken  
17 to address the issues with that contractor, but  
18 there's also another one that's come to our  
19 attention, too, which is Griffin's Landscaping. They  
20 pled guilty on October 26, 2024, to one count of  
21 conspiracy to commit bribery, one count for wire  
22 fraud, and Griffin's Landscaping, the owner of the  
23 company, was recently denied his motion to withdraw  
24 his guilty plea by the district court judge. Griffin  
25 Landscaping is currently bidding on a 20-million-

2 dollars-plus of work in the New York City Parks  
3 Department, of which two projects have been awarded  
4 and are awaiting registration by the New York City  
5 Comptroller. Is that correct?

6 COMMISSIONER DONOGHUE: Yes, that is  
7 correct, yep.

8 CHAIRPERSON KRISHNAN: And so I fail to  
9 understand the Parks Department's approach to working  
10 with these deeply problematic contractors that are  
11 multiple times now tied up in serious federal  
12 criminal charges. What is the decision-making process  
13 here to continue going back and doing business with  
14 these actors?

15 COMMISSIONER DONOGHUE: Thank you, Council  
16 Member, for the question, and as you said earlier,  
17 planting trees equitably and across all the city is  
18 really important to the Parks Department, and in  
19 order for us to improve and invest in our urban  
20 canopy as fairly and efficiently as possible, we  
21 believe it's in the best interest of New Yorkers to  
22 continue working with the contractor. They're under  
23 an active monitoring agreement that's overseen by the  
24 Department of Investigation, and so our parks  
25 contracting determinations are made prior to each

2 award based on a thorough review of a vendor's  
3 business experience, and ability to meet the  
4 requirements of the project, and so we are doing our  
5 best to really enhance and invest in the urban tree  
6 canopy as fairly and efficiently as possible.

7 CHAIRPERSON KRISHNAN: But are there a set  
8 of standards, whether it's ethical standards,  
9 criminal conduct, that especially goes to the  
10 business practices of these tree contractors that you  
11 all employ in evaluating whether to give them  
12 contracts or to deny them contracts?

13 COMMISSIONER DONOGHUE: That is where, you  
14 know, the active monitoring agreement overseen by the  
15 Department of Investigation, that's what we rely on.

16 CHAIRPERSON KRISHNAN: I would encourage  
17 you all to take a look in particular. As I said  
18 before, we've still got more work to do with the  
19 other contractor, Dragonetti contractor, but I know  
20 you all took steps there as well. I would strongly  
21 encourage you all to review this situation with  
22 Griffin Landscaping as well, because the charges are  
23 serious, and they go towards the business practices  
24 of these companies that are then receiving business  
25

2 contracts in large sums, 20-million-dollars-plus,  
3 from the Parks Department in the City of New York.

4 What is the current staffing level for  
5 wage enforcement investigators at the Parks  
6 Department?

7 COMMISSIONER DONOGHUE: That is a question  
8 that we'd have to get back to you on.

9 CHAIRPERSON KRISHNAN: And is there any  
10 plan to rehire or hire more staff for that unit?

11 COMMISSIONER DONOGHUE: That is a question  
12 I will have to get back to you on.

13 CHAIRPERSON KRISHNAN: Okay. It would be  
14 helpful, because, you know, there are, of course, a  
15 number of unions and union labor that are paying  
16 healthy, livable, prevailing wages, and it's  
17 important to make sure that the contractors that  
18 we're working with, too, are held to those standards,  
19 that we're using more union labor for Parks  
20 Department roles, and a key piece of that is to  
21 ensure that wage levels are adequate so if you can  
22 all look into it, too, I'd appreciate that.

23 COMMISSIONER DONOGHUE: Absolutely. I  
24 mean, you know, making sure that we're following  
25 enforcement, all rules, City rules and regulations,

2 especially around wages, is an important priority of  
3 ours and of the City, and something we take very  
4 seriously so we're happy to provide further  
5 information to you on it.

6 CHAIRPERSON KRISHNAN: Thank you. Now I'll  
7 turn it over to Council Member Marte for questions.

8 He's not here? Okay. We'll go to Council  
9 Member Carr.

10 COUNCIL MEMBER CARR: Thank you, Chair.  
11 Commissioner, always a pleasure to see you.

12 I want to begin by thanking you and  
13 everybody in the Parks Operations teams in Staten  
14 Island and Southwest Brooklyn for the wonderful job  
15 they do each and every year. We love our parkies in  
16 District 50.

17 I want to ask something I ask at almost  
18 every budget hearing, which is about the tree and  
19 sidewalk program. Very important for homeowners when  
20 city trees uplift their sidewalks, and unfortunately  
21 we never have the resources in order to really get  
22 through that backlog of folks who are waiting for  
23 their sidewalks to be repaired, so could you tell us  
24 in the prelim budget what level of rating you expect  
25 Parks to get through in terms of the backlog, and

2 then how much would be required to be budgeted in  
3 order for you to get through the backlog period?

4 COMMISSIONER DONOGHUE: Thank you, Council  
5 Member Carr, for the question, and we agree with you.  
6 We know it's an important program, and we know that  
7 it's important to homeowners. I'm going to toss it  
8 over to Jennifer to answer in terms of your specific  
9 questions around budget there.

10 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER GREENFELD: Sure.  
11 Thank you for your question, Council Member Carr, and  
12 we have some answers because you do ask this every  
13 time. Our program right now, we're committed to all  
14 the service requests that we have within a sort of a  
15 certain number at a certain point of time of 85 and  
16 above so it's sort of, if we were to do everything in  
17 Staten Island that was 75 and up, it would be close  
18 to 10 million dollars, so there's an estimate. We do  
19 still have some inspections that we have not done, so  
20 that doesn't count sites that we haven't looked at  
21 yet or rated so that's one example just for Staten  
22 Island.

23 COUNCIL MEMBER CARR: I appreciate that,  
24 and it feels like, you know, you gave a number in the  
25 high 80s. I feel like in prior years, even without

2 Council enhancements, we were doing ratings better  
3 than that so has the program financing diminished, or  
4 is there simply just a larger number of cases?

5 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER GREENFELD: That's an  
6 excellent question. The program is not diminished. In  
7 fact, we have baseline funding of over 12 million  
8 dollars in capital funds and 1 million dollars in  
9 expense funds for those individual sites that aren't  
10 capitally eligible so we feel very good about the  
11 funding level. Of course, as any capital program,  
12 we're like sort of catching up from COVID and other  
13 slowdowns, and we did have some issues with vendors,  
14 and right now we have six, I think, active contracts,  
15 or seven active contracts, and we've done a thousand  
16 sites since these contracts have been active so we're  
17 on the upswing. We feel pretty good about the  
18 program, and particularly the funding for it.

19 COUNCIL MEMBER CARR: I appreciate that,  
20 and I guess I have a similar question with respect to  
21 tree stump removals. There was a time in the not-too-  
22 distant past, there was a large backlog. I think  
23 there's been strides made to improve that, but is  
24 there a backlog, and do you have sufficient funding  
25 to address stump removals as you are aware of them?

2 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER GREENFELD: Great.

3 That's a great question. We haven't for a very long  
4 time had a good estimate of stump removals, and we've  
5 actually been taking this past year to work with a  
6 consultant to get a good number, and we don't think  
7 there's more than about 30,000 stumps, I know that  
8 sounds like a lot, on the streets, but remember we  
9 remove close to 10,000 trees a year, and any trees  
10 that are done by our in-house crews, they don't take  
11 the stump out because it's not the same sort of tree  
12 risk issue, but we've improved certain things, like  
13 our smaller tree removal contracts include stumps as  
14 well, and that's in addition to the generous funding  
15 that we've received from the Council each year, and  
16 the baseline funding that the City has dedicated to  
17 stump removals, in addition as the Commissioner said  
18 earlier, now that we're switching to this new  
19 neighborhood program, where we're not kind of sort of  
20 dropping in and putting a tree in where there are  
21 opportunities, we're going block by block, we'll be  
22 getting stumps through that capital program, which is  
23 in addition to our existing expense-funded stump  
24 removals.

25

2 COUNCIL MEMBER CARR: That's great. That's  
3 wonderful to hear.

4 My next question is about comfort  
5 stations. Some Colleagues have talked about the  
6 expense involved in capital programming that Parks  
7 does, in particular comfort stations. You guys  
8 recently installed what we call in Staten Island the  
9 Richmond Reliever, not the Portland Loo, and I'd just  
10 love to hear about the efficiencies you think that  
11 program will bring once you're able to batch more  
12 installations together, which I think is the point of  
13 the program.

14 COMMISSIONER DONOGHUE: Yes. Thank you,  
15 Council Member Carr, and you know, you've jumped  
16 ahead on the naming for Staten Island, which we  
17 appreciate. I think that the Richmond Reliever or the  
18 Portland Loo is just an example of the many different  
19 aspects that we are looking at, the many different  
20 ways that we can innovate and bring down the costs  
21 and the timeline for bathroom construction in the  
22 city, and so in addition to the Richmond Reliever or  
23 the Portland Loo, you know, looking at modular,  
24 looking at trailers, looking at every different  
25 available option out there to make sure that we're

2 doing all we can to reduce both price and also  
3 timeframe. With (TIMER CHIME) the Portland Loo, there  
4 are five, there's going to be one in each borough,  
5 and they are intended as a pilot. We want to see how  
6 they function, you know, putting anything in a New  
7 York City park, they're going to experience a whole  
8 lot of different situations. We want to see, really,  
9 how they function, how the maintenance is, how they  
10 work, and so we'll get them out there, see the  
11 results of this pilot, and then see how, and if we  
12 want to move forward on it. But there's no doubt that  
13 it's, you know, a lower cost option and something  
14 that we can get out there quickly.

15 COUNCIL MEMBER CARR: That's great. Thank  
16 you, Commissioner. Thank you, Chair.

17 CHAIRPERSON KRISHNAN: Thank you. Council  
18 Member Menin.

19 COUNCIL MEMBER MENIN: Thank you so much,  
20 Chair.

21 So just a couple of questions,  
22 Commissioner. You mentioned that in your testimony  
23 that there will be 5 million dollars in new baseline  
24 funding for aquatics and lifeguard staff, and I know  
25 the Chair asked you some questions about that, so I

2 just wanted to have a better understanding, because  
3 as you know, the Council passed and the Mayor signed  
4 my bill to mandate free swim lessons for all second  
5 graders.

6 COMMISSIONER DONOGHUE: Yes.

7 COUNCIL MEMBER MENIN: What is happening  
8 in terms of the implementation of that mandate?

9 COMMISSIONER DONOGHUE: Yes. Well, so as  
10 you noted, Council Member, and thank you for the  
11 question, we were pleased to get the Swim Safety  
12 Expansion funding. You know, in terms of the bill,  
13 there needs to be funding to support training all  
14 second graders in Learn to Swim. So, with the Swim  
15 Safety Expansion funding, it allows us to expand our  
16 Swim for Life program. It's focused on swim  
17 instruction for second graders, and we're able to  
18 hire 91 new staff to support this expansion, and  
19 we're going to be doing this in coordination with  
20 DOE. They're a key factor here, and it allows us to  
21 expand our aquatics staff and our Swim for Life  
22 programming to DOE schools across the city.

23 COUNCIL MEMBER MENIN: But how many  
24 children specifically is this going to cover? Is this  
25 truly a universal program?

2                   COMMISSIONER DONOGHUE: It wouldn't be  
3 universal based on funding, but I can tell you that  
4 we're on track to serve over 5,000 Swim for Life  
5 participants in FY25, and we project we'll be able to  
6 serve an additional 4,200 Swim for Life participants  
7 in FY26 through this new Swim Safety Expansion for an  
8 anticipated total of 9,200 Swim for Life  
9 participants.

10                   COUNCIL MEMBER MENIN: Again, I would just  
11 urge that the Administration try to do what the bill  
12 was focused on doing, which is, again, to provide the  
13 free swim lessons to every second grader. You know, a  
14 partnership that Council Member Krishnan and I  
15 launched, a really public-private partnership with  
16 Asphalt Green I think shows that you can think  
17 outside of the box, we don't need to use the City  
18 pools. We can use other pools. We mapped out, I  
19 think, close to 900 pools across the city that could  
20 be utilized, and it's one significant way that we can  
21 increase scalability of that program.

22                   COMMISSIONER DONOGHUE: We agree, thank  
23 you, and we're partnering with Asphalt Green using  
24 our aquatics instructors for swim instruction in  
25 Brooklyn. We're just visiting the young students at

2 that program recently, so we agree it's a great  
3 partnership.

4 COUNCIL MEMBER MENIN: Okay, and just in  
5 my remaining time, I want to build upon some other  
6 questions that some Colleagues asked. What right now  
7 is the average price and timeline to construct a  
8 bathroom in a New York City park?

9 COMMISSIONER DONOGHUE: Yes, I have that.  
10 Just bear with me. I have bathrooms, I know. Hold on  
11 just one sec for me. It's here, just bear with.  
12 Bathrooms. Let's see. Okay. The estimate for a public  
13 restroom reconstruction is 2.25 million for an in-  
14 house design and 3.25 million for a consultant  
15 design.

16 COUNCIL MEMBER MENIN: So, in Ruppert Park  
17 in my District, the cost now is 4 million dollars.  
18 It's been over three years since we've seen really  
19 any progress. These costs are astronomical. You know,  
20 we've got to have some type of procurement reform to  
21 bring both the cost down as well as the timeline. So,  
22 I know you spoke a little bit about this, but what  
23 specifically can you commit to that is going to both  
24 bring the cost down and the timeline down?

2                   COMMISSIONER DONOGHUE: So, as I said  
3 earlier, and in answering the earlier question,  
4 looking at innovative new designs, different  
5 opportunities for different types of bathrooms,  
6 prefab, trailers, the Portland Loo, those are all  
7 ways that we're looking to bring the cost down. And  
8 then also we've been very active in the capital  
9 process reform discussions and looking at every  
10 element of that procurement and construction  
11 timeline. We're also working with DDC and building  
12 out a group of bathrooms through design build that's  
13 intended to serve to bring down cost and timeline so  
14 many different ways that we're looking at doing that.

15                   COUNCIL MEMBER MENIN: And I know you  
16 mentioned to Council Member Carr a lot of these  
17 elements. What I would just say is I feel like we're  
18 at the same point we were in the budget hearing last  
19 year where we had the exact same types of  
20 conversation and yet we're not seeing a lot of  
21 progress on bringing the cost and the timeline down,  
22 and I think it's imperative to do so.

23                   COMMISSIONER DONOGHUE: Thank you. We  
24 agree and we're working hard on it.

25                   COUNCIL MEMBER MENIN: Thank you.

2 COMMISSIONER DONOGHUE: Thank you.

3 CHAIRPERSON KRISHNAN: Thank you so much.

4 I just want to echo that point that Council Member  
5 Menin mentioned about finding ways to be as creative  
6 as possible to expand swim lessons, whether it's with  
7 and there are a number of organizations that are  
8 ready to do that work, whether it's the YMCA, Asphalt  
9 Green, and many others too, AND look forward to more  
10 conversations around that as well as I know we share  
11 that same goal. Council Member Avilés.

12 COUNCIL MEMBER AVILÉS: Thank you so much,  
13 Chair. Good afternoon.

14 So much talk about bathrooms.

15 Commissioner, with all due respect, I still don't  
16 understand why it would cost the City 2.25 and it  
17 would cost an additional million dollars for a  
18 consultant for the same square footage of bathroom.

19 Like that price discrepancy is quite  
20 mind-blowing. I have, I guess in the notion of I am  
21 very blessed to have two public pools in my district  
22 along with a good number of green space, which  
23 receives very... does not have remotely adequate amount  
24 of staffing to actually manage the intensity and  
25 usage of those spaces. In Sunset Park in particular,

2 this is a park that's 24 acres and it has two  
3 bathroom stalls. Does this ratio 24 acres of park  
4 space and two bathroom stalls, does that concern the  
5 Parks Department at all?

6 COMMISSIONER DONOGHUE: Thank you, Council  
7 Member, for the question. And it absolutely does. As  
8 part of what I talked about in my testimony, as part  
9 of our Vital Parks Explorer tool, we've mapped all  
10 the bathrooms that we have in our inventory, and we  
11 were pleased over 70 percent of New Yorkers have a  
12 public bathroom within a 10-minute walk of their  
13 house. We know that that 30 percent is really  
14 important and that's why we've mapped them and that's  
15 why we're really focused on targeting our investments  
16 to where they're needed the most. The Parks  
17 Department maintains over 600 public restrooms in New  
18 York City and we are the largest provider of public  
19 restrooms in New York City. We have more public  
20 restrooms than there are Starbucks across the state.  
21 We think a lot about bathrooms. We're very, very  
22 focused on them. There's no doubt. And that's why I  
23 said in my testimony with our Better Bathrooms  
24 Initiative that we announced 150 million dollars in  
25 new investment in bathrooms. 46 new ones we're

2 building, 36 that we're renovating. So, I hear you,  
3 two stalls is not enough, but it's been an incredible  
4 focus of the agency.

5 COUNCIL MEMBER AVILÉS: And I guess I'll  
6 just underscore, I'll follow up with you because on  
7 the Red Hook side we have 58 acres of park space and  
8 two bathroom stalls so I've been bemoaning bathrooms  
9 and the lack of bathrooms with all this park space  
10 that brings hundreds of kids and wonderful people and  
11 nowhere to pee. Lots of water, lots of stuff.

12 Something that continues to come up in  
13 our District is particularly around leagues and  
14 permits. I've recently been informed that there have  
15 been a cutting of permits, particularly for night  
16 baseball. I have a league that's been playing for the  
17 80s, pays all these fees for their permits and were  
18 recently told that they were getting cut an hour and  
19 a half. An hour and 50 minutes for this league means  
20 many games and could potentially gut their  
21 opportunity to play in these fields. We were told it  
22 was efficiency. These are automatic lights. Can you  
23 explain this situation to me?

24 COMMISSIONER DONOGHUE: I would have to  
25 look into the specific league that you're

2 referencing. We did go through a process, a rule  
3 change with our permits. With that rule change, what  
4 we looked to do was preference non-profit and youth  
5 organizations in our permitting. There were  
6 definitely changes that went into effect that have  
7 had ramifications for some. I don't know the  
8 specific, but if you tell us the specific league,  
9 we're absolutely happy to look into it.

10 COUNCIL MEMBER AVILÉS: The permit was cut  
11 from 8 to 11:50, which they had been for decades,  
12 from 8 to 10. An hour and 50 minutes for them is  
13 significant because they play every minute they can  
14 get. Given that they've been doing this for decades,  
15 the math doesn't work with how much they're actually  
16 paying for the permits and how they can sustain a  
17 season with so much cut of play time. I'd like to  
18 follow up with you, but this is existential for them,  
19 and the efficiency argument isn't one that seems to  
20 have been justified in a way that we could be like,  
21 okay, that's reasonable because somebody's not  
22 standing outside with the (TIMER CHIME) waiting to  
23 flip on the switch.

24 COMMISSIONER DONOGHUE: We're happy to  
25 take a look at it, absolutely.

2 COUNCIL MEMBER AVILÉS: I guess there's so  
3 many questions. I thank you, Park Staff. I absolutely  
4 agree 100 percent that we need to fully fund the care  
5 and just equity of our park staff. 700 cuts is  
6 unacceptable and we see it every day with the  
7 rodents, with the trash, and I know you're trying  
8 your best and we will continue to push for  
9 significant funding for our green spaces. Thank you.

10 CHAIRPERSON KRISHNAN: Thank you, Council  
11 Member. Before going to our next Colleague, just  
12 wanted to focus on another area. We've talked about  
13 forestry for a bit. Our Parks Enforcement Patrol, our  
14 PEP officers. They play a crucial role in our park  
15 system, keeping them safe on their duty, but how many  
16 PEP officers do we have for all of New York City?

17 COMMISSIONER DONOGHUE: Thank you, Council  
18 Member, for the question. The budgeted tax levy  
19 headcount for the PEP division is 369 with an active  
20 headcount of 346.

21 CHAIRPERSON KRISHNAN: So roughly about  
22 350 PEP officers, again, for all of New York City.  
23 That's about 70 PEP officers per borough. Can you  
24 tell me what is the schedule of the PEP officers? How  
25 are 70 PEP officers throughout an entire borough of

2 Queens, let's say, how do they get around to all  
3 their parks? What is their schedule? Are there parks  
4 that are not getting any PEP officers? How does the  
5 Parks Department work with 70 PEP officers for far  
6 more park space than the number of staff they have?

7 COMMISSIONER DONOGHUE: Just bear with me  
8 one second. Where were you? So, we work hard, Council  
9 Member, to deploy our PEP officers in a manner that's  
10 equitable across the five boroughs. In terms of  
11 schedule, deployment hours really vary based on  
12 enforcement needs, but PEP officers generally work  
13 hours ranging from 7 a.m. to midnight throughout the  
14 city. There are instances where officers may start  
15 earlier based on the needs of the boroughs, but we  
16 are looking to provide PEP coverage in the areas  
17 where they're needed most. Some of our PEP officers  
18 are mobile, so we provide coverage through mobile  
19 patrols, fixed-post patrols. Patrol methods also  
20 include by foot, by bicycle. We have mounted horses.  
21 We have vehicles. So there's a wide range of  
22 different ways that we cover our park system.

23 CHAIRPERSON KRISHNAN: The math isn't  
24 mathing, right? If there's 70 PEP officers per  
25 borough, I'm having a hard time seeing how they are

2 able to cover all the different parks in that  
3 borough. Are there parks that don't have PEP  
4 officers, or do the schedules have to be truncated  
5 and changed so they can move around to all the parks?  
6 How does that work?

7           COMMISSIONER DONOGHUE: Our PEP officers  
8 are deployed, as I said, strategically, equitably, as  
9 much as we can across the city. They're generally  
10 focused on parks with high usage or where there are  
11 pressing quality-of-life concerns, and we also are  
12 very reliant on partnership with PD, so we work very  
13 closely together with PD to cover areas and to work  
14 in partnership, but it's really, we're looking to  
15 spread them as best we can to high-need areas.

16           CHAIRPERSON KRISHNAN: So, 40 forestry  
17 staff per borough in a time when we're seeing so many  
18 wildfires. 70 PEP officers per borough in this  
19 moment. Isn't it your understanding, Commissioner,  
20 that Mayor Adams' priority is public safety in our  
21 city?

22           COMMISSIONER DONOGHUE: Yes, absolutely.

23           CHAIRPERSON KRISHNAN: And keeping New  
24 Yorkers safe when they're in their parks, safe from

2 wildfires? Wouldn't you agree those are priorities of  
3 the Mayor?

4 COMMISSIONER DONOGHUE: Those are  
5 priorities of the Mayor. They're priorities of our  
6 agency as well.

7 CHAIRPERSON KRISHNAN: I cannot understand  
8 how, with so few resources, this Administration is  
9 able to keep its parks and our city safe, able to  
10 keep all of us as New Yorkers safe from climate  
11 change. It's shocking to look at the disparity  
12 between the needs of the Parks Department on each of  
13 these issues and the staffing you have in place.

14 Turn it over to Council Member Restler  
15 for questions.

16 COUNCIL MEMBER RESTLER: Wonderful.  
17 Commissioner Donoghue, great to see you, and thank  
18 you, Chair Krishnan.

19 I'll just say for a moment, at a time  
20 when there is such turmoil and tumult across the  
21 building, it's really important that we have capable,  
22 competent, steady leaders in our agencies, and I  
23 appreciate your continued service to our city.

24 COMMISSIONER DONOGHUE: Thank you.

2 COUNCIL MEMBER RESTLER: My mother told me  
3 to always lead with a compliment.

4 COMMISSIONER DONOGHUE: Well done.

5 COUNCIL MEMBER RESTLER: Vickie says my  
6 mother's right. So, always. I'll give you two more  
7 compliments. Recently promoted Community Board 1  
8 Administrator for Parks, Mary Salig Husain, is just  
9 terrific. You all know it, just a tremendous partner  
10 for our office and for everybody in Williamsburg and  
11 Greenpoint. Really lucky to have her. And really  
12 grateful to her and your whole team for the  
13 partnership on the mini-forest that we're doing in  
14 Williamsburg. We're really excited about the Miyawaki  
15 mini-forest that we're hoping to get planted later  
16 this spring. So, thank you for everyone who's worked  
17 with us on that. I think it's a great model that  
18 hopefully we'll replicate in Council Districts across  
19 the city. We're really thrilled to help fund it.

20 And I do want to echo Council Member  
21 Avilés' concerns on the permitting issues. We have  
22 the same problem in McCarran. People are pissed. We  
23 would love to see that issue fixed.

24 There are two or three issues, depending  
25 on time, that I would like to get through. First is

2 around second shifts. We know that the budget  
3 proposed an increase in about 480 Parks workers,  
4 including 230 second shift workers, but that still  
5 leaves the Parks' part-time headcount down by nearly  
6 40 percent since the time you all took office. 38  
7 percent. That's a massive reduction. I appreciate in  
8 your testimony that you highlighted that 200 separate  
9 locations, including 121 of our busiest parks, are  
10 going to be getting a second shift, but think about  
11 that. That's two parks per Council District. How many  
12 parks do we have in each of our Council Districts  
13 that really need a second shift? So, McCarran gets  
14 one, but not McGorrick. So, Cannon Plaza gets it, but  
15 not the Promenade. It's not enough. How many  
16 additional workers do you need to be able to provide  
17 the necessary second shifts so that our parks  
18 conditions improve? The 3-1-1 complaints were way up  
19 this summer. The number of parks in acceptable  
20 conditions were down this summer, down to 85 percent.  
21 It's not surprising. You don't have the person power.  
22 Somebody in Brooklyn Parks told me they haven't had  
23 this few staff in 40 years. So, what's the headcount  
24 that we need, the person power we need, to actually

2 be able to achieve second shift staffing at the level  
3 that we should expect?

4                   COMMISSIONER DONOGHUE: Thank you, Council  
5 Member, for both the compliments and the questions.  
6 So, we are quite pleased with the expansion of second  
7 shift. We know it makes a difference. We know it is  
8 important. What we try and do is target that second  
9 shift to those areas that we know are heavy  
10 barbecuing areas, the busiest areas in our parks. And  
11 so, that's why the over 400 positions that will be  
12 deployed to second shift are very helpful and  
13 important for us. As I've said, as a Commissioner, I  
14 always welcome more resources. We know second shift  
15 works and is important, both for the coverage and the  
16 cleaning, but just to have the staff in the park into  
17 the evening. I can't give you an exact number.

18                   COUNCIL MEMBER RESTLER: Would you be  
19 willing to share a proposal with Chair Krishnan and  
20 OMB... (CROSS-TALK)

21                   COMMISSIONER DONOGHUE: Further expansion  
22 of second shift?

23                   COUNCIL MEMBER RESTLER: Yes.

24                   COMMISSIONER DONOGHUE: Yes, absolutely,  
25 we can do that.

2 COUNCIL MEMBER RESTLER: We would welcome  
3 that. That would be very helpful.

4 I'd now like to just shift to tree  
5 pruning. I was at Community Board 1 last week. A lot  
6 of talk about Community Board 1 today. I was at  
7 Community Board 1 last week, and I was getting  
8 harangued by a constituent in South Williamsburg  
9 about a number of trees on their block that they want  
10 to see pruning. I explained that the Parks Department  
11 recently rolled out a new approach to pruning that  
12 you all have said is going to make things more  
13 efficient and improve things operationally for you  
14 all, but I said unfortunately each area in New York  
15 City is only going to receive tree pruning once every  
16 nine years now.

17 COMMISSIONER DONOGHUE: The new initiative  
18 we rolled out, Council Member, sorry to interrupt, is  
19 around tree planting, not pruning. Our pruning cycle  
20 has stayed the same. It's every seven years... (CROSS-  
21 TALK)

22 COUNCIL MEMBER RESTLER: (INAUDIBLE)  
23 request for planting that it's every nine years.  
24 That's right? So, you've broken community districts  
25 down into three chunks and once every nine years

2 you'll be coming to fill gaps where you identify a  
3 need for tree planting?

4 UNIDENTIFIED: Sorry, no. During the nine  
5 years, the entirety of that given community board...

6 (CROSS-TALK)

7 COUNCIL MEMBER RESTLER: I don't know what  
8 the word is. It's not a quadrant.

9 UNIDENTIFIED: Sort of waves.

10 COUNCIL MEMBER RESTLER: How do you  
11 describe it? A third of a community board? What's a  
12 third of a community board? Whatever. In that third  
13 of the community board, you'll come once every nine  
14 years to plant a tree. So, if you came last year,  
15 it's going to be at the end of the decade nine years  
16 from now that you're coming to plant a tree. That's a  
17 question.

18 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER GREENFELD: Thank you  
19 again. We estimate that based on our tree planting  
20 opportunities now, it will take about nine years to  
21 fill all of them. When we're done, maybe it won't  
22 take that long to get the next round. We don't know.  
23 So, we're looking today, based on what we know about  
24 opportunities, that it will take us about nine years  
25 to fill every possible space in the entire city.

2 COUNCIL MEMBER RESTLER: But think about  
3 it. None of us are going to be here in nine years.  
4 Right? I mean, even if we're all lucky enough to  
5 stick around for another term, we're gone in four  
6 years, so what am I supposed to do to look my  
7 constituents in Northern Greenpoint or South  
8 Williamsburg or wherever that area is in the eye and  
9 tell them, I'm sorry, the Parks Department isn't  
10 going to come by to plant a tree for nine years? I  
11 don't understand how that's a logical policy. That's  
12 leaving communities out in the cold for a very long  
13 time, certainly longer than any of us are going to be  
14 around.

15 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER GREENFELD: Thank you  
16 for the question. I understand. It's something we  
17 really try to work through when we design this  
18 program, and that's one reason we split things up  
19 into sort of waves of three, like you were saying. So  
20 every community board, we go by community boards, not  
21 Council Districts, because they're more stable..

22 (CROSS-TALK)

23 COUNCIL MEMBER RESTLER: We'll stick with  
24 Williamsburg and Greenpoint. South Williamsburg,  
25 Northside Greenpoint. For the folks in Greenpoint,

2 they don't care that you went to plant trees in South  
3 Williamsburg last year and that you're not going to  
4 be in Greenpoint for nine years. It's three miles  
5 away. It's a different neighborhood. It's a different  
6 community. It doesn't help. So to me, this is a plan  
7 that makes sense on paper and is a good operational  
8 plan. But to tell my community members, or for you to  
9 come out and try and tell my community members that  
10 you're going to be there in nine years, they're going  
11 to scream at you, right, and they're going to be  
12 really pissed. They want to see if there's a spot on  
13 their block where they're looking for a tree, telling  
14 them that it's a nine-year wait is like, it's never  
15 going to happen, right? So I just, I really, I made  
16 this clear to your staff. I'm raising it in a hearing  
17 after I've already said it to you all privately. I  
18 don't think this policy makes any sense. I really  
19 think you should revisit it. I think it's something  
20 that works on paper and doesn't work in practice and  
21 doesn't work in our communities so I really hope that  
22 you'll rethink it and make exceptions and make  
23 different approaches so that we don't have to tell  
24 our constituents that there's a nine-year wait until  
25 the Parks Department's coming to plant a tree.

2 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER GREENFELD: I

3 appreciate that. Change is very complicated and  
4 difficult. We really believe that this is more equity  
5 driven, this is more efficient, and also it's more  
6 predictable. Today, when you make a service request,  
7 we can't really tell you when we're going to inspect  
8 it. It's at least a year, if not more or longer. We  
9 can't tell you when that tree is going to come, and  
10 we don't feel comfortable with that approach where  
11 we're really just serving communities who know how to  
12 request trees and yet still cannot provide sort of  
13 predictable responses to even those people who are  
14 asking. So, when we have a choice of serving some  
15 over serving everybody, we're choosing an equitable  
16 approach and a predictable and efficient approach. We  
17 think that's an excellent use of City resources.

18 COUNCIL MEMBER RESTLER: I think to say  
19 that a predictable approach is coming by essentially  
20 once a decade, right? Once, you know, you have a  
21 Mayor or a Council Member, that's eight years, over  
22 the course of our whole eight years in office, we're  
23 going to have to tell constituents that the Parks  
24 Department's never coming by to plant trees during  
25 that period, right? It just is, to me, doesn't, I

2 understand that you don't have enough resources. We  
3 should fix that. We should put more resources into  
4 planting trees. I've certainly put a lot of resources  
5 into planting trees in District 33, and I know some  
6 of my Colleagues have as well, but to try and tell us  
7 that it's a once a decade opportunity to get a tree  
8 planted on your block, I can't look my constituent in  
9 the eye and have that conversation without being,  
10 without being screamed at, right? And so I don't  
11 think that the solution you've come up with actually  
12 works. We're happy to continue to give feedback and  
13 give input on how to do something more equitably,  
14 more fairly, but this, to me, is a bad policy. Thank  
15 you.

16 CHAIRPERSON KRISHNAN: Thank you, Council  
17 Member Restler. One follow-up question. I do  
18 understand the need and importance of efficiency,  
19 too, as a goal. Is it because the way it's divided up  
20 that it, you know, the areas are divided up into  
21 thirds, that it creates a nine-year cycle? Like, is  
22 there any way to do, even with the current framework,  
23 to reconfigure how it's divided up to reduce the  
24 amount of time? Have you all considered that, or how  
25 do you look at that?

2           COMMISSIONER DONOGHUE: You know, I think  
3 when we talk about efficiency, it goes back to, you  
4 know, when you think about if you're, if we're  
5 responding to individual street tree requests, we're  
6 trying to deal with costs coming down, so we're  
7 sending contractors, two in Brooklyn, two in Queens,  
8 it's not the most efficient, and it impacts price.  
9 So, remember, we're trying to address concerns that  
10 have been raised here and across the city about, how  
11 do we bring price down per tree planting? So it makes  
12 sense if a contractor can do a whole block, right, or  
13 a series of blocks, or a whole community board  
14 district in one planting, and we talked about this,  
15 Council Member, you saw with our block pruning, you  
16 saw how effective that was, and your neighborhood all  
17 of a sudden, and that's standard seven-year pruning  
18 cycles nationwide, that's a standard. And so that's  
19 what we're looking to replicate here, is to have an  
20 impact that is efficient, that's equitable, and that  
21 will help us to drive costs down.

22           DEPUTY COMMISSIONER GREENFELD: And I'll  
23 just note, Council Member, that I understand you're  
24 not necessarily questioning the approach but the pace  
25 of it, and we really have learned over time that

2 there's a limit that the market can handle in terms  
3 of growing trees and contracting and all of that, and  
4 so we are trying to be really realistic in terms of  
5 what we understand the capacity of the market is. And  
6 we may learn, as we do this, that because it's more  
7 efficient, we'll attract different folks that will be  
8 able to grow the trees we need, and we ask for you to  
9 understand, and maybe we'll learn, and maybe the pace  
10 will be picked up, but we looked at what we think is  
11 possible and are trying to make really sort of  
12 appropriate, set appropriate expectations.

13 CHAIRPERSON KRISHNAN: Right, right. And  
14 like I said, I understand the goals. I was looking  
15 specifically about the time and the pace itself, but  
16 I appreciate the further conversation with all of us  
17 on it too. Council Member Narcisse.

18 COUNCIL MEMBER NARCISSE: Good afternoon,  
19 and thank you, Sue, for being here. I have to give a  
20 shout out for my new Director for Marine Park, Eric  
21 Peterson, and of course, Marty. I love parks, so.

22 Given the increase of fires in parks,  
23 right, I started hearing it, what specific actions  
24 Parks are taking to ensure better fire prevention?

2                   COMMISSIONER DONOGHUE: Thank you for the  
3 question, and obviously that was, you know, it was so  
4 alarming for us, Council Member, what we saw comes  
5 out of, you know, the driest October on record in  
6 history. We have, through our natural resources  
7 group, spent years focused on how we can do the best  
8 in terms of maintaining our urban forests, reducing  
9 phragmites, reducing invasive species and mugwort,  
10 things that are more likely to choke and damage  
11 forests, so it's really a continuation of our ongoing  
12 work. We are also part of a task force with FDNY and  
13 our sister agencies. Given what we all experienced  
14 with the wildfires last fall, working together,  
15 seeing how we can all make sure that our response,  
16 our interaction is the most efficient at dealing with  
17 what we know will be ongoing situations because of  
18 climate change.

19                   COUNCIL MEMBER NARCISSE: Thank you, and  
20 additional, we need the staff to actually do those  
21 actions.

22                   How much do dog parks cost roughly, the  
23 dog parks?

24                   COMMISSIONER DONOGHUE: How much does a  
25 dog park?

2 COUNCIL MEMBER NARCISSE: Roughly.

3 COMMISSIONER DONOGHUE: That, I would need  
4 to get back to you. It really varies on where it is,  
5 what size it is.

6 COUNCIL MEMBER NARCISSE: The smallest one  
7 that we can, let's start with the smallest one.

8 COMMISSIONER DONOGHUE: I don't know that  
9 I have an average price.

10 COUNCIL MEMBER NARCISSE: Because I have  
11 two, I have Marine Park, Garrison Beach, and of  
12 course Canarsie asked me for dog parks.

13 COMMISSIONER DONOGHUE: I'm happy to get  
14 back to you and let you know, but I don't know  
15 offhand what the average price is.

16 COUNCIL MEMBER NARCISSE: All right. So,  
17 you're going to get back to me with the money because  
18 I have three different places that asked me.

19 UNIDENTIFIED: If I can, I'll just add  
20 that it is a substantial construction project like  
21 any other capital project, like a full park  
22 playground renovation, but we've seen prices that  
23 range from 500,000 dollars on the lower end to, in  
24 some cases if it's large enough and if there are  
25 connections in terms of water connections or what

2 have you, we've seen prices certainly higher than  
3 that depending on the footprint and the site  
4 conditions as the Commissioner noted, but on the  
5 lower end we've seen projects advance for around  
6 500,000 dollars.

7 COMMISSIONER DONOGHUE: But we'll get back  
8 to you with specifics.

9 COUNCIL MEMBER NARCISSE: Okay. Swimming  
10 pool. I mean, I don't have any. I have that little... I  
11 need a microscope to see the one that we have in the  
12 (INAUDIBLE) area so we need our kids to swim, right?  
13 The Speaker has been a very huge advocate, especially  
14 when it comes to Black and Brown communities, right?  
15 So now, they cannot swim in a bucket. We need to have  
16 an actual swimming pool. I don't have any, especially  
17 in my District, Canarsie and Flatlands area. That's  
18 been a problem. Any plan to actually address that  
19 equity, making sure that we have a swimming pool,  
20 especially in those areas?

21 COMMISSIONER DONOGHUE: Absolutely,  
22 Council Member, and as I said in my testimony, we're  
23 so pleased with the new pools that we are able to add  
24 to the system with Shirley Chisholm and Roy Wilkins  
25 and Walter Gladwin. We have gone through an effort to

2 identify where there are swim deserts, so we're very  
3 focused on looking to add investment, target  
4 investments where they're needed, and we have also  
5 been very active not only in Mayoral funding for  
6 pools, but taking advantage of grant money, New York  
7 State Swims money, to bring as much money as possible  
8 into the system, so absolutely we're focused on where  
9 we can expand. It's an expensive proposition, but we  
10 absolutely want to add more pools.

11 COUNCIL MEMBER NARCISSE: Please expand  
12 over there by those areas that I know of, like  
13 Canarsie, Flatlands, Sheepshead Bay area.

14 Gun violence is a big problem for me,  
15 especially in the Canarsie and Flatlands area. We  
16 know gun violence does not occur in silos. It's a  
17 combination of different issues, and one of the  
18 issues, the young folks don't have no place to go.  
19 So, myself, I've personally been going around with  
20 those young folks and asked them, what do they want  
21 from me? They want to have a community center. Where  
22 I'm looking at, even the Mayor agree, everyone agree,  
23 that flat area by 80s is a problem, and they're all  
24 hanging around doing nothing, absolutely nothing. So  
25 now, can we have an assessment done to help me out?

2 Because it's a Park land that we have I-68 between  
3 82nd and 81st so no one play handball anymore, so can  
4 we actually look into that space, work with me to  
5 bring something that those young folks that causing  
6 problem can have a place to go? I need your help on  
7 that. (TIMER CHIME)

8 COMMISSIONER DONOGHUE: Yes, and we're  
9 happy to look at it with you, and certainly  
10 understand, and that's why we're so focused on, we  
11 participated actively in the Mayor's Gun Violence  
12 Prevention Task Force. We know that by bringing  
13 programs and activities, it makes a difference for  
14 young people. We need them to have things to do, so  
15 happy to look at a certain space with you.

16 COUNCIL MEMBER NARCISSE: All right. So,  
17 I'm going to have your help on that one.

18 The question I have now in front of me,  
19 the last round of PEGs included the elimination of  
20 the Community Gardens Program, which was a program  
21 targeted at high-risk youth as well as the NYC SPARKS  
22 program, which provided girls with engagement in  
23 STEAM, science, technology, engineering, arts, and  
24 mathematics. These programs were never even able to  
25 begin before being cut as part of the PEGs program,

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2 but hopefully we will see these programs restored and  
3 brought back to life. Have there been discussion with  
4 OMB or the Mayor regarding the restoration of this  
5 program, and how much would it cost to restore these  
6 programs? How much additional headcount would be  
7 needed? What can the Council do to help your agency?

8 COMMISSIONER DONOGHUE: Yes, thank you,  
9 Council Member, for the question. As the budget  
10 process moves forward, we're in continuous  
11 conversations with OMB and the Mayor's Office  
12 regarding agency needs, and we definitely are  
13 committed and remain committed to delivering on our  
14 broader mission. In terms of, you're right, the PEGs  
15 savings were enacted, and we had not hired or spent  
16 for these programs when they were eliminated. In  
17 terms of the New York City SPARKS Program, to  
18 restore, it would cost, it's six positions and  
19 350,000 dollars. And in terms of the Community  
20 Gardens Programs, it's two positions and 150,000  
21 dollars.

22 COUNCIL MEMBER NARCISSE: Thank you.  
23 You've been the best. You know I love Parks so much.  
24 And, Chair, one more question.

25 CHAIRPERSON KRISHNAN: Sure.

2 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER GREENFELD: The leash,  
3 because the dogs, do you have signage, actually, to  
4 let people know what is the rule and regulation of  
5 the park? People complain, the dogs are running wild.

6 COMMISSIONER DONOGHUE: Yes, absolutely.  
7 We have so much signage, and our Deputy Commissioner  
8 Mark Focht oversees our sign shop, and we have spent  
9 so much time on signage in our parks and making sure  
10 that it's clear where their dogs can and can't be off  
11 leash. It's on our rule sign. We try and make it  
12 really clear. There's extensive signage out there,  
13 yes.

14 COUNCIL MEMBER NARCISSE: Okay. The last  
15 one. Also, can we get trash bins along the marshland  
16 that we have by Marine Park? Because it's such a  
17 beautiful area, but there is no container, no trash  
18 can there to hold it.

19 COMMISSIONER DONOGHUE: Absolutely.

20 COUNCIL MEMBER NARCISSE: I know you  
21 visited with me at Marine Park, and over there, so  
22 you know how beautiful it is. You are always welcome,  
23 but we need swimming pools too, so let's think about  
24 that. Thank you. Thank you, Chair.

2 CHAIRPERSON KRISHNAN: Thank you, Council  
3 Member Narcisse. I have to come visit with you too  
4 and see your park. That's right.

5 COUNCIL MEMBER NARCISSE: Yes, you do.  
6 Thank you.

7 CHAIRPERSON KRISHNAN: Also, just before I  
8 turn it over to my next Colleague, we just wanted to  
9 I forgot to mention before, but I do appreciate the  
10 expansion, the Second Shift Program, the 100  
11 hotspots. I think that was something that we had  
12 discussed last budget too. It was very important to  
13 the Council so I look forward, and I think Council  
14 Member Restler raised this point too, but I look  
15 forward to continued conversation about ways that we  
16 can expand that program even beyond the 100 hotspots  
17 that we have.

18 And I'll turn it over to Council Member  
19 Paladino.

20 COUNCIL MEMBER PALADINO: Good afternoon.  
21 Am I on? I'm on. Okay, good. Good afternoon. Thank  
22 you very, very much. I want to say, of course, to you  
23 guys, I know how hard you work, and we're circling  
24 back now, like people have said repeatedly throughout  
25 this meeting, the frustration, the wait, the

2 understaffing, the budget that we keep giving you for  
3 capital projects, not that we're going to see it come  
4 to fruition, sadly. Those are the realities of what  
5 we are up against right now. And I've discussed many  
6 times, and since this is a budget hearing, it seems  
7 like this might be the best time to bring it up.

8 Again, I really would love to see if Parks could  
9 break this down into 51 different Districts, whereas  
10 the money that's allotted is allotted specifically  
11 for a borough in a very realistic manner, whereas we  
12 could then fund projects that we can see a beginning,  
13 a middle, and an end, because at this rate we are  
14 giving you, you know, in my office alone, close to,  
15 here's 11, here's 8, that's 19, and another close to  
16 a million for miscellaneous, so that's an awful lot  
17 of money to come out of one Council Member's office  
18 as well as cooperation from the Speaker and so on,  
19 but the frustration that you are going through is  
20 certainly one that I could feel for you, because  
21 there's nothing worse than telling a constituent, and  
22 you know, your auto emails hurt when a constituent  
23 hears seven to nine years. You know, seven to nine  
24 years is a ridiculously long time. And the City in  
25 its whole overall topographical hasn't really changed

2 all that much. We've still had these parks, because a  
3 great many of these parks are you know, 100 years  
4 old, 50 years old, 80 years old. These are realities.  
5 And our street line, you know, our tree-lined streets  
6 have become something of the past to make way for  
7 bicycles and bike lanes and all this other  
8 unrealistic stuff so the dream of tree-lined streets  
9 are kind of going to the wayside.

10 I do want to say that I have several  
11 things which I'm going to talk to you about offline.  
12 You know, not today. But I do want you to put some  
13 focus on Flushing Airport, if you could. It's coming  
14 to my District. And EDC is taking bids, and this is  
15 an extremely serious situation. It is a wetlands. I'm  
16 extremely disturbed by what they want to do, EDC, to  
17 make way for 80 acres of what once was a functioning  
18 small airport, and they want to use 27 acres of that  
19 to build on. Now we did the 26th Avenue breakthrough  
20 to connect the two roads. EDC had to go down 120 feet  
21 to get to stable so they could build this road. It's  
22 beautiful. Absolutely beautiful. We know how  
23 beautiful APEC is. So, what I want to try to do is  
24 work with Parks. I don't know what your limits are  
25 concerning this particular project. But if you would

2 talk to me about it, or we could get together and  
3 discuss this because needless to say, this is in the  
4 billions of dollars. I was in touch with APEC, I very  
5 much want to work together because if this should  
6 happen, they've tried three times to make this work.  
7 It's a flooded area. It's not feasible for building.  
8 So, I'd like to see what your intake is, what you  
9 feel about it, and I'd like to work together with  
10 Parks so that we could make this something that could  
11 be absolutely stunning. And like I said, we're not in  
12 the millions with an M. We're in the billions with a  
13 B. So, I'll talk to you about this other stuff  
14 offline. It got late. I've got to go back to Queens.  
15 But thank you all very, very much. Thank you.

16 COMMISSIONER DONOGHUE: Thank you, Council  
17 Member. We appreciate the support. And we do work  
18 closely with EDC on a number of different projects so  
19 we can absolutely talk about that.

20 COUNCIL MEMBER PALADINO: Just wanted it  
21 on your radar. The bids are due... what's today, the  
22 20th?

23 COMMISSIONER DONOGHUE: Yeah.

24 COUNCIL MEMBER PALADINO: Bids are due  
25 today is the final. We'll talk, okay? Thank you.

2 COMMISSIONER DONOGHUE: Thank you.

3 CHAIRPERSON KRISHNAN: Thank you, Council  
4 Member.

5 Before we move into the second round, I  
6 just wanted to highlight another area of our Urban  
7 Park Rangers, right? We know that our park rangers,  
8 they provide an essential service in our city's  
9 parks, making sure New Yorkers of all ages understand  
10 and expand their knowledge about the history of  
11 parks, the many animals and plants that reside within  
12 them. They were just at my children's school  
13 recently, too. But the funding for many of their  
14 positions isn't actually baselined, and so every  
15 year, they have to live with the uncertainty that  
16 their jobs may not be funded or reinstated. I know  
17 that. I've spoken with many of them. I've heard their  
18 concerns about it. And they've really impacted me  
19 about the, again, the disparity between how important  
20 their roles are in our parks, yet how every year they  
21 are afraid and deeply concerned about losing their  
22 jobs, and so obviously this is no way to be funding  
23 such essential workers in our park system. It's no  
24 way, frankly, for us to be budgeting at all with  
25 these temporary positions. We call them one-shots,

2 budget-speak, but jobs shouldn't be every year  
3 subject to renewal, especially jobs like these where  
4 they are serving our parks every day in perpetuity.  
5 And so I just wanted to know what is the current  
6 headcount for Urban Park Rangers? How many are  
7 actually permanent or baseline funded, and how many  
8 are temporary or one-shot funded?

9 COMMISSIONER DONOGHUE: Yes, absolutely,  
10 Council Member. So, of the current budgeted headcount  
11 of 89 total ranger positions, 39 are baseline and 50  
12 are one-shot funded.

13 CHAIRPERSON KRISHNAN: 39 are baseline, 50  
14 are one-shot funded. So that's about 80, 89 park  
15 rangers total, right? For the whole city?

16 COMMISSIONER DONOGHUE: Yeah, almost 90  
17 total rangers, yep.

18 CHAIRPERSON KRISHNAN: Got it. So that's  
19 about 18 per borough. I mean, do you feel like that  
20 is an adequate number of park rangers for an entire  
21 borough, 18 park rangers?

22 COMMISSIONER DONOGHUE: As you spoke to,  
23 Council Member, you're right. They do provide such an  
24 important service in terms of education and outreach  
25 and helping us enforce park rules. Park rangers are

2 such a visible presence across the city. They play a  
3 really important role. We try and spread them out as  
4 equitably as we can and have them have as much  
5 exposure to kids and students and free programming as  
6 possible.

7 CHAIRPERSON KRISHNAN: It's just shocking  
8 to me again because I think, and with the breakdown  
9 you provided, that means most of the Urban Park  
10 Rangers are funded by the Council's temporary one-  
11 shot funding. So, of 89, 50 of them are coming from  
12 us every year putting that money into the Council,  
13 and that to me is just shocking knowing the role that  
14 they play, knowing that every year, and I know these  
15 workers I mentioned and I hear from them, but that  
16 most of their core of rangers is funded by the  
17 Council's temporary line because City Hall has not  
18 devoted the attention or the resources to actually  
19 fund their positions and support these workers. I  
20 know everyone in the Council, we are so grateful for  
21 the work that they do, but it's truly outrageous that  
22 that is the case. And again, our Urban Park Rangers,  
23 if we want to talk about public safety, play such a  
24 crucial role, keeping our parks safe in their own

2 way, keeping our natural habitats and our wildlife  
3 safe. Really, it blows my mind.

4 I want to turn over now for a second  
5 round of questions to Council Member Brewer and then  
6 Narcisse.

7 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: I do want to thank  
8 Tricia Shimamura and certainly Steve Simon from  
9 Manhattan. I forgot to do that.

10 But also, on this tree issue, what would  
11 be the price that could cut the timeframe in half? In  
12 other words, it's the staff that the Chair talked  
13 about, plus the cost of 3,110 dollars for each tree.  
14 What would be the amount to cut the time in half? So  
15 in other words... (CROSS-TALK)

16 COMMISSIONER DONOGHUE: So it isn't as  
17 long of a time period?

18 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Four years, every  
19 four years to get the entire city.

20 COMMISSIONER DONOGHUE: I don't know that  
21 we have that analysis right now, but we can certainly  
22 look at it, Council Member. I do just want to note  
23 that we are planting a record number of street trees,  
24 18,000, as I said in my testimony, in a year. There  
25 are so many factors with how many we can get in the

2 ground. It's number of contractors, it's the  
3 availability of the trees, all of that, so we're  
4 always looking to spread our street tree planting as  
5 equitably as possible in order to reduce that. I  
6 don't have the exact number of what the dollar value  
7 would be to reduce that timeframe, but it's something  
8 we can take a look at it.

9 UNIDENTIFIED: It's not really a funding  
10 issue per se. There are a lot of other  
11 considerations.

12 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: It's making people  
13 so upset, this notion of nine, ten years. It's  
14 getting people... I hope that the constituents are not  
15 listening. Street trees are like friends, and they're  
16 going to be so upset. I'm just wondering if we could  
17 get a number. I can't believe that it's not possible  
18 to speed up the process. Money helps. Obviously, it's  
19 not the end of the world. It doesn't help completely,  
20 but staffing and money would help, I would assume.

21 UNIDENTIFIED: We'll be happy to look into  
22 that further.

23 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Give us a number  
24 for cutting the process time-wise in half.

2 UNIDENTIFIED: Absolutely. We'll take a  
3 look at that. Thank you.

4 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Thank you.

5 COUNCIL MEMBER NARCISSE: All right. I'm  
6 coming back again. You know I love parks, right?

7 With increasing awareness of the needs of  
8 children with autism and other sensory sensitivities,  
9 how is the Parks Department ensuring that new  
10 playground designs incorporate sensory friendly  
11 elements? Are we making it a priority to create  
12 playgrounds that are not only inclusive, but also  
13 provide a safe and engaging environment for children  
14 with different abilities, including those with  
15 sensory processing challenges?

16 COMMISSIONER DONOGHUE: Absolutely,  
17 Council Member, and thank you for the question. Our  
18 Capital Division has done an incredible job ensuring  
19 not only ADA accessibility, but really being  
20 thoughtful about all kinds of different disabled  
21 children. We have incorporated in our designs as part  
22 of our renovations extensive sensory elements so that  
23 kids with autism, kids across the spectrum will feel  
24 comfortable. All of our new playground designs, if  
25 you see them, incorporate and are thoughtful about

2 accessibility, about how we can make them as  
3 welcoming, and as you said, not only safe for kids,  
4 but also as welcoming for differently abled children  
5 as well.

6 COUNCIL MEMBER NARCISSE: Yes, because you  
7 know, as being a nurse hearing the parents ask me all  
8 that, because they say, how could we bring our  
9 children to the park and our children have autism,  
10 they're not responding the same way as other  
11 children. While we own that playground, thank you for  
12 the Oval in Northern Park. It's completed. Thank you,  
13 God. But now the playground. Am I going to have the  
14 sensory things addressing the children that have real  
15 challenges needs in there, and then when?

16 COMMISSIONER DONOGHUE: I can get back to  
17 you on the when, because I don't have that  
18 specifically, but as you know, we work so hard. The  
19 first thing that we do in any capital project is get  
20 input from the community, and so we're always going  
21 to be responding to, if people say that their primary  
22 objective, their primary thing that they want is to  
23 have play equipment for differently abled children,  
24 that's what we're going to do. We're always looking  
25 to be responsive to the needs of the community.

2 COUNCIL MEMBER NARCISSE: Yeah. Because  
3 the parents are killing me, because the park, they've  
4 been looking at it, and it's been years sitting  
5 there, and now we have the Oval, they want for me to  
6 give them the date when, when, Council Member, we're  
7 going to have that playground back.

8 COMMISSIONER DONOGHUE: Yes, absolutely.  
9 Understandable. Yes, we can get back to you.

10 COUNCIL MEMBER NARCISSE: Thank you so  
11 much. Appreciate it. Thank you, Chair, again, for my  
12 second round. Appreciate you.

13 CHAIRPERSON KRISHNAN: Absolutely. Thank  
14 you both for your questions.

15 All right. We've gone through a number of  
16 topics, and there was a lot of ground that we  
17 covered. Thank you all so much. Thank you,  
18 Commissioner, for your leadership, for your  
19 testimony. Look forward to our continued work  
20 together to care for our parks and to ensure that we  
21 get the budget and resources that we need. Do you  
22 want to say any closing words, Commissioner?

23 COMMISSIONER DONOGHUE: No. Just thank  
24 you. We so appreciate the support of the Council and  
25 the advocacy for our parks and open spaces.

2 CHAIRPERSON KRISHNAN: Absolutely. All  
3 right.

4 We are now going to turn it over for our  
5 public testimony. We appreciate your patience getting  
6 through all the different topics and questions we  
7 had. I'm going to read a brief statement at the  
8 beginning.

9 I now open the hearing for public  
10 testimony. I remind members of the public that this  
11 is a formal government proceeding and that decorum  
12 shall be observed at all times. As such, members of  
13 the public shall remain silent at all times.

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

21 If you wish to speak at today's hearing,  
22 please fill out an appearance card with the Sergeant-  
23 at-Arms and wait to be recognized. When recognized,  
24 you will have two minutes to speak on today's hearing  
25 topic, which is the Parks Budget for Fiscal Year

2 2026, and I just ask members of the public to observe  
3 that time limit as we do have a number of people to  
4 get to as far as testimony.

5           If you have a written statement or  
6 additional written testimony you wish to submit for  
7 the record, please provide a copy of that testimony  
8 to the Sergeant-at-Arms. You may also email written  
9 testimony to [testimony@council.nyc.gov](mailto:testimony@council.nyc.gov) within 72  
10 hours of this hearing. Audio and video recordings  
11 will not be accepted.

12           And we'll now call up the first panel. We  
13 may need one more chair, Sergeant, for the table.  
14 We're going to call five at a time. Will Hiron, Max  
15 Barton, Isaac Kirk Davidoff (phonetic), Dilcy Benn,  
16 and Joseph Puleo. Please come on up.

17           We can start from my left to right. And  
18 because it's a long hearing, I'm going to stand, but  
19 I'm listening just the same. So go ahead.

20           MAX BARTON: Hi. My name is Max Barton.  
21 I'm a Union Representative from Laborers Local 1010,  
22 pavers and road builders. Union representation gives  
23 a worker a voice, and it's a powerful thing to have a  
24 voice. Members of the City Council, Chair Krishnan,

2 thank you for giving me the opportunity to have a  
3 voice today.

4 My union is proud to advocate alongside  
5 Playfair Coalition for the full restoration of New  
6 York City Parks alongside the Fiscal Year '26 budget,  
7 and I'm excited to use the Vital Parks tool in  
8 testimony for the first time today. A tool used to  
9 empower New Yorkers with data, which then they use to  
10 empower their elected officials to make budget  
11 decisions. Well over 75 percent of our community  
12 board's parks fall below the Vital Parks high  
13 condition scores, as once clean, safe, and green and  
14 resilient parks have been replaced by budget cuts  
15 that we've been talking about today. And how do we  
16 solve this problem? We've been talking about it at  
17 Playfair, restore our budget, hire back our workers.  
18 I would also like to use my opportunity to raise  
19 concerns about the use of the budget that we both  
20 currently have and will going forward. I'm going to  
21 talk about the felony parks contractors, not  
22 Dragonetti that we usually talk about. Our union's  
23 been raising concerns about Dragonetti for years,  
24 Nicholas and Vito who pled guilty 2022 to insurance  
25 fraud and offering a false instrument for filing a

2 second degree. I'm going to talk about Griffins  
3 Landscaping and Glenn Griffin today in 2025. March  
4 13, 2025, one week ago, last Thursday, Glenn Griffin  
5 motion to withdraw guilty plea is denied. He's  
6 sentencing for one count conspiracy to commit bribery  
7 and one count wire fraud will take place on April  
8 22<sup>nd</sup>, in 33 days. Glenn Griffin is set to receive up  
9 to 10 years in federal prison and over 20 million  
10 dollars in capital projects. Nine years to plant your  
11 tree. Will he be in prison when he does that for you?  
12 This is real and relatable. Is it solvable? Proper  
13 contractor vetting and public oversight in the City's  
14 procurement process will ensure accountability and  
15 eliminate waste and inefficiency. Procurement should  
16 be better. Contractors awaiting federal sentencing  
17 and receiving awards is not an efficient use of  
18 resources. With greater transparency, oversight, and  
19 accountability, you better believe this issue can be  
20 solved. Ten seconds. Thank you for your time and  
21 consideration to improve our Parks budget to create a  
22 budget that all New Yorkers can feel proud of.

23 CHAIRPERSON KRISHNAN: Thank you so much  
24 for your testimony. Dilcy.

2                   DILCY BENN: Good afternoon, Chair

3 Krishnan and fellow Members of the City Council and

4 Parks and Recreation Committee. My name is Dilcy

5 Benn. I'm the President of Local 1505, representing

6 close to more than 1,000 city park workers, also

7 known as CPWs, as well as known seasonal workers who

8 primarily work in New York City Parks and Recreation

9 Department in all five boroughs performing cleanup

10 and conducting maintenance in all city parks. We are

11 happy to see that they may include a second shift

12 expansion in this Preliminary Budget, which includes

13 an additional 4.6 million for the Fiscal Year '25 and

14 12.6 million in Fiscal Year '26 and outyears. This

15 funding increase will add 230 additional second shift

16 workers, bringing the total of second shift workers

17 to 470. These new workers will cover an additional

18 100 hot spots in city parks. As you're aware, these

19 are much needed positions, especially in the summer

20 when there's a lot of activity in the parks, such as

21 families celebrating live events, concerts in parks.

22 The parks need to be kept clean so thousands of New

23 Yorkers, as well as visitors, can enjoy these

24 beautiful open spaces. These positions are a pipeline

25 to employment and helping New Yorkers get job skills

2 to get back on their feet. I heard that the other day  
3 a single mother living in New York City housing went  
4 from being a park worker to becoming a CPW. That's  
5 only one of the many stories that you haven't been  
6 yet told. I am glad to hear that the Administration  
7 had fully heard us and included the much-needed  
8 funding into the budget for second shift. But there's  
9 more work to be done. I'm here today to support my  
10 fellow union brothers and sisters who work in other  
11 Park titles that need restoration and baselining of  
12 funds. Some of these positions include baselining 4.1  
13 million for 50 Urban Park Ranger positions to manage  
14 (TIMER CHIME) wildlife and ensure engaging additional  
15 experience. I will take any questions if you have  
16 anything you need to ask. I want to say thank you.

17 CHAIRPERSON KRISHNAN: First, I want to  
18 say thank you so much for your testimony, for your  
19 work, for your membership's work too. One question I  
20 have is, as a union leader as well, representing so  
21 many different Parks workers in our system, when we  
22 don't, it's my view and I think a lot of my  
23 Colleagues would agree that investing in our Parks  
24 budget, as I've said, is investing in our workers,  
25 and the cuts that you all face directly impacts

2 workers on the front lines. Can you describe what you  
3 hear from also your co-workers too about their  
4 concerns about when the parks budget gets cut? What  
5 is the impact? What does that have on the workforce?

6 DILCY BENN: Well, I've been in parks 30.2  
7 years. And I've got to give a lot of my members  
8 credit because we don't get paid a lot of money to do  
9 what we do, but we do it every day and we do it with  
10 a lack of equipment, a lack of... I have 12 homeless  
11 people. We have homeless people that work for the  
12 City of New York. It's a lot of things that... and I'm  
13 quite sure everybody know how cold it was this  
14 winter. There's no part of Parks that's inside. We  
15 work outside. This has been a brutal winter for us  
16 where we had a short shortage of equipment and, like  
17 I said to you, to be homeless at that time and have  
18 people that don't have food to eat, it's insane, but  
19 they do it every day. This is what they come back to.  
20 But I have a lot of seasonals that come back every  
21 year that have to leave, and these jobs can help them  
22 have some kind of stability in their lives. So, we  
23 can have seasonals that come back. We can have other  
24 people that have families that don't have prominent  
25 jobs. And like I said to you, the main thing is

2 taking care of all the ground that we have to cover.  
3 It's a lot of ground, and there's no way for us to  
4 cover it with the amount of people that we have to  
5 work. And I appreciate all the help that we're  
6 getting from the City Council, especially from you,  
7 the Pay Fair Coalition that come out for us every  
8 year, like I said, Mark Levine, and everybody that  
9 comes out to try to help us, but it's just not  
10 enough.

11 CHAIRPERSON KRISHNAN: So in your  
12 testimony, in your view, you don't feel that the  
13 resources that the Parks Department currently has are  
14 enough to support the workers doing the work every  
15 single day out there?

16 DILCY BENN: Not enough at all. Not enough  
17 at all. We need as much as we can get, and like I  
18 said, if they give us the 1 percent, that'll put us  
19 to where we used to be. Okay? We've never been over.  
20 We've always been behind, and every year we're still  
21 behind. The people that we have now are people that  
22 they're trying to get back from what we had years  
23 ago. They always want us to do more with less. I  
24 always say that, but like I said, my people do this  
25 every day, but you have a lot of New Yorkers right

2 now, especially the way prices are rising, food is  
3 rising, and don't try to buy no eggs, okay? We need  
4 help. Like I said, and it would help them have some  
5 kind of stability, and like I said, a lot of people  
6 came off of welfare, to PEP Worker, to CPW. Now the  
7 CPWs are being trained to be gardeners and pruners.  
8 We're trying to advance our members to do more with  
9 the help that we have, but we can use as many as we  
10 can get.

11 CHAIRPERSON KRISHNAN: Well, thank you for  
12 your testimony, and thank you for highlighting how  
13 important and personal the issue is for so many Parks  
14 workers.

15 DILCY BENN: And thank you for your help  
16 always.

17 CHAIRPERSON KRISHNAN: Absolutely.

18 DILCY BENN: Appreciate you.

19 CHAIRPERSON KRISHNAN: You too. Will.

20 WILL HIRON: Good afternoon, everyone.

21 Chair Krishnan, thank you so much. Also to the  
22 Members of the Parks Committee, and also to the  
23 Council Members in attendance, my name is Will Hiron,  
24 and I'm here on behalf of Labor's Local 1010 Liuna,

25

2 and I'd like to thank you for this opportunity to  
3 testify before you today.

4 Labor's Local 1010 is proud to advocate  
5 alongside our community members for full restoration  
6 of NYC Parks in the FY26 budget. With one of the  
7 smallest City agency budgets, every dollar allocated  
8 to our Parks matters. However, we also want to raise  
9 serious concerns about the Parks Department  
10 procurement policies that allow unscrupulous  
11 contractors to bid and win contracts, and thank you,  
12 Chair Krishnan, for uplifting that to the Parks  
13 Commissioner. We mentioned Griffin Landscaping  
14 Corporation that has a history of being awarded NYC  
15 Parks projects, specifically over 20 million dollars,  
16 as also the Chair mentioned, in tree planting  
17 contracts in the past three years, despite the  
18 company owner, Glenn Griffin, being charged in 2022  
19 with seven counts of fraud, bribery, and bid rigging  
20 in federal courts. In 2025, Griffins Landscaping will  
21 be awarded two tree planting projects that are  
22 currently pending contract registration, and we've  
23 also included the original endowment in the folders  
24 that we've distributed. But this is not the first  
25 time that we've seen NYC Parks engage with fraudulent

2 contractors. In 2023, the Parks Department awarded  
3 Dragonetti Brothers with 40 million in tree service  
4 contracts, despite Nicholas and Vito Dragonetti  
5 pleading guilty in 2022 to insurance fraud and  
6 offering a false instrument for filing in the second  
7 degree. And just recently, it was reported that  
8 Champion Electric also falsified payroll records in  
9 2016 and committed over 200,000 dollars in wage theft  
10 on a sidewalk repair project, also contracted to  
11 Parks.

12           These cases highlight a critical failure  
13 in the City's procurement process, and taxpayer  
14 dollars should not be handed to companies with a  
15 track record of fraud and misconduct. These contracts  
16 not only (INAUDIBLE) scarce funding, they undermine  
17 the integrity of public projects, they lead to worker  
18 exploitation, and they put all of our communities at  
19 risk. So, the City Council and the Parks Department  
20 really must take immediate action to ensure that the  
21 (TIMER CHIME) public funds are not awarded to  
22 criminal contractors, and we look forward to working  
23 with you, Chair Krishnan, and to everybody in the  
24 City Council to make sure that that doesn't happen  
25 again.

2 CHAIRPERSON KRISHNAN: Thank you for your  
3 testimony. One question. Do you believe that there  
4 would be other contractors? I mean, there's a problem  
5 of awarding contracts to problematic contractors. Do  
6 you accept the argument that these are the only ones  
7 that can do this work, or is there a pool of  
8 contractors much broader than the problematic ones  
9 that the Parks Department's using right now?

10 WILL HIRON: Absolutely not. We certainly  
11 do not accept Parks' argument. As a matter of fact,  
12 we have plenty of contractors, responsible  
13 contractors, who have experience in this work,  
14 specifically M/WBE contractors. I mean, we have a  
15 whole bunch of signatory contractors in our union,  
16 I'm sure other unions do as well, that can very  
17 easily take on this work, that have the experience  
18 and that also have integrity, and that also treat  
19 their workers right so we don't accept that argument  
20 at all, and again, there's plenty of contractors who  
21 bid on these contracts, but they don't get it.

22 CHAIRPERSON KRISHNAN: Council Member  
23 Brewer.

24 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Thank you, Mr.  
25 Chair. So, I asked a question I'm sure you heard. Is

2 there enough capacity to have a quicker turnaround?

3 In other words, maybe half the timeframe. And I think

4 the answer from the Commissioner was basically

5 there's no capacity, there aren't enough contractors,

6 but I think you're saying something different. If we

7 had the funding, and if there was enough staff, I

8 think you're saying that there would be enough

9 contractors to plant in perhaps half the time.

10 WILL HIRON: I mean, I don't know how the  
11 Parks Department is coming up with that statement,  
12 but I mean, we have plenty of contractors, and again,  
13 M/WBE contractors especially, that are able to do  
14 this work, that have the capacity, that have the  
15 experience, but they're just not given the  
16 opportunity, so we don't accept that argument from  
17 the Parks Department either.

18 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Thank you, Mr.  
19 Chair.

20 WILL HIRON: Thank you, Council Member.

21 CHAIRPERSON KRISHNAN: Thank you, Council  
22 Member.

23 WILL HIRON: Thank you, Chair.

24 CHAIRPERSON KRISHNAN: Thank you. Joe.

25

2           JOSEPH PULEO: All right. Thank you. Good  
3 afternoon. For those of you who don't know, my name  
4 is Joe Puleo. I am the President of Local 93. I  
5 represent the Urban Park Rangers, the PEP officers,  
6 the Associate Park Service workers, and all the  
7 City's seasonal aides in Parks. Again, thank you,  
8 Chair, for your advocacy, and Members for all your  
9 help.

10           As you already know, we're in a crisis  
11 situation when it comes to both cleanliness and  
12 safety in our parks. It is probably the all-time  
13 worst, and what I find most frustrating is, it's not  
14 coming from enemies. This is coming from friends.  
15 These are people that were elected and told us they  
16 were going to do things for us, like the 1 percent.  
17 Not only did we not get the 1 percent, but we got a  
18 reduction in workforce, just the exact opposite of  
19 what we were promised. So this, from my standpoint,  
20 is frustrating, and to me, it's outrageous, how we  
21 could put our people out there in harm's way. Not  
22 only the park patrons, but also our PEP officers.  
23 With a reduced force, that means that they are  
24 scattered thin. A lot of times, these people have to  
25 do these patrols by themselves, and they have to

2 encounter such people in parks that are less than  
3 friendly. These are people that, at times, have to be  
4 arrested. We need more PEP officers. We need to  
5 double the force that's out there, just to scratch  
6 the surface. And what a lot of people don't realize  
7 is that during the summer months, most of the people  
8 that are in the parks are no longer there, because of  
9 the pools and beaches. They're redeployed into these  
10 areas, so that leaves the parks wide open, with  
11 nobody there. For the first time in recent times,  
12 last year, I'm watching park crimes on national news.  
13 We're talking about Nightline. These are, during  
14 broad daylight, vicious crimes like rape, robbery,  
15 happening in our parks, during the daytime. And to  
16 me, for that (TIMER CHIME) not to catch somebody's  
17 attention is really a crisis.

18 CHAIRPERSON KRISHNAN: Joe, first, thank  
19 you to you and your workers for all the work you do  
20 in our parks. So, 18 park rangers per borough.

21 JOSEPH PULEO: Yeah, I mean, that says it  
22 all. And thanks to you and City Council. And let's  
23 not forget, this is serious because at one point in  
24 time, they were all laid off. And who would want to  
25 take on a civil service job without security? Imagine

2 being told that you are hired, but you might not have  
3 a job in a year from now. Who would take on the  
4 burden of taking that role, knowing that they may not  
5 have a job, you know, and not just them. Our City,  
6 like my colleague Dilcy said, we also represent City  
7 seasonal aides, which are like CPWs, but just hired  
8 for the summer. Their headcount has been reduced  
9 dramatically. These are the people that clean  
10 alongside with Dilcy's people, clean the parks, the  
11 beaches, the pools, right? There's been a significant  
12 reduction in their numbers. And there's still a  
13 hiring freeze. Our Associate Park Service Workers  
14 cannot be hired because there's also restraints in  
15 that matter, too, as well. So, I don't still  
16 understand until today why we are at a state of point  
17 where we are, where we cannot get people into these  
18 positions and let them do what is needed for the City  
19 of New York.

20 CHAIRPERSON KRISHNAN: Thank you for your  
21 testimony. Thank you all to this panel for your  
22 testimony and for your work.

23 Our next panel we'll call up are all High  
24 Line Fellows. Bismarck Ghanny, Jasiah Vega, Aniyah  
25 Cameron, Evander Tomaschett, and Nachele Johnson.

2 BISMARCK GHANNY: Hi. Good afternoon,  
3 Chairs of the Committee. My name is Bismark Ghanny,  
4 and I'm representing myself as part of the High Line  
5 Fellows program. I go to (INAUDIBLE) High School, and  
6 I went to High Line when I was a junior. Oh, I'm  
7 sorry. I'll restart.

8 Good afternoon, Chairs of the Committee.  
9 My name is Bismark Ghanny, and I'm representing  
10 myself as part of the High Line Fellows program. I go  
11 to (INAUDIBLE) High School, and I live in Manhattan  
12 in the Hell's Kitchen neighborhood. I know there's a  
13 lot going on in our city. For our city to function  
14 well, we need to fund it holistically. In 2023, the  
15 U.S. Surgeon General declared loneliness as a public  
16 health crisis. Then in 2024, a Harvard survey found  
17 that 21 percent of adults experience loneliness, 24  
18 percent among 18- to 29-year-olds, and 29 percent of  
19 those 30- to 44-year-olds as the loneliest group.  
20 Some of the leading causes show huge numbers of  
21 involvement, with 73 percent blaming technology, and  
22 66 percent blaming that they have lacked time with  
23 their family. The need for connection is clear, and  
24 the solution, I believe, is parks. Three-quarters of  
25 Americans want more accessible green spaces and

2 community events to bring people together for their  
3 families and friends. Providing that, investing in  
4 our parks means investing in our community's well-  
5 being, which invests in our city as well. Parks  
6 aren't just scenery, they're essential for mental  
7 health and connection, and investing in them is  
8 investing in our City's well-being. Thank you.

9 CHAIRPERSON KRISHNAN: Thank you.

10 JASIAH VEGA: Good afternoon, Committee  
11 Chairs. My name is Jasiah Vega. I'm a resident of  
12 Lower East Side, and I'm here representing the High  
13 Line Fellows. Parks are more than just an open space.  
14 They are essential to our community's health and  
15 safety. New York City has a chance to fund Parks that  
16 have been continuously underfunded for many years. As  
17 a resident of Lower East Side, I know how important  
18 parks are to our community and public schools. Public  
19 schools constantly have to use public spaces because  
20 not all schools have the funding or space to have  
21 their own playground. More funding allocated to the  
22 Parks budget will ensure we keep parks safe, clean,  
23 and accessible for kids and the community. Parks  
24 provide a peaceful environment that supports mental  
25 well-being, offering people a place to relax and

2 enjoy ourselves. Green spaces also provide better air  
3 quality and reduce pollution, making our city  
4 healthier for everyone. Investing in Parks is not  
5 just about investing in its beauty, it's about making  
6 our city healthier, safer, and stronger for everyone.  
7 Underfunding Parks has led to people losing their  
8 jobs, less maintenance on parks, and has even  
9 impacted the quality and safety of green spaces.  
10 Investing in our parks is investing in the well-being  
11 of New Yorkers. I urge the Committee to increase the  
12 Parks budget for parks to ensure we can keep our  
13 parks safe, clean, and accessible for everyone. Thank  
14 you for hearing my testimony.

15 ANIYAH NICOLE CAMERON: Hello, Committee  
16 Chair and Members of the Committee. My name is Aniyah  
17 Nicole Cameron. I currently attend Bard High School  
18 Early College, and I am also a fellow of the High  
19 Line. I want to say thank you for the Chair and the  
20 Members of the Committee for convening this hearing.

21 Parks have been the center of cultural  
22 cultivation for years, but for some reason, we have  
23 continued to deprioritize Parks in the City budget.  
24 Each year, we have the opportunity to create a new  
25 era for parks where they are well-funded, cared for,

2 and overall continue to serve as a backdrop for so  
3 many historical and cultural moments. They are one of  
4 the most important common goods in our city, and we  
5 should fund them as such. During the summers, one can  
6 walk around and certainly find at least one picnic or  
7 barbecue happening inside of a park. If it wasn't for  
8 the paid safety workers keeping the trouble away and  
9 the paid workers keeping it clean, these moments of  
10 peace and happiness would not have been able to  
11 occur. A cut in the budget of Parks is a cut in the  
12 cleanliness and safety in parks. This would  
13 eventually lead to the diminishment of New York  
14 City's culture. As the years go by, we have seen an  
15 increase in the conversations surrounding mental  
16 health and climate change, and I believe that the  
17 attention towards green spaces should follow.

18 According to the National Library of Medicine, there  
19 has been a direct correlation between green spaces in  
20 neighborhoods and the decrease of an individual's  
21 mental distress, anxiety, and more. Therefore, I urge  
22 you to increase the budget of Parks with the mental  
23 health and safety of your New Yorkers in mind. Thank  
24 you for your time.

2 NACHELLE JOHNSON: Hello, Committee Chairs  
3 and Members of the Committee. Thank you for the  
4 opportunity for us to speak today. My name is  
5 Nachelle Johnson, and I am a High Line fellow.

6 Throughout the years, the parks have been  
7 put to the side for too long. The parks are supposed  
8 to be an open space to many, either after school,  
9 during free time, to let go, no matter what age, and  
10 yet it is continuously being deprioritized. Without  
11 the full restoration of Parks funding, we get a park  
12 that provides less than the basic necessities. With  
13 less funding, we get a park that is less safe, but  
14 gets more trash and risk. With less funding, we get a  
15 higher percentage of kids not enjoying the wonders of  
16 outside. With less funding, parents don't feel that  
17 their child is safe, even when it's made for them.  
18 But with more funding, that could be changed. One  
19 step, one funding cycle at a time, people will see a  
20 park that truly grows their community, where kids  
21 blossom and bloom. The lack of attention,  
22 infrastructure, and improvement for parks only cause  
23 less security for our communities. We need a place to  
24 be kids and socialize with others our age, and if the  
25 parks, the place that formed the joy and innocence of

2 many, looks as if it was abandoned, neglected, and  
3 isolated, it is simply not inviting or safe to  
4 anyone. That is why we need to change it. If we get  
5 the Parks section of the City budget to something  
6 better, there will be a future where kids and many  
7 others are more open to the world. Thank you for your  
8 time.

9 EVANDER TOMASCHETT: Good afternoon,  
10 Committee Chairs. I'm Evander Tomaschett. I'm a civic  
11 engagement fellow at the High Line. Recent budget  
12 cuts to the City's Parks have left them woefully  
13 underfunded. Although more funding will be allocated  
14 to the Parks for 2026, years of budget cuts,  
15 especially ones made during COVID, make this  
16 additional funding insufficient. With sufficient  
17 funding, parks contribute invaluablely to their  
18 communities. They improve the mental and physical  
19 health of people living near them, provide jobs to  
20 people all over the city, and increase tourism.  
21 Without funding, parks deteriorate and stop providing  
22 the same utility. They cannot afford to fix the  
23 cracks in the pavement that discourage runners or  
24 hire employees and create jobs or maintain the  
25 attractive parks that draw in tourists and are

2 pleasant places for New Yorkers to spend their time.

3 If you were to restore the Parks' budget, they would  
4 be able to provide all these services and more to our  
5 communities. Thank you for your time.

6 CHAIRPERSON KRISHNAN: Thank you so much  
7 to all of you for your testimony and for how much you  
8 care. (APPLAUSE) You all did an amazing job. And just  
9 appreciate for all of you in school, too, being so  
10 dedicated to our parks, to making sure that they have  
11 the resources they need. And really, besides all  
12 you're doing in school, showing by action, too, how  
13 you can get involved in your community and how you  
14 can care for our parks, so thank you all so much. You  
15 give us a lot of hope for the future, too.

16 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: I love the T-  
17 shirts, the sweatshirts.

18 CHAIRPERSON KRISHNAN: That's right. It's  
19 a good touch. Thank you all very much.

20 All right. For our next panel, Adam  
21 Ganser, Deborah Kirschner, Tamar Renaud, and Alia  
22 Soomro.

23 ADAM GANSER: Testing. Thank you,  
24 Chairperson Krishnan and the Members of the Committee  
25 for the opportunity to testify today. My name is Adam

2 Ganser. I'm the Executive Director of New Yorkers for  
3 Parks. We're the co-founders of the Play Fair for  
4 Parks Coalition and the only independent not-for-  
5 profit focusing solely on New York City's parks.

6 I want to make something very clear. The  
7 Preliminary Budget has not restored the Parks  
8 Department. We've been hearing a lot about that  
9 today, but the Administration is saying otherwise.  
10 Parks has not been restored. Over the last three-plus  
11 years, the agency's budget has been cut repeatedly  
12 since Fiscal Year '23, lost more than 700 positions.  
13 While libraries and culturals have had their budgets  
14 restored, Parks did not in June. The Mayor's  
15 Preliminary Budget for the next fiscal year does not  
16 address these lost positions, leaves the agency  
17 short-staffed and unable to do the work that New  
18 Yorkers and our Parks Department depend on. A few  
19 examples. The agency is critically low on Parks  
20 Enforcement Patrol officers, which keep our parks  
21 safe for families and communities. The Forestry and  
22 Natural Areas divisions have been gutted, notable  
23 given that we've had more than 400 brush fires in our  
24 city's parks last summer. Fifty of the agency's small  
25 team of urban rangers are in one-shots, as we

2 discussed. Those positions are going to expire at the  
3 end of the fiscal year. Administrative staff, trade  
4 people, programming staff, project managers, the list  
5 goes on. You heard a lot about operational efficiency  
6 from the Parks Department itself. I think that's a  
7 euphemism for doing whatever they can with the little  
8 that they have. How does this impact New Yorkers?  
9 They're visiting parks and playgrounds that are less  
10 safe and poorly maintained. They're frustrated  
11 because bathrooms are closed. There are less parks  
12 programming. Parks repairs are taking longer. New  
13 Yorkers for Parks and the Play Fair for Parks  
14 Coalition are (TIMER CHIME) demanding 79.8 million  
15 dollars in Fiscal Year '26 to restore these essential  
16 positions. This is a public safety and a quality-of-  
17 life issue. Speaker Adams recognized as much when she  
18 called for full restoration of Parks during her State  
19 of the City. We thank her and we thank you for your  
20 support.

21 CHAIRPERSON KRISHNAN: Thank you.

22 DEBORAH KIRSCHNER: Thank you, Chair  
23 Krishnan and Council Member Brewer and the full  
24 Committee for having us here today. I'm Deborah  
25 Kirshner. I'm Vice President of External Relations at

2 Prospect Park Alliance, the non-profit organization  
3 that operates Prospect Park in partnership with the  
4 City. I'm also on the Advocacy Committee of Parks and  
5 Open Space Partners, a citywide network of more than  
6 50 non-profit organizations dedicated to stewarding  
7 and programming New York City's green and open  
8 spaces. Together, we have a shared vision of an  
9 equitable and resilient park system for all New  
10 Yorkers. I would like to thank you for holding  
11 today's budget hearing and giving members of the open  
12 space community a chance to share our perspective on  
13 how budget cuts impact our work and the public at  
14 large.

15 I am here today to support the efforts of  
16 the Play Fair campaign to restore cuts to the Park's  
17 budget, one of the only agencies not to see  
18 restoration of cuts made in the previous fiscal year,  
19 and to prioritize funding that recognizes how our  
20 parks and open spaces are critical infrastructure for  
21 all New Yorkers. This includes an additional 65  
22 million investment to strengthen our park system and  
23 restore 795 lost positions. These roles are critical  
24 to ensuring that our parks remain clean, safe, and  
25 welcoming spaces for our communities. We also are

2 urging the City to baseline this funding to prevent  
3 the yearly budget cuts that undermine our park  
4 system. Prospect Park is truly a public-private  
5 partnership. We rely on the City to help with the  
6 day-to-day trash pickup and facility maintenance that  
7 keeps the park clean and safe. This essential service  
8 is core to making Prospect Park a welcoming and  
9 accessible space for the diverse communities of  
10 Brooklyn. Since the pandemic, visitorship to our  
11 parks has increased significantly. In Prospect Park,  
12 we have seen a record number of visitors throughout  
13 the year, which has created significant wear and  
14 tear. At the same time, the City has not kept up with  
15 this record use in its funding of parks in the City  
16 budget. Now is the time where we need more, not less,  
17 funding for our parks.

18 TAMAR RENAUD: Thank you, Chairperson  
19 Krishnan and Members of the Committee. I'm Tamar  
20 Renaud, the New York State Director of Trust for  
21 Public Land, a non-profit dedicated to ensuring that  
22 everyone has access to the benefits and joys of the  
23 outdoors. Parks, as you have heard many times today,  
24 make cities healthier, more livable, less lonely, and  
25 economically stronger. Our 2022 report found New York

2 City parks save the City 1 billion dollars in  
3 healthcare costs and 2 billion in stormwater  
4 management, while significantly boosting tax revenue.  
5 And as you have heard, they should be employing 700  
6 more staff if only the City invested properly. In  
7 partnership with the Department of Environmental  
8 Protection and many of you Council members, the Trust  
9 for Public Land has transformed over 230 playgrounds  
10 in all five boroughs, once barren asphalt, now  
11 vibrant green, shade-producing, and storm-absorbing.  
12 These spaces are open to the community members after  
13 school hours and on the weekends. Please note that we  
14 still need funding to keep those 45 of the newest  
15 playgrounds open to the community. We're also working  
16 with EDC and New York City Parks to convert a 3.5-  
17 mile abandoned rail known as the Queensway, a much-  
18 needed park and trail connecting six communities in  
19 Queens. Despite the clear benefits of parks, New York  
20 City's park system remains underfunded and  
21 understaffed, with thousands fewer workers than  
22 decades ago. As a result, New York's National Park  
23 Ranking, called the Park Score (TIMER CHIME) has  
24 dropped from 7th, New York City has dropped from 7th  
25 out of 100 to 12th last year while other cities

2 continue to invest more in their parks. As part of  
3 the Playfair Coalition, we urge the City to restore  
4 those budget cuts and fully fund our parks. Thank  
5 you.

6 CHAIRPERSON KRISHNAN: Thank you. Alia.

7 ALIA SOOMRO: Good afternoon. My name is  
8 Alia Soomro, and I'm the Deputy Director for New York  
9 City Policy at the New York League of Conservation  
10 Voters. Thank you, Chair Krishnan and Members of the  
11 Committee on Parks and Rec, for the opportunity to  
12 testify today.

13 Despite the fact that Mayor Adams  
14 committed to funding Parks at 1 percent of the City  
15 budget three years ago, he's basically done the  
16 opposite. Our City's Parks Department was the only  
17 agency that did not receive its full budget  
18 restorations last year. On top of this, the Mayor's  
19 Preliminary Budget once again under-resources the  
20 staff and stewards that maintain our city's parks.  
21 This lack of investment in our city's park system  
22 directly contradicts the Mayor's campaign pledge and  
23 also contradicts all the climate goals outlined in  
24 the Administration's Plan NYC, Getting Sustainability  
25 Done. That's why we stand with Council Members and

2 fellow advocates and Parks workers calling for 79.7  
3 million to restore and strengthen the city's parks  
4 workforce and programs. This, to be clear, is not  
5 enough, but this is what we're asking for at the bare  
6 minimum. New York City Parks has lost almost 800  
7 critical positions due to budget cuts and attrition,  
8 and the City's Parks workforce is operating at a  
9 historic low. While we appreciate that the Mayor's  
10 Preliminary Plan included additional funding for  
11 second shift workers to cover more parks hotspots,  
12 fully restoring these lost DPR positions will create  
13 stable, good-paying union jobs. So, as members of  
14 Play Fair and Forest for All NYC coalitions, NYLCV  
15 urges the City to restore the almost 80 million to  
16 DPR, commit 1 million in funding for a robust multi-  
17 agency planning process for Local Law 148, that's the  
18 City's Urban Forest Plan, and I outline more in my  
19 written testimony. But I just want to emphasize that  
20 the climate crisis is here, we get air quality  
21 emergencies a lot, extreme heat waves impact the most  
22 vulnerable residents of our city, we have to invest  
23 in our Parks workers. It's here, we're waiting for  
24 the Mayor to make (TIMER CHIME) good on his campaign  
25 pledge. We really appreciate the Council and Speaker

2 Adams' support, and we look forward to working with  
3 y'all. Thank you.

4 CHAIRPERSON KRISHNAN: Thank you for your  
5 testimony. Just one question for you all, too. I  
6 mean, you all do some of the leading work around  
7 green space and green space advocacy in our city. You  
8 know, you talked a bit about the impact these cuts  
9 have had over building on each other over the last  
10 few years too, but I will say compared to other  
11 cities around the country too, how do we compare in  
12 terms of the investments that we make in our parks  
13 and workers?

14 TAMAR RENAUD: So, as I mentioned, we're  
15 coming down in the ranking, we used to be one of the  
16 top ten, we're now 12th. A report is coming out next  
17 year, we'll see how we fared. Other cities are  
18 investing more, they're increasing their acreage and  
19 they're maintaining their parks. They also have  
20 amenities in their parks, like bathrooms, much  
21 discussed. So, the issue is really like the funding  
22 for the caretaking of the parks is increasing in  
23 other cities, and you see in D.C., there's been a  
24 huge growth in Minnesota, also in Minneapolis,  
25 there's been a huge growth in investment in parks,

2 and so their parks are improving, and that is  
3 improving the outcomes for the residents in those  
4 cities.

5 CHAIRPERSON KRISHNAN: And my last  
6 question also is just can you talk about, any of you,  
7 the practical impact of funding long-term positions  
8 for Parks workers and these temporary one-shot  
9 funding streams that we keep fighting for, what  
10 impact does that have on park services? Is that a way  
11 that we should be budgeting and running a Parks  
12 Department?

13 ADAM GANSER: I think what you've seen,  
14 since the days when the Parks Department had fully-  
15 baselined staff, is a loss of institutional  
16 knowledge, which might be an overused expression, but  
17 we're relying on seasonal workers, many of whom try  
18 to come back every year, but they're having to rehire  
19 these workers every year, and you're not building a  
20 baselined workforce to build institutional knowledge,  
21 to build for the future of the agency and for its  
22 assets. And you referred previously to the Ranger  
23 Program. The Ranger Program has been around for 30  
24 years. Many of the last Commissioners came out of  
25 that Ranger Program, and now having the vast majority

2 of those positions being reliant on one-shot funding  
3 every year, you really can't build out what has been  
4 an exceptionally important and productive program for  
5 building professionals within the agency so this is  
6 happening at every level of the Parks Department.  
7 Reliance on seasonal workers really defeats the  
8 overall goals of building institutional knowledge.

9 CHAIRPERSON KRISHNAN: Please.

10 DEBORAH KIRSCHNER: I can add one thing  
11 from Prospect Park. I think with the one-shot  
12 funding, too, it really doesn't help park managers  
13 plan for their season. The way the budget lines up  
14 where you don't have a budget resolved until July  
15 1st, the busy season starts by May 31st. We don't  
16 know how many turf crew workers we're going to have.  
17 We don't know how many Parks maintenance. So I know  
18 it's really hard for park managers to be able to plan  
19 for the high season when they don't even know what  
20 their headcount is going to be.

21 CHAIRPERSON KRISHNAN: Thank you. Thank  
22 you for your testimony.

23 Our next panel is Roxanne Delgado, Lynn  
24 Kelly, Emily Walker, and Victoria Dearborn.

25 All right. You can begin.

2 ROXANNE DELGADO: Afternoon, Chair. Thank  
3 you for identifying all the needs and problems within  
4 the Parks Department. I really think you have a full  
5 understanding of what's needed so I won't repeat what  
6 you have said. But I'm with Friends of Pelham Park. I  
7 founded it over seven years ago to address needs for  
8 Pelham Park Greenway in the Bronx. And mind you, our  
9 group is not funded nor do we work very closely with  
10 the Parks Department for many issues. Why? One thing  
11 I will say is that for democracy's sake, I recall  
12 over three years ago, Mayor Adams made a promise to  
13 fund the DPR agency 1 percent. That was one of the  
14 factors why I voted for him despite my concerns. And  
15 I think this is the last opportunity to keep his word  
16 and leave a legacy that he's a person of his word.  
17 Because it undermines democracy when we have  
18 candidates making promises that they have no  
19 intention of keeping. So if our Mayor is listening, I  
20 hope he understands if he's a man of his word, or a  
21 person of his word.

22 Secondly, regarding trash cans at Pelham  
23 Parkway, the number of trash cans they remove from  
24 Pelham Parkway is unbelievable. And unfortunately, we  
25 have spent seven years educating and encouraging our

2 community to use trash bins, and now they undermine  
3 our efforts by removing most of the trash bins. And  
4 now that it's nicer, unfortunately, the trash  
5 canister is now trash accumulating there.

6           Secondly, barbecuing. The Greenway does  
7 not permit barbecuing. Unfortunately, due to lack of  
8 enforcement, barbecuing happens. So Parks says,  
9 you're a Greenway, so we don't have to provide you  
10 with Parks enforcement, but yet at the same time,  
11 you're allowing barbecuing. So it's a double-edged  
12 sword where we're not getting the maintenance and  
13 enforcement that we need because we're a Greenway,  
14 but yet despite that fact, the Greenway is being used  
15 as a full-scale park. So I ask Parks, make up your  
16 mind. Allow barbecuing, provide us with the  
17 maintenance and enforcement, or enforce the current  
18 rules where you don't need the maintenance where you  
19 would have a full-scale park. Because when people  
20 barbecue and they stay there all day drinking,  
21 eating, unfortunately, there (TIMER CHIME) is people  
22 defecating in the parkway. To make this short, I  
23 really would like to make one big, big point. Sorry,  
24 since I came over. Sorry, Chair. I wanted to mention  
25 something very important. The trees. You're right.

2 They said, I did do my request. They said it takes  
3 over a year to prune it. But what they did was they  
4 removed the branch maintenance and now there's a big  
5 hole in the tree. So instead of pruning the tree,  
6 they just pulled the branch out and there's a big  
7 gap, a hole. And the lack of care, if you look at  
8 their website, the lack of care for the trees in  
9 Pelham Park is C-minus. And we're a very  
10 marginalized, hot-temperature community where we need  
11 our trees. Our aging trees are being neglected. So,  
12 their intent should be removed. And no new trees are  
13 being planted. If they are planted, it's ornamental.  
14 It doesn't provide anything for urban wildlife. It  
15 doesn't provide anything for us or for all the  
16 current mission throughout the Greenway. And I do  
17 complain. You can Google Friends of Pelham Park. We  
18 do get retaliation from Parks Agency where we  
19 actually have to lose our fiscal sponsor and lose our  
20 funding because we made complaints about parks.  
21 (TIMER CHIME) Thank you so much for your time. Thank  
22 you.

23 CHAIRPERSON KRISHNAN: Thank you for your  
24 testimony.

25 ROXANNE DELGADO: Thank you.

2 CHAIRPERSON KRISHNAN: Lynn.

3 LYNN KELLY: Hi, Council Member. I'm Lynn  
4 Kelly. I'm the Executive Director of New Yorkers for  
5 Parks and also a Co-Chair... I'm sorry, did you hear  
6 me? Boy, I'm off. It's been a long day. It's been a  
7 long day. I'm the Executive Director of New York  
8 Restoration Project but proudly here as a Co-Chair of  
9 Parks and Open Space Partners and a founder of the  
10 Play Fair Coalition. Council Member, today is the  
11 first day of spring. Right? Yay, spring. However, it  
12 feels like Groundhog Day to me because I have sat in  
13 this chair for the better part of a decade with New  
14 Yorkers for Parks, with my colleagues behind me  
15 advocating for a budget that really reflects parks as  
16 critical city infrastructure. Listening to the facts  
17 from the Commissioner, you know, 18 Rangers per  
18 borough, 3,100 dollars to plant a tree in a wait of  
19 nine years. If I wasn't here in person, I would think  
20 I'm watching a bad episode of Parks and Recreation.  
21 And here's the thing. This is what happens when you  
22 have disinvestment for 40 years in the City's parks  
23 system. We can change that. I know you believe in  
24 that. Our world feels upside down right now. The  
25 values that our city holds near and dear are under

2 attack. Right? Where do people go when they need a  
3 respite? Where do people go when they need to clear  
4 their head? They spend time and they commune inside  
5 our parks. For me, the safety, the security, and the  
6 maintenance of the parks is something I will continue  
7 to fight for for another decade, but we need your  
8 help. Bismarck, the young man from the High Line  
9 Leaders, if he doesn't know it, he has my vote for  
10 Mayor. Yes? And I would ask you, Council Member, and  
11 your Colleagues, that when the going gets tough and  
12 you're across the budget negotiation table and you're  
13 talking about it, think about Bismarck. Think about  
14 what he said. Think about the facts he spoke about,  
15 about mental health, and think about how we have the  
16 (TIMER CHIME) opportunity to really turn the tide.  
17 Thank you. And thank you for listening to my mess-ups  
18 here at this table.

19 CHAIRPERSON KRISHNAN: Emily.

20 EMILY WALKER: All right. Good afternoon.  
21 My name is Emily Walker, and I'm the Senior Manager  
22 of External Affairs at the Natural Areas Conservancy.  
23 Thank you to the Chair and the Members of the  
24 Committee for the opportunity to speak today.

2           Despite the strong support of the Council  
3 last year, NYC Parks lost nearly 80 percent of the  
4 staff lines that care for our 12,000 acres of natural  
5 forests, wetlands, and trails. The timing, as it  
6 turned out, could not have been worse. Last fall, we  
7 experienced a drought that resulted in hundreds of  
8 brush fires throughout our forested natural areas  
9 citywide. The unprecedented scale of these fires  
10 caused a strain on our Parks staff, Conservancy  
11 partners, and the FDNY when managing the spread of  
12 these dangerous blazes and assessing the damage. We  
13 are here today to state in the strongest terms  
14 possible that the Mayor's Office must restore and  
15 baseline 5 million dollars to make permanent 76 staff  
16 lines for forest and trails management. These  
17 positions would add urgently needed capacity for the  
18 Parks Department's Natural Resources Group to ensure  
19 that our forested natural areas are better managed  
20 and restored and that our public nature trails are  
21 better maintained for safe public access. We urge the  
22 City Council to throw their full weight behind this  
23 investment in NYC Parks and its natural areas. This  
24 is both a watershed and vulnerable moment for our  
25 urban forest. Under the new federal administration,

2 it's clear that cities will need to take strong  
3 leadership on climate and resiliency issues. There  
4 are currently 22 natural area staff whose positions  
5 are being covered through federal funding that's  
6 currently imperiled, now at risk due to the budget  
7 cuts and the grant freezes coming from D.C. We are  
8 also now working closely with our partners, including  
9 the Mayor's Office for Climate and Environmental  
10 Justice, on the creation of New York City's first  
11 ever urban forest plan. Disappointingly, the level of  
12 funding allocated to our forests in the FY26  
13 Preliminary Budget makes clear that City Hall is not  
14 meeting the moment with the urgency and investment it  
15 requires. Despite the immeasurable benefits they  
16 provide, our forested natural areas are at an  
17 ecological tipping point. Our forests contain 5  
18 million of our city's 7 million trees, absorb 70  
19 percent of our carbon, absorb 22 percent of our  
20 (TIMER CHIME) city's stormwater, and provide critical  
21 ecosystem services for the thousands of unique flora  
22 and fauna that, despite all odds, call New York City  
23 home. But they require more on-the-ground management  
24 to remain healthy in the long term. This year, the  
25 Mayor and the Council have the opportunity to be true

2 climate leaders by investing in our forests. It's not  
3 a large investment to make and would result in  
4 outsized positive benefits for our urban forests and  
5 the public. Thank you.

6 CHAIRPERSON KRISHNAN: Thank you.

7 VICTORIA DEARBORN: Always a tough act to  
8 follow. Good afternoon. My name is Victoria Dearborn.  
9 I'm here today representing Tami Lin-Moges, who is  
10 the Director of the Nature Conservancy's Cities  
11 Program in New York. Thank you, Chair Krishnan, for  
12 allowing us the opportunity to speak about the need  
13 to fund Parks, and in particular the New York City  
14 Urban Forest.

15 I'll be brief today, but I've submitted  
16 longer written testimony. The Nature Conservancy is  
17 the world's largest conservation organization. We  
18 have 90,000 members across New York State, 35,000 of  
19 whom are in New York City, and we also convene the  
20 Forest for All NYC Coalition, which is now a  
21 coalition of over 170 organizations, and we are also  
22 a proud member of the Play Fair Coalition. I'm here  
23 today to express support for fully restoring,  
24 baselining, and expanding the Parks budget,  
25 particularly for urban forestry. Tree canopy,

2 vegetation cover, and green space are crucial for the  
3 health and safety and livability of New York City.  
4 Trees and parks cool neighborhoods, clean air, and  
5 improve our quality of life. Our urban forest and its  
6 care directly impacts the well-being of New Yorkers.  
7 I commend Council, as well as the Administration, for  
8 establishing a goal of 30 percent tree canopy cover  
9 citywide to address extreme heat, both through  
10 commitments in PlaNYC and also codified in Local Law  
11 148 of 2023. Unfortunately, the continued budget cuts  
12 critically threaten our urban forest. I'm asking  
13 Council and the Mayor to fund, baseline, the Parks  
14 and Recreation Forestry staff positions, as well as  
15 fund the implementation of the first-ever citywide  
16 urban forest plan by the Mayor's office, fund updated  
17 citywide LiDAR data to monitor the urban forest, and  
18 fully fund the 2025 Street Tree Census. Additionally,  
19 I call for a full restoration and baselining of the  
20 700-plus other park staff positions and tree programs  
21 that were cut in the past few years. Parks workers  
22 perform critical services, and they're necessary for  
23 the public safety, workforce development, community  
24 health and wellness, and climate resilience goals of  
25 our city. Thank you again, Committee Chair Krishnan

2 and members of the Parks Committee, for considering  
3 our request for DPR's urban forest budget. It needs  
4 to be fully restored and protected, and (TIMER CHIME)  
5 I ask that you help us in that fight. Thank you so  
6 much.

7 CHAIRPERSON KRISHNAN: Thank you all for  
8 your testimony and for your work every day for our  
9 park system.

10 Our next panel is Tessa Huxley, Karen  
11 Horvat, Allie Ryan, and Sally Burns.

12 TESSA HUXLEY: Let me start. Hi. My name  
13 is Tessa Huxley, and I came here today as a citizen.  
14 I'm a volunteer for the Sarah Roosevelt Park in the  
15 Lower East Side, but the longer I've listened to  
16 everybody here, I thought I'd give you a little of my  
17 experience, because I have worked in greening public  
18 gardens, public community gardens, public parks since  
19 1975, and we are a broken record. All we do is say  
20 there's not enough funding, and we never have had  
21 enough funding. In 1989, I was part of a group of  
22 every environmental organization in the City of New  
23 York, that was a hard thing to do, but one of the  
24 things we were advocating for was 1 percent of the  
25 budget. Here we are. It seems a bit much that 50

2 years after I started my career in greening, we're  
3 still asking for 1 percent of the City budget. So  
4 most of all, I say take off your gloves and let's get  
5 serious, because it's really, really bad. As a  
6 volunteer, I did, since no one else here is just  
7 working as a volunteer, I'm 72, so I retired. It's  
8 just so sad to be in my park every day, where I  
9 should be doing horticulture, that's what I thought I  
10 would do, but really what I'm doing is garbage  
11 collection, and it's endless. It never ends. It's not  
12 through the fault of the Parks Department. They just  
13 don't have enough people. A couple of weeks ago, I  
14 did a major winter cleanup of the area I care for,  
15 and it was three days before those 15 trash bags were  
16 collected. So we are really in trouble, folks. Thank  
17 you very much. I know you're trying.

18 ALLIE RYAN: Thank you. Hello. My name's  
19 Allie Ryan, and I am a long-term resident of the East  
20 Village, and because of my children, I spend a little  
21 part of every day in a New York City park or a  
22 playground in Lower Manhattan, and I biked by Sarah  
23 D. Roosevelt Park on the way here, and I see the  
24 trash as well. I appreciate the City Council  
25 Committee on Parks for hosting this meeting every

2 year. This is not my first time, and I also want to  
3 commend you, Chairman Krishnan, because, or Shekar  
4 Krishnan, because I know last year you negotiated the  
5 highest percentage for the Parks Department, the  
6 Parks Department budget that we've seen yet, and I  
7 want to commend you for that. But I know you're a  
8 parent too, and you're in the parks as much as I am,  
9 because our children are close in age. But what I  
10 want to share is that I found it, like, we talk about  
11 the Parks Department being understaffed. When I first  
12 started coming to this meeting, I wanted to talk  
13 about one thing, but then I realized, no, I need to  
14 talk about the workers and their union jobs. We're  
15 asking to help people earn a living, but also to take  
16 pride in their communities. And not all parks have a  
17 conservancy attached to provide essential funding to  
18 ensure that the park is maintained and safe for all.  
19 So I'm here today to call for the Council Members to  
20 hold the line and to dedicate 1 percent of the City  
21 budget to Parks. Fully fund Green Thumb, which  
22 symbolizes protection of the community gardens that  
23 enable families to grow food, as well as outdoor  
24 community spaces. Year-round staffing. Restore the  
25 funding for 700 union jobs. (TIMER CHIME) I'm going

2 to just quickly wrap it up. PEP, we need more PEP  
3 officers. It's not just for public safety, but like  
4 in my neighborhood, it's because we have gang-related  
5 gun violence and drug dealing. Closing parks at  
6 midnight so parks can rest. And then the biggest  
7 issue I think that's going to be coming up is pest  
8 control. Especially dealing with rats, because in  
9 like Tompkins Square Park, there are 197 rat burrows  
10 right now. And the restaurant sheds are about to,  
11 we're going to get new restaurant sheds opening April  
12 1st, so we do need to add more into the budget to  
13 deal with rats and pests.

14 CHAIRPERSON KRISHNAN: Thank you. Thank  
15 you for your testimony. And unfortunately, we got the  
16 highest budget ever for Parks, and that was supposed  
17 to be a starting point to get more and, instead, it's  
18 been backsliding since, but we will keep fighting.  
19 Thank you.

20 KAREN HORVAT: Thank you, Speaker Krishnan  
21 and the Members of the Council who have been deeply  
22 committed to our parks and open spaces. My name is  
23 Karen Horvat, and I'm President of NYC Tree Pit  
24 Services. We're a for-profit social enterprise  
25 contractor and a member of the Forest for All NYC

2 Coalition. NYC Tree Pit Services plants street trees.  
3 We expand tree beds, we install tree guards, and we  
4 perform other services that help our street trees  
5 live to their fullest potential so we've been  
6 fighting for years to increase our city's tree canopy  
7 coverage. We were very pleased in 2023 with Local Law  
8 148, which codified that goal of 30 percent canopy  
9 coverage equitably and citywide. I think the thing  
10 is, goal setting is really just the very first step.  
11 So I'm calling on the Council and the Mayor to  
12 provide the funding so that our urban forest plan has  
13 a chance to succeed. We need to get past this issue  
14 of persistently underfunding the Parks Department,  
15 specifically in the areas of urban forestry. We need  
16 forestry staff just to care for the canopy that we  
17 have that's existing, which has taken us decades to  
18 establish. We need funding for the urban forest plan,  
19 including the LiDAR data set so that we can track the  
20 change in canopy coverage over time. We need funding  
21 for the updated street tree census, which lets us put  
22 a monetary value on our urban forest, and it also  
23 helps us to more efficiently support our urban  
24 forest. And finally, we need restoration of the Parks  
25 programs and staff, which have been severely cut

2 since 2023 to levels that are far below our  
3 international peers. Our street trees are the  
4 gateways to our communities. They're a gathering  
5 place, a source of pride, silently standing guard  
6 over our busy New York lives, but they cannot speak  
7 for themselves. I know that the budget must address  
8 many important priorities of this city, but what good  
9 are many of these things if we don't have clean air  
10 and water? Our planet is warming rapidly, and trees  
11 are a (TIMER CHIME) long-term investment. So please,  
12 fight for us. Invest now in the future of this city  
13 and its people. Thank you.

14 SALLY BURNS: Good afternoon, Chair  
15 Krishnan and Committee Members. My name is Sally  
16 Burns, and I'm the Planning Associate for Union  
17 Square Partnership, the non-profit business  
18 improvement district stewarding Union Square. Union  
19 Square is a key transit hub, a powerful job center,  
20 an extraordinary residential community, a center for  
21 culture, for recreation, a home for institutions, a  
22 burgeoning tech campus, and a favored shopping  
23 destination. However, its park is outdated, and its  
24 infrastructure needs repair. The Union Square  
25 District Vision Plan, USQNEP, sets out to address

2 these issues by transforming the continuous public  
3 realm in Union Square and 14th Street, comprising  
4 parkland, plazas, and sidewalks. Union Square Park is  
5 a critical open space amenity and neighborhood anchor  
6 serving as a green oasis, site for free expression,  
7 and venue for demonstrations, performances, and  
8 public events, but this intense use has caused the  
9 infrastructure beneath it to age and fail. The park  
10 was last redesigned in 1985, and its dated design  
11 fails to live up to modern expectations for public  
12 space. Also, the adjacent 14th Street is home to a  
13 critical crosstown busway, but it lacks any permanent  
14 streetscape improvements needed for a world-class  
15 pedestrian experience. As a down payment on the  
16 implementation of the entire Vision Plan, Union  
17 Square Partnership is requesting 10 million dollars  
18 to be allocated to the New York City Department of  
19 Transportation, including 9 million from New York  
20 City Council and 1 million from Manhattan Borough  
21 President for an initial capital commitment towards  
22 construction. 14th Street is a key gateway to Union  
23 Square Park, and investments in pedestrian-forward  
24 accessible streetscapes will further support Union  
25 Square Park as a neighborhood amenity, improving the

2 experience for all park users. We are asking the  
3 Members of the Committee to support a City Council  
4 allocation for this project, which will signal long-  
5 term support, help finance its implementation, and  
6 (TIMER CHIME) sustain future phases. We would like to  
7 thank Manhattan Community Board 5 for their letter of  
8 support, and Council Members Rivera, Bottcher,  
9 Powers, Chair Krishnan, and Manhattan Borough  
10 President Mark Levine's staff for taking the time to  
11 meet about this important project. Thank you.

12 CHAIRPERSON KRISHNAN: Thank you all for  
13 your testimony. The next panel, which is Heather  
14 Lubov, Merritt Birnbaum, Christina Taylor, and  
15 Rosamond Fletcher.

16 HEATHER LUBOV: Good afternoon, Chairman  
17 Krishnan. I'm Heather Lubov from City Parks  
18 Foundation, and I'm here to express my severe dismay  
19 over the FY26 budget for Parks, which will result in  
20 the loss of almost 800 jobs, leaving our parks  
21 critically understaffed and struggling to maintain  
22 even the most basic services. Particularly at a time  
23 when federal funding for the City is highly  
24 precarious, I urge the Council to restore baseline  
25 and renew initiatives within NYC Parks through an

2 allocation of 79.7 million in the FY26 budget. Our  
3 parks are not luxuries. They are the backbone of our  
4 communities, but they are failing even the agency's  
5 own standards. More than 60 percent of Parks'  
6 properties have a vital park score lower than 95, and  
7 that's the Department's own standard. This is not a  
8 minor issue. This is a crisis. At City Parks  
9 Foundation, we're doing everything we can to address  
10 some of those gaps by providing free programming like  
11 Summer State and the Puppet Mobile, sports and  
12 fitness classes, environmental education programs.  
13 We're staffing and funding the NYC Parks and Open  
14 Space Partners Coalition, which some people have  
15 spoken about, to build the capacity of the non-profit  
16 park stewards that help support the parks and  
17 contribute nearly 200 million dollars in private  
18 budget relief for the agency. Perhaps most relevant,  
19 as half of the public-private partnership  
20 collaboration that is Partnerships for Parks, we  
21 mobilize more than 32,000 volunteers and offer them  
22 training, coaching, event planning, permit support,  
23 and other hand-holding services to ensure that those  
24 volunteers are able to care for local green spaces  
25 each year with the least amount of friction. We also

2 fundraise and administer the New York City Green Fund  
3 to distribute more than 2 million dollars in private  
4 funds annually to volunteer groups around the city.  
5 And while we would encourage volunteerism no matter  
6 what, it's essential now when the agency is severely  
7 underfunded. (TIMER CHIME) Eleven Partnerships for  
8 Parks team members do this work and are funded  
9 directly by the Council's Parks Equity Initiative, so  
10 we're asking that this highly cost-effective  
11 initiative be expanded to 1 million dollars to ensure  
12 that we can continue. The Commissioner mentioned the  
13 hiring slowdown, but part of that is that there's  
14 currently a freeze on the hiring of external  
15 candidates. We have lost countless Partnerships for  
16 Parks staff recently to other agency departments and  
17 vice versa, so it's a merry-go-round of staff moving  
18 between programs with absolutely no growth. In  
19 practice, this means that our volunteers are  
20 continually working with different staff and there's  
21 no stability to build relationships. The ban on  
22 external hiring must be lifted. And finally, as  
23 you've heard, we took on the role of fiscal sponsor  
24 for the private funds that are supporting the  
25 development of the first-ever Urban Forest Plan, and

2 we're conducting the public engagement for the plan's  
3 development. And the hope, of course, is that we can  
4 use the plan to increase our tree canopy to 30  
5 percent. But with the loss of all those Forestry and  
6 Natural Areas positions, there is no way that the  
7 Mayor's Office can prepare a plan with such lofty  
8 goals and keep those cuts in place. The plan is  
9 doomed to fail before it's even been published.  
10 Restoring the Parks' workforce and its vital programs  
11 is the only way to ensure that every (TIMER CHIME)  
12 New Yorker has access to clean, safe, and thriving  
13 parks. Thank you.

14 CHAIRPERSON KRISHNAN: Thank you, and  
15 thank you for the work of City Parks Foundation every  
16 day, despite the limited resources of the Parks  
17 Department. Merritt.

18 MERRITT BIRNBAUM: Thank you, Council  
19 Member Krishnan. Thank you for your advocacy and for  
20 calling this hearing. My name is Merritt Birnbaum.  
21 I'm the President and CEO of Riverside Park  
22 Conservancy. We work in partnership with NYC Parks to  
23 help care for 400 acres of public parkland spread  
24 across six miles from West 59th up to the George  
25 Washington Bridge. You heard today about our

2 coalition's asks for this budget. We are asking for  
3 people. We are asking for parkies. We are not asking  
4 for overhead or equipment or even for pay raises. We  
5 are just asking that you put back the funding for the  
6 jobs that the City funded in the past so that our  
7 parks can be clean and green and safe. We want 795  
8 good union jobs back, and we want to baseline them so  
9 that we can stop fighting for these jobs every year  
10 and so that these hardworking New Yorkers will know  
11 that they are not expendable and that they can  
12 support themselves and their families this year and  
13 next year and the year after that. I want to share a  
14 few real stories from one of the largest public parks  
15 in the system, a district that serves millions of New  
16 Yorkers. Each year from Midtown to West Harlem to  
17 Washington Heights, our district is fortunate that we  
18 have a conservancy that contributes several million  
19 dollars every year towards its maintenance and  
20 operations through our agreement with NYC Parks. Our  
21 struggles are real but they are nothing compared to  
22 the emergencies faced by smaller parks with even  
23 fewer resources. In each example you will see a  
24 system that is at the breaking point being propped up  
25 by extraordinary workers, advocates, and partners

2 like the Play Fair members who are all doing our best  
3 to keep our parks alive, and we are all tired, we are  
4 all frustrated, and we are all here because we know  
5 that this kind of short-sighted budget austerity  
6 cannot continue.

7           A Riverside City Parks worker in West  
8 Harlem was moved to tears recently describing what it  
9 was like to (TIMER CHIME) be the only City worker  
10 responsible for snow removal in her section on Sunday  
11 morning at 5 a.m. as dozens of staircases and  
12 pathways remained to be cleared and we had  
13 conservancy staff and volunteers there to support her  
14 and rally and get the job done, but that doesn't  
15 always happen and it's possible only in a few parks  
16 and in many cases it's never available. Later that  
17 same Sunday as families were sledding and building  
18 snowmen, they tried to access the bathroom at one of  
19 our parks, I know I was there at 2:45 in the  
20 afternoon, and it was closed. This is what happens,  
21 this is what we see every day. People can't get the  
22 most basic services because there are not enough  
23 workers in our parks. This is what happens when you  
24 don't fund the Parks Department. Last summer, all of  
25 the New York City Parks Department's mowers in our

2 park failed at the same time. Now it's not unusual  
3 for mowers to stop working, but there were not enough  
4 mowers to go around so the conservancy had to  
5 authorize emergency funding because it would have  
6 taken weeks, if not months, for the Parks Department  
7 to fix them. These are just three examples, one park  
8 of how the City is failing to provide the bare  
9 minimum of what it takes to keep the parks clean,  
10 green and safe. So I'll just close with a question.  
11 At a time when our city is losing population at the  
12 highest rate in decades, at a time when we should be  
13 focused on making our city more livable, at a time  
14 when we need stable union jobs to support working  
15 families, and at a time when our very existence is  
16 threatened by environmental degradation and climate  
17 change, why are we not providing the bare minimum of  
18 funding for our city parks? It's easy. So Parks power  
19 New York City. It's time to invest in our City's  
20 budget by powering our parks.

21 CHAIRPERSON KRISHNAN: Thank you so much,  
22 Merritt, for your powerful testimony.

23 ROSAMOND FLETCHER: Good afternoon. My  
24 name is Rosamond Fletcher, and I'm Executive Director  
25 of the Fort Greene Park Conservancy. Thank you, Chair

2 Krishnan, for this hearing. At 30 acres, Fort Greene  
3 Park is neither large nor small, but it is incredibly  
4 well used. The park is located in the heart of Fort  
5 Greene and right where everything is expanding in  
6 downtown Brooklyn. Just north of the park, over  
7 12,000 residents live in public housing. The density  
8 and growth of the area over the last decade has  
9 dramatically increased use of the park by people and  
10 dogs. We welcome this use, but we have to contend  
11 with its impacts, like the erosion of the park's  
12 hills, which requires intensive seasonal lawn  
13 rotation and restoration, and the overflowing garbage  
14 cans which require numerous day and evening pickups.  
15 The park's heavy use demands adequate park staffing.  
16 We filled the staffing gap during the pandemic but  
17 our role as a Conservancy is not to relieve the City  
18 of its responsibility to fund park staff. Our role is  
19 to provide complementary services. I want to repeat  
20 that. Our role is not to relieve the City of its  
21 responsibility to fund park staff. As an example of a  
22 complementary service, our Green Team program is a  
23 paid environmental education and job pathways program  
24 for local teens, now in its third year. The majority  
25 of participants live next to the park at Whitman,

2 Ingersoll, and Farragut Houses. One of our recent  
3 graduates shared this with us. Quote, I just finished  
4 my second day of training with the National Park  
5 Service. Kayaking on the Jamaica Bay, we went to a  
6 small island and watched a massive swarm of horseshoe  
7 crabs molting. It was amazing and so rare to see and  
8 that's just my second day of work. I feel so lucky. I  
9 don't think I would be here without my work with the  
10 Green Team and the Conservancy. It has made such a  
11 difference. (TIMER CHIME) So Resident Association  
12 President of Whitman Houses, Ms. Sharpton, has asked  
13 that we expand the program to meet the demand for  
14 teen opportunities in the neighborhood. But how can  
15 we expand it? How can we expand this fourth cohort  
16 when we're being asked to fill the gap on park  
17 staffing? So I'm here to say that it's not fair, not  
18 fair to deprive our young people of programming that  
19 has an impact like this. So, we need the City to step  
20 up and restore the 65 million and the 795 lost staff  
21 positions. Parks are vital public infrastructure. Do  
22 not make us take funds from the teens. Please. Thank  
23 you.

24 CHAIRPERSON KRISHNAN: Thank you so much  
25 for your testimony and for all your work.

2 Our next panel is Michael Davis,  
3 Constance Lesold, Herbert Brooks, and Giulietta  
4 Fiore.

5 You may begin.

6 MICHAEL DAVIS: Hello, Chair Krishnan and  
7 Members of the Committee. My name is Michael Davis,  
8 and I'm a community garden member at East Harlem  
9 Rodale Community Garden. There's no better time than  
10 summer to embrace the magic and beauty of nature.  
11 Unfortunately, we gardeners haven't recovered from  
12 the recent budget cuts of New York City Parks. People  
13 come to us with food scraps to be composted, only to  
14 be rejected because the program has been suspended.  
15 Green spaces are currently underfunded and at risk of  
16 displacement. They provide a good experience as  
17 opposed to generating profit. Basically, when you  
18 hand over a public utility to private investors, they  
19 consistently cut costs as much as possible to  
20 generate profits. This usually leads to a worse  
21 experience for our people. We've seen this in  
22 industry after industry, and we've even seen that  
23 happen with the threat to the Elizabeth Street  
24 Community Garden. Basically, the New York City  
25 Housing Authority took over the land in 2012. The

2 plan is to erect residential housing there. What's  
3 happened to Elizabeth Street Community Garden should  
4 set alarms and shock throughout the community. A lot  
5 of people have already commented on my other points,  
6 but in conclusion, I just say that Rodale is one of  
7 over 550 community gardens across the city. If  
8 community gardens were private business, it would  
9 have closed decades ago. But they're not, so we don't  
10 have to think like private business, and it's a  
11 gamble, but it's worth the risk so I land my plane.

12 CHAIRPERSON KRISHNAN: Thank you.

13 GIULIETTA FIORE: Good afternoon. Thank  
14 you so much, Chair Krishnan, for calling this. I've  
15 testified at this hearing a few years in a row now,  
16 and I will submit a formal testimony as well, but I  
17 kind of just wanted to speak off the cuff since I  
18 have this opportunity. I'm here representing the  
19 Historic House Trust of New York City. We help  
20 preserve and promote 23 historic houses that operate  
21 as public house museums. They're located across all  
22 five boroughs of New York City, from the southernmost  
23 tip of Staten Island to the easternmost reaches of  
24 Queens and the northernmost reaches of the Bronx, and  
25 even under the GW Bridge, the Little Red Lighthouse.

2 I just want to kind of... these places mean a lot to a  
3 lot of people. We have over one million people  
4 visiting these houses annually, and that number is  
5 growing. Half of those are school children who  
6 utilize these places in the five boroughs, in their  
7 own backyards, to learn about New York City history.  
8 All of these places are publicly owned, and they're  
9 on public park land. They're park-zoned. We, as  
10 historic preservationists, are playing the long game,  
11 and we are not looking to just preserve these  
12 historic houses for another five years. We're looking  
13 to preserve them for 50, 100, 200 years. When I say  
14 that we want these resources to be around for another  
15 200 years, that shouldn't be a radical prospect. We  
16 should have the investment now that we need to ensure  
17 that something like that is possible. If these  
18 historic sites in public parks go away, you're  
19 depriving people of something that's really special,  
20 and it's one of those resources that you can't find  
21 anywhere else in the world, anywhere else, any other  
22 city in America. This is really unique to New York  
23 City, and it's also not the only infrastructure that  
24 needs to be supported. I love my historic houses.  
25 It's a mission that's very close to my heart, but

2 there are a lot of other resources that the Parks  
3 Department maintains. Rec centers, handball courts, I  
4 know people love pickleball courts, and if those  
5 things aren't invested in today through maintenance  
6 and staff positions, there's just no way that we'll  
7 have a livable city in the future. I really hope that  
8 you all are able to push for additional funding for  
9 the Parks Department, (TIMER CHIME) and I appreciate  
10 your time.

11           HERBERT BROOKS: Thank you, Chair Krishnan  
12 and the Committee. Thank you for staying to the end.  
13 My name is Herbert Brooks, and I'm a ropes course  
14 facilitator at Alley Pond Park in Queens. It's a  
15 seasonal position. I'm also a trail steward for  
16 Riverdale Parks where I live, and a state-licensed  
17 wilderness guide for the Catskills. I'm still  
18 actually waiting to find out whether the budget  
19 supports me going back to Alley Pond so that's where  
20 I am right now today. Being in parks, I get to see  
21 the inner workings of the park. I got there three  
22 years ago, and I noticed it's a heavily used location  
23 for barbecues, sports, birding, and dog-owner  
24 communities, not to mention the ropes course where we  
25 engage thousands of children, businesses, and members

2 of the public in the outdoors, and challenge them to  
3 build community and reach beyond their comfort zone.  
4 I also noticed the skeleton crew that we have of M  
5 and O workers, maintenance and operations, that has  
6 subsisted with 10 workers for the entire 632 acres.  
7 We don't have our own PEP officers or Rangers, so we  
8 have to call in Rangers from other parks for animal  
9 rescue, unhoused encampments, or other emergencies  
10 like last year's forest fires. Sometimes we would  
11 have to add parks cleaning or opening bathrooms to  
12 our own duties. Aside from daily use, larger projects  
13 can be affected by your budget reconsideration.  
14 Wetlands replenishment is an ongoing necessity to  
15 stave off the devastation of storms such as Sandy,  
16 which we still all remember. (TIMER CHIME) Continued  
17 greenway projects connect our boroughs with  
18 ecologically friendly routes. Parks contribute to  
19 lowering the heat index, both in terms of temperature  
20 and crime, but only if they are maintained well. I  
21 ask that you help us to not just, 1 percent doesn't  
22 seem like a lot, but also if we could just not cut,  
23 that would help. Parks are the biggest, most  
24 invaluable pieces of real estate in the city. And to  
25 close, to quote the Lorax, one of my favorite

2 environmental texts, unless someone cares a whole  
3 awful lot, nothing's going to get better, it's not.

4 CHAIRPERSON KRISHNAN: Well, thank you for  
5 your testimony, thank you for your work in Alley Pond  
6 Park, and we will keep fighting for the budget that  
7 you all deserve.

8 HERBERT BROOKS: Thank you.

9 CONSTANCE LESOLD: Good afternoon,  
10 Chairman Krishnan. My name is Constance Lesold. I  
11 have lived in Brooklyn most of over 50 years now, and  
12 I have worked on Parks issues during that entire  
13 time. I am here first and foremost to represent the  
14 interest of those people on Eastern Parkway and the  
15 friends of Mount Prospect Park who are desperately  
16 trying to protect that park and prevent any funding  
17 for a skateboard park in that small park which is  
18 used for vast numbers of purposes, including Easter  
19 egg hunts where they want to cement over a part of  
20 the park. There is one skateboard park already in  
21 Community Board 8 where I used to be chair of the  
22 Parks and Recreation and Cultural Affairs Committee,  
23 and there are no skateboard parks in many other parts  
24 of Brooklyn, and we are doing our share. I am founder  
25 of the Community Garden over the Franklin Avenue

2 Shuttle, and in that capacity was also chair of the  
3 Transportation Committee, and why we founded that  
4 garden was so that children from East New York and  
5 other neighborhoods who would not be able to get to  
6 all the parks of Brooklyn without the shuttle would  
7 have a transportation that would take them everywhere  
8 to all the gardens. I could go on and on, that area  
9 I'm talking (TIMER CHIME) about along Eastern  
10 Parkway, everybody works together, the Brooklyn  
11 Botanic Gardens, Mount Prospect Park, the Community  
12 Garden down the block, and we need you to protect our  
13 gardens, not to cement them over, to stop any  
14 cementing over, to stop, I started working on this  
15 thing over trees, and founded the Eastern Parkway  
16 Coalition, which saved many trees and led to the  
17 landmarking of Eastern Parkway's scenic landmark. So,  
18 thank you for trying to help, and I only want to say  
19 that I am sorry, Chairman, to hear that your  
20 neighborhood is being visited by ICE heavily. My in-  
21 laws came from Hitler's Berlin, and they were  
22 supported by, emotionally, by being able to go to the  
23 parks of Brooklyn, Prospect Park and others, while  
24 they were waiting to hear what happened to their  
25 relatives. Please remember, as I know you do, the

2 immigrants all over the city still need all these  
3 parks, and I'm going to hand you this, which is a  
4 scene where a family that looked like an ordinary  
5 middle-class family was being divided on the streets.  
6 I don't know whether... the father was taken off in a  
7 Fire Department ambulance for no good reason, the  
8 mother was taken off in a police car, and the two  
9 little children were taken off in a separate police  
10 car. I don't know whether ICE was involved with this  
11 or it was strictly the 71st Precinct, and nobody  
12 wants to tell anything about why this extraordinary  
13 thing happened. Please remember the immigrants and  
14 their need for the gardens. Thank you.

15 CHAIRPERSON KRISHNAN: Thank you very much  
16 for your testimony.

17 Now we have a few virtual panelists as  
18 well who have been waiting. First up will be Isabel  
19 Friedman.

20 ISABEL FRIEDMAN: Good afternoon, Chair  
21 Kishan and Members of the Committee on Parks and  
22 Recreation. My name is Isabel Friedman. I'm an  
23 Environmental Health Advocate at the Natural  
24 Resources Defense Council. NRDC has long advocated  
25 for expansion of the city's tree canopy and the

2 deepened investment in environmental programs. For  
3 many years, the city's incredible park system has  
4 been significantly underfunded and understaffed, with  
5 the City (INAUDIBLE) a fraction of the budget on  
6 parks compared to other major cities. While running  
7 for office, Mayor Adams repeatedly pledged that 1  
8 percent of the budget would go to Parks, saying that  
9 parks were not a luxury, but a necessity. Needless to  
10 say, this commitment has not been met. Chair  
11 Krishnan, himself, has argued in the past that urban  
12 forests are directly connected to public health,  
13 housing, and racial and immigrant justice. On top of  
14 all the key benefits outlined by others today, trees  
15 mitigate the urban heat island effect by lowering air  
16 temperatures. As temperatures continue to rise and  
17 heat waves are prolonged, ensuring equitable access  
18 to cooling must be a priority (INAUDIBLE) by  
19 neighborhoods who are already minimally overburdened  
20 have the lowest access to green spaces, and  
21 experience temperatures an average of 5 degrees  
22 hotter than the rest of the city. The proposed budget  
23 is insufficient to support the necessary expansion  
24 and maintenance of our urban forests, especially  
25 given the obligation under Local Law 148 to reach 30

2 percent treaty canopy cover. In order to achieve a  
3 commitment to climate resiliency and community  
4 protection, the City needs to provide the Parks  
5 Department with sufficient resources for the staff  
6 and (INAUDIBLE) do this. We are calling on the Mayor  
7 and the City Council to dedicate 1 percent of the  
8 (INAUDIBLE) budget to the Parks Department, with a  
9 focus on expanding access to green spaces for the  
10 farmland community, and continue the (INAUDIBLE) to  
11 achieve 30 percent treaty canopy cover by 2035. Thank  
12 you for the opportunity to comment today. My  
13 colleague Eric Goldstein and I look forward to  
14 working with you all.

15 CHAIRPERSON KRISHNAN: Thank you so much  
16 for your testimony.

17 Next up we have Romke Hoogwaerts.

18 SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: You may begin.

19 ROMKE HOOGWARTS: Hi. I hope you can hear  
20 me. Thanks for this distinguished Council for  
21 offering me the opportunity to speak today. Thank  
22 you, Chair Krishnan.

23 I know that you're a Mets fan, so I  
24 apologize in advance for what I'm about to propose.  
25 New York is set to host the World Cup in 2026, and

2 yet constituents are constantly challenged to find  
3 spaces to play. Of course, New York City has limited  
4 space, but I would like to argue that we should  
5 reconsider the usage of a few sites that we already  
6 have. Soccer is unique in that you can play with just  
7 two people, bring a ball to a pitch, and people will  
8 come together to play. It's magnetic. Our city is  
9 full of soccer fanatics. Soccer pitches are  
10 remarkably amenable to other sports like American  
11 football, lacrosse, cricket, ultimate frisbee, and  
12 various cultural events. Soccer fields are basically  
13 giant multipurpose playgrounds. Now, of course,  
14 baseball is a vital historic American sport, but as  
15 our city grows, becomes more international, and  
16 critically is hosting the upcoming World Cup, it may  
17 be time to reconsider the allocation of our sports  
18 fields in our city parks. Let's look at Central Park.  
19 It has 25 baseball fields, and not one soccer pitch.  
20 I would like to propose converting the six fields  
21 within the Great Lawn to multipurpose soccer pitches,  
22 keeping two ball fields just above the rink. I would  
23 also like to propose that half of the ball fields in  
24 North Meadows be converted. However, for those, I  
25 would suggest urban farms, inspired by the efforts of

2 Amber Tam. As for Heckscher Ballfields in the south,  
3 those are historic and should absolutely be  
4 preserved. I am a first-generation American. I've  
5 lived here for 16 years, and I love this city's  
6 soccer community. I've played in paid leagues, free  
7 pickup games, and tournaments across Manhattan,  
8 Queens, and Brooklyn. I've even had the pleasure to  
9 play alongside Newcomer's Football Club, a crew of  
10 players mostly consisting of asylum seekers passing  
11 through the shelter system. It's a reminder that  
12 public access to soccer is a fantastic way to bring  
13 citizens together. Let me close out by mentioning  
14 financial opportunities. This proposal would allow  
15 the Parks Department to make use of the 20-million-  
16 dollar budget EDC has allocated for fan events  
17 related to the World Cup. Central Park is an ideal  
18 (TIMER CHIME) location for such events, considering  
19 all the tourists that will be there between games.  
20 And finally, this would also create opportunities for  
21 lucrative sponsorships, potentially offsetting any  
22 costs this conversion would accrue. Had he been alive  
23 today, I would like to think that Charles B. Stover  
24 would have loved this proposal. Thank you for your  
25 time and consideration. And lastly, for the record,

2 let's go Mets. If I still have a second, I just want  
3 to shout out Hattie Carthen and her tree planting  
4 initiatives in the late '60s, the work that she was  
5 able to do with Mayor Lindsay. She was able to plant  
6 1,500 trees in a matter of like two years or three  
7 years or something like that. It's a testament to  
8 what we can do if we work together with the Mayoral's  
9 office. It's absolutely possible. The idea that it  
10 would take nine years to plant trees is absolutely  
11 ridiculous. I just want to throw that out there as  
12 well. Thank you to everybody today.

13 CHAIRPERSON KRISHNAN: Thank you for your  
14 testimony. And indeed, let's go Mets.

15 Next up we have Roberto Sosa.

16 SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: You may begin.

17 ROBERTO SOSA: Hello, my name is Roberto  
18 Sosa. (SPEAKING SPANISH)

19 CHAIRPERSON KRISHNAN: (SPEAKING SPANISH)

20 Next we have Alejandra Ng.

21 ALEJANDRA NG: Hey, I hope you can hear  
22 me. Thank you, Chair Krishnan and Members of the  
23 Parks Committee. My name is Alejandra Ng, and I am  
24 the Assistant Director of NYJTL's Community Tennis  
25 Programs. I'm speaking because we are seeking a

2 million dollars under the Council's Physical  
3 Education and Fitness Initiative, which would be our  
4 first increase in over 16 years. During the past 16  
5 years, everything has gone up. Labor permits, minimum  
6 wage, and we are struggling to maintain the quality  
7 of programming that we are used to at our current  
8 level of funding. So, please, increased funding to  
9 NYJTL's community programs is vitally needed. It is  
10 our belief that talent is universal, but access and  
11 opportunity are not, and that is why we have strived  
12 for over 50 years to introduce the sport of tennis to  
13 all children. And with the Council as our partner,  
14 NYJTL has become the largest tennis and education  
15 organization in the country. I'm going to kind of  
16 just take a little tangent. I'm a product of this  
17 organization. I grew up, you know, doing programming  
18 in New York City parks and playgrounds, and I  
19 wouldn't be where I am without this organization. I  
20 wouldn't be able to help the over 10,000 kids that we  
21 help bring tennis to annually every year. We're in  
22 over, I think, 25 parks across the city. You know,  
23 all five boroughs, including Staten Island,  
24 (INAUDIBLE). The majority of our participants, I  
25 think over 70 percent, are ages 10 and under, and

2 that's, you know, we need to be able to combat, you  
3 know, the obesity crisis, get these kids young, get  
4 them active while we still can. Over 75 percent of  
5 the youth that we serve identify as Black, African  
6 American, Latino, and/or Asian. Over 80 percent of  
7 our families report with being low income based on  
8 New York City's area median income. And let's not  
9 just think about the young ones that we serve, but  
10 also our older kids. We employ over 100 coaches every  
11 year. 50 percent of these coaches are in high school  
12 or college. For a lot of them, we are their first  
13 job. And we just want to be able to continue  
14 providing training the way we are. Thank you.

15 CHAIRPERSON KRISHNAN: Thank you for your  
16 testimony. And going back to in person, our next  
17 witness is Christopher Leon Johnson.

18 CHRISTOPHER LEON JOHNSON: Hello, Chair  
19 Shekar Krishnan. My name is Christopher Leon Johnson.  
20 I know it's kind of last person. But I'm here to ask  
21 for support for the parks. Yeah, the parks need 1  
22 percent. I know what's going on here is that the  
23 Speaker, Adrienne Adams, is weaponizing this budget  
24 to make sure all these non-profits support her  
25 campaign for Mayor. And if they don't, then she won't

2 fund the non-profits. At the same time, we have to  
3 save all these parks in this budget. Eric Adams is  
4 out the door. So while Eric Adams is out the door, he  
5 needs to do the right thing for all these non-profits  
6 and fund their non-profits through the executive  
7 budget. The Speaker needs to be watched by all these  
8 non-profits that serve the parks because she is going  
9 to weaponize this budget to make all these non-  
10 profits support her campaign for Mayor and, if they  
11 don't support her campaign for Mayor, then she won't  
12 give them the money that they need to sustain their  
13 services. While that happens, guys, you guys, all you  
14 non-profits need to call the FBI on Adrienne Adams.  
15 You need to call the DOI on Adrienne Adams. Record  
16 all her conversations. Anytime she gives you a call,  
17 record them. Get a copy of everything that she does  
18 because she's going to weaponize the budget with the  
19 help of Justin Brannan, a.k.a. Fester, to make sure  
20 you guys support her campaign for Mayor. We need to  
21 fund the parks, fund all these non-profits that  
22 support the parks. Save Bushwick Inlet Park. Save  
23 Bushwick Inlet Park in Brooklyn, New York, Lincoln  
24 Restler's District. Lincoln Restler, to support... save  
25 Bushwick Inlet Park. Lincoln Restler, please do it.

2 At the same time, last 20 seconds, we need to make  
3 sure these bike dock stations be inside the parks. I  
4 know Marte introduced a bill to your Committee to put  
5 the bike charge lanes in the parks. This needs to  
6 happen under this budget. We need to put that  
7 deliverista hub outside City Hall. Protect our  
8 deliverances. Protect our migrants. But all you non-  
9 profits, if Adrienne Adams (TIMER CHIME) threatens  
10 you guys and gals, call the FBI. Go to 26 Federal  
11 Plaza and report her to the federal government, and  
12 let's get her arrested. Take care.

13 CHAIRPERSON KRISHNAN: Thanks for your  
14 testimony.

15 We now have Dr. George Sands.

16 DR. GEORGE SANDS: Thank you for your  
17 persistence and perseverance. I want to compliment  
18 all the Council Members and the Chairman for having a  
19 rigorous review of Parks and asking really good  
20 questions.

21 My name is George Sands, and I'm speaking  
22 for the Friends of Mount Prospect Park, which is a  
23 member of the Forest for All New York City Coalition.  
24 And I'm going to go through my testimony, which I did  
25 submit, and then I have a comment from just sitting

2 here and watching everything happen over the last few  
3 hours. One of the themes clearly is concern about the  
4 environment, that New York City is getting hotter.  
5 And, you know, as we consider the New York City  
6 parks, the future and the protection of green space  
7 and the tree canopies, it's very clear that the  
8 weather continues to get hotter, and that it's an  
9 increasing problem for New York. And we've already  
10 talked about it today several times, about the Fire  
11 in Prospect Park. That was inconceivable a year ago,  
12 right, and so it's happening more and more. So as we  
13 all deal with the hotter temperatures, the parks are  
14 an important resource for New Yorkers. The green  
15 space helps. (phone ringing Eric Merrill-Sands,  
16 FaceTime video) I can't believe this. The green space  
17 helps cool the environment and allows New York  
18 respite from the heat. Many within the New York City  
19 government have talked about keeping things green.  
20 Paving over green space in parks for any reason is  
21 inconsistent with that vision and puts New Yorkers at  
22 greater risk for the heat (TIMER CHIME) to come. The  
23 proposal to pave historic Mount Prospect Park in  
24 Prospect Heights, Brooklyn, will remove an important  
25 resource for the neighborhood to survive the heat.

2 Paving is a bad precedent to start in this city. The  
3 call for another skateboard facility in Brooklyn is  
4 better served by paving a previously paved space. We  
5 should keep all the green space we have. It will only  
6 get more important with time. How will you all feel  
7 in 10 to 15 years as the planet and New York City  
8 continues to get hotter and hotter if you support  
9 paving Mount Prospect Park? Will you regret it?

10           And then, separate from that testimony  
11 which was submitted, it's very clear we've been  
12 talking about the trees and the environment and I  
13 think people are all concerned on some level about  
14 exactly what we're talking about, the climate and how  
15 parks fits into that. And then we're talking about  
16 how to manage the finite resources. I only heard one  
17 allusion to what parks brings to this city. You think  
18 about the number of people that use our parks,  
19 tourists who come from outside New York. When you  
20 walk into Central Park, almost ever, and there's tons  
21 of tourists everywhere, the High Line, Prospect Park,  
22 if there's some way to quantify the revenue or how  
23 that impacts the city on the plus side, because we're  
24 always talking about the cost and everybody's  
25 thinking about the parks as a cost. But the parks is

2 a major source of bringing people in. And if you use  
3 Prospect Park on the weekends, it's challenging to  
4 bike because people are out there totally not aware  
5 of what's happening. Same thing in Central Park and  
6 they're redoing the roadway in Central Park to  
7 finally account for the tourists and the bikes and  
8 everything. That's because the tourists come, and  
9 they bring revenue. So, if someone can figure out a  
10 way for us to quantify that and share that with the  
11 executive or whoever that will be in coming years,  
12 maybe we can create some of the more positive energy  
13 in the parks and make it not a cost but an important  
14 service for those coming to visit us and for the New  
15 Yorkers who've lived here for however many years.  
16 Thank you for your continued attention and thank you  
17 for allowing me to be the last person to testify.

18 CHAIRPERSON KRISHNAN: Thank you for your  
19 testimony. Thank you for closing us out with a very  
20 good suggestion, too, that I think is a very helpful  
21 idea of a way to quantify the benefits of parks.  
22 Thank you so much.

23 GEORGE SANDS: Thank you.

24 CHAIRPERSON KRISHNAN: Well, we are at the  
25 end here.

2           If we inadvertently missed anyone who  
3 registered to testify today and has yet to be called,  
4 please use the Zoom raise hand function if you are  
5 testifying remotely, and you will be called in the  
6 order that your hand has been raised.

7           If you are testifying in person, please  
8 come to the dais.

9           Seeing none, I will now close the  
10 hearing.

11           Thank you to the members of the  
12 Administration and the members of the public who have  
13 joined us today. Thank you to the Parks Department,  
14 this hearing. Thank you to all our Council Staff, our  
15 Sergeants here. We appreciate it all. Thanks very  
16 much.

17           This hearing is now closed. [GAVEL]  
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C E R T I F I C A T E

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



Date April 15, 2025