

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 21, 2024  
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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  
Sandy Nurse  
Vickie Paladino  
Sandra Ung

## A P P E A R A N C E S

Sue Donoghue  
New York City Parks

Mark Focht  
New York City Parks

Matt Drury  
New York City Parks

Jennifer Greenfeld  
New York City Parks

Daniella Jimenez  
Student

Christian Mia  
Student

Meredith Thomson  
Council District 37

Maximus Alexander Barton  
Labors Local 1010

Christopher Loscalzo  
Local 1010 Laborers Employers Cooperation and  
Education Trust

Alia Soomro  
New York League of Conservation Voters

Adam Ganser  
New Yorkers for Parks

Lynn Kelly  
New York Restoration Project

Morgan Monaco  
Prospect Park Alliance

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

Emily Walker  
Natural Areas Conservancy

Isaac Kirk-Davidoff  
Parks worker

Heather Lubov  
City Parks Foundation

Sarah Balistreri  
Trees New York

Christine Taylor

Rosa Chang  
Gotham Park

Giulietta Fiore  
Historic House Trust of New York City

Scott Daly  
NYJTL

Joe Puleo  
Local 983 DC 37

Morlena Giga  
Local 983 DC 37

John Sorico  
Center for an Urban Future

Ralph Baselice  
Park Enforcement Sergeant

Merritt Birnbaum  
Riverside Park Conservancy

Joby Jacob  
Eastern Queens Greenway

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

Kathleen Corrigan  
Friends of Tompkin Square Park

Leona Chin  
Kissena Synergy

Aislinn Klein  
The Municipal Art Society of New York

Sally Burns  
Union Square Partnership

Savona McClain  
West Harlem Park Fund

Elise Herschlag  
Council District 22

Lonnie Portis  
We Act for Environmental Justice

Diana Finch  
Bronx Park East Community Association

Jessica Burk  
Friends of Crocheron & John Golden Park

Tami Lin Moges  
Nature Conservancy's New York City Program

Jennifer Seda  
Bronx River Alliance

Suebeen Kim  
Natural Areas Conservancy

Marieke Bender  
Forest for All Coalition

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

Georgia Silvera Seamans  
Washington Square Park Eco Projects

Susan Littman  
Lover of Parks

Rosamond Fletcher  
Fort Greene Park Conservancy

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COMMITTEE ON PARKS AND RECREATION

6

SERGEANT AT ARMS: Mic check, mic check, mic check on today's Committee on Parks and Recreation. Today's date is March 21, 2024 in the Committee Room recorded by Walter Lewis.

SERGEANT AT ARMS: Alright, good morning. Welcome to the hearing on the Committee on Parks and Recreation. At this time, please silence all electronics and do not approach the dais at any time. If you need to submit a testimony online, you may do so at [testimony@council.nyc.gov](mailto:testimony@council.nyc.gov). That is [testimony@council.nyc.gov](mailto:testimony@council.nyc.gov). If you need any assistance, please contact the Sergeant at Arms. Chair, you may begin.

CHAIRPERSON KRISHNAN: Thank you so much everyone. Good morning or good afternoon I should say and welcome. It's all blowing together at this point but good afternoon and welcome to the Parks and Recreations Committee Hearing on the Fiscal 2025 Preliminary Budget and the Preliminary Mayor's Management Report for the Department of Parks and Recreation. My name is Shekar Krishnan and I am the Chair of the Council's Parks and Recreation Committee.

1  
2 As Council Members come in from their own budget  
3 hearings, I'll acknowledge them as they join us and  
4 I'd also like to thank our Parks Commissioner  
5 Donoghue and our incredible leadership team from  
6 parks for being here today and all your great work.

7 Today, we will be hearing testimony from them and  
8 from Department of Parks and Recreation overall as  
9 well as the general public on its Fiscal 2025  
10 Preliminary Budget which totals \$583.7 million. A  
11 decrease of \$54.5 million since adoption. This is  
12 clearly less than one percent of the total city  
13 budget for Fiscal 2024. Yet another year where Mayor  
14 Adams has not fulfilled his promise of ensuring the  
15 Parks Department budget is at one percent if not more  
16 but it always wasn't this way.

17 The Fiscal 1938 budget for the Department of  
18 Parks and Recreation was \$8.8 million out of a total  
19 \$590 million New York City budget, a 1.5 percent  
20 proximation of the total budget. Fiscal Year 1962 to  
21 1963, the budgeted headcount for the Department of  
22 Parks was \$10,049, 6,015 full time and 4,034 seasonal  
23 workers. The budget for that year was \$38.3 million  
24 out of a total \$2.8 billion New York City budget or  
25 1.4 percent of the total city budget.

1  
2 Moving onto Fiscal Year 1975 and 1976 City  
3 Budget. Amidst the city's worst financial crisis,  
4 even then Mayor Beam oversaw Parks Department with a  
5 budgeted headcount of 11,868 workers: 6,332 full time  
6 workers; and 5,536 seasonal staff. With the budget  
7 in 1975, during our city's fiscal crisis of \$158  
8 million out of the total \$13.2 billion in our New  
9 York City budget or 1.2 percent of the total budget.  
10 And yes, we went into the city archives to find all  
11 of these budgets and I want to thank our incredible  
12 Parks Committee Staff for doing so but the point is  
13 clear, again, 1938 1.5 percent, 1962 1.4 percent,  
14 1975-1976 in a fiscal crisis a real, not manufactured  
15 fiscal crisis, a budget of 1.2 percent for Parks of  
16 the New York City Budget.

17 Let's fast forward and time travel to the  
18 present. Fiscal year 2025 Preliminary Budget keeping  
19 those numbers in mind, as a full-time budgeted  
20 headcount of 4,510 and 3,457 full time equivalence,  
21 for a total of 7,967 with a budget of \$583.7 million  
22 total out of a budget of \$109 billion or 0.5 percent  
23 of the total budget.

24 Let those numbers sink in. In 1975-1976, 11,000  
25 Parks workers and a budget of 1.2 percent. In 1962,



1 a workforce of 6,015 yet here with 11,000 in 1975  
2 Parks workers and a budget of 1.2 percent. We have  
3 here a workforce of 7,900 workers. About 40, 50  
4 years later, we are down to a workforce of 7,900. We  
5 are down to a budget not of 1.2 percent but 0.5  
6 percent of the city budget. The decline and  
7 disinvestment in our Parks by New York City  
8 government is astonishing, decade after decade.

10 Additional analysis from New Yorkers for Parks  
11 stated that this is 900 fewer parks workers than the  
12 Fiscal 2024 budget and 800 fewer than pre-COVID. At  
13 a time when we have a Mayor that campaigns on one  
14 percent of our city budget for Parks that claims to  
15 want to invest in our green spaces and claims to want  
16 to make sure every New Yorker has access to green  
17 spaces, yet what we're facing are cuts after cuts and  
18 the loss of Parks worker positions. What we're  
19 facing is a manufactured fiscal crisis. Not a real  
20 one because we in the Council have shown that our  
21 revenue is far higher than what City Hall and OMB  
22 have stated. A manufactured fiscal crisis blaming  
23 asylum seekers and using asylum seekers falsely as a  
24 scapegoat to cut from every single city service that  
25 asylum seekers, as well as all New Yorkers depend on,

1 and that includes our parks and public spaces.

2 Because from asylum seekers who are just coming here  
3 to all New Yorkers, what we all need is more green  
4 space, more park space for us to rest, to recover, to  
5 bring us together.  
6

7 For someone as our Mayor claims to get stuff  
8 done, he has not gotten stuff done when it comes to  
9 our parks. He has failed his campaign promise of one  
10 percent and year after year, we are here fighting to  
11 reverse cuts that never should have happened in the  
12 first place.

13 The previous two plans have further reduced the  
14 headcount by another 659 positions, as part of  
15 vacancy reductions, a hiring freeze and the  
16 elimination of Plan NYC initiatives. This combined  
17 with massive budget cuts will only further the  
18 degradation of our parks as the Mayor, as I  
19 mentioned, uses increased, inflated, asylum seeker  
20 costs to justify the disinvestment in our city's  
21 parks. These positions could have supported New  
22 Yorkers, provided good paying jobs to those in need,  
23 right? Because as I've always said, you cannot cut  
24 your way to prosperity. You invest and you  
25 especially invest in social services, in social

1 spaces like our parks, which not only we depend on  
2 but also provide a mean for economic stability and  
3 prosperity for all New Yorkers.  
4

5 But these positions have been cut and they have  
6 been cut to save a small portion of the total budget,  
7 which will have a large negative impact on the parks  
8 that are enjoyed by millions each year, newly  
9 arriving New Yorkers as well as New Yorkers who have  
10 been here for decades.

11 Not only have these positions been cut, but there  
12 is still an ongoing hiring freeze, parks being one of  
13 the few agencies that still has a hiring freeze but  
14 is preventing the Department from doing what they  
15 need and hiring sufficient staff to ensure their  
16 parks, our parks are in good, working order. This  
17 means as a result of these cuts and positions last,  
18 that bathrooms won't be opened or they'll close even  
19 earlier. Trash won't be picked up in our parks.  
20 Garbage cans will be overflowing. Shifts, cleaning  
21 shifts for workers, will be cancelled and support for  
22 our community gardens and green spaces from gardening  
23 to planting won't be done.

24 Now, certain agencies were exempt from the most  
25 recent round of PEGs due to concerns about public

1  
2 safety and cleanliness. Yet the Parks Department in  
3 managing parks and green spaces across the city plays  
4 an essential role in improving public safety and  
5 cleanliness in New York City. Our parks keep us  
6 safer. Our parks provide a place for our youth to go  
7 to keep them engaged. Our parks provide crucial  
8 services when it comes to our mental health and  
9 wellbeing and of course, our parks need to be clean  
10 for our city, for our streets to be clean, then its  
11 public spaces need to be clean too.

12 The Parks Department deals with all of those  
13 things and falls squarely within City Halls agenda  
14 and stated vision to improve the safety for all New  
15 Yorkers and improve cleanliness. Yet our Parks  
16 Department was not exempt from any cuts. Not only  
17 were they not exempt but on top of that, they are  
18 still one of the few agencies facing not just  
19 restrictions but a freeze on hiring. Our parks are  
20 incredible public assets that need care, attention  
21 and maintenance. Bathrooms need to be unlocked for  
22 everyone, parents, parents of young children, young  
23 children to older adults, we depend on parks  
24 bathrooms and need them clean and open.

1                   Our ball fields and basketball courts need to be  
2                   tended to opened and clean for everyone to play,  
3                   especially as we get closer to summer. Our benches  
4                   must be repainted. Our lights need to be turned on.  
5                   Our trees need to be pruned and new ones planted.  
6                   Need I go on and on of the very basic services that  
7                   our parks need that will be impacted by these cuts.

8                   PEP officers ensure the safety or our safety of  
9                   our parks visitors and our city parks workers, they  
10                  clean and maintain our parks and parks bathrooms  
11                  every single day. When you go into your park or your  
12                  playground, look around and see the dedicated park  
13                  staff who are there, who adopt these parks, their  
14                  parks that they clean every day as their own and put  
15                  their heart and sole into it.

16                  Their work will be impacted by these cuts  
17                  severely. This is an assault on our parks and green  
18                  spaces but also fundamentally the workers budget that  
19                  our Parks Department is.

20                  These are jobs that anyone can clearly see are  
21                  related to public safety and cleanliness but the  
22                  Mayor still forced the Parks Department to take  
23                  damaging cuts and institute a hiring freeze. If the  
24                  Mayor exempted some agencies on the basis of  
25

1  
2 cleanliness and public safety, does the  
3 Administration not believe that our parks should be  
4 clean and safe too? Do they not believe our parks  
5 workers deserve the full support of our city  
6 government and city hall behind them? Additionally,  
7 the cuts to the Second Shift program, Second Shifts  
8 providing second shift cleaning services to 100 hot  
9 spot parks across the city, that will be cut as a  
10 result of this recent PEG and that will leave our  
11 parks in even worse condition than before.

12       Once again, this is not time for cuts but a time  
13 for investment and expansion. We cannot, if there is  
14 one thing our budget hearings over the last month  
15 have shown, from school lunches to 3K to our parks,  
16 New Yorkers depend on, rely on, and need these  
17 benefits and services to thrive. Yet every single  
18 one of them was cut by the City Hall.

19       This is not a time for cuts but a time for  
20 investment. That is the only way that we will get to  
21 prosperity as a city. We need our parks more than  
22 ever and the Mayor is not giving us the funding that  
23 we need. Looking back across our city's budgetary  
24 history, we see from decade to decade, to decade, the  
25 30's, the 60's, the 70's and beyond. We see what we

1  
2 have lost when it comes to investments in our parks  
3 and green spaces. We see a dramatic systematic  
4 decline in public dollars going to our parks, as  
5 every other major city in America puts more money  
6 into parks and invests over one percent of its budget  
7 in parks. We are going backwards in every respect  
8 when it comes to our parks and green spaces.

9       The Fiscal 2025 Preliminary Budget includes no  
10 new needs for Fiscal 2025. I would argue our parks  
11 have countless new needs. \$38 million in other  
12 adjustments and \$20.1 million in PEGs. The \$38  
13 million in other adjustments may make it seem like  
14 the budget for parks is growing, however, that is not  
15 so. That is merely this Administration putting back  
16 the funding into the Parks Opportunity Program that  
17 it cut in the first place. That it needlessly cut in  
18 a PEG in November. A program that not only ensures  
19 our parks are clean but provides a path for  
20 stability, job training for parks workers and New  
21 Yorkers who are on public benefits. In other words,  
22 a workforce program, a public benefits program, a  
23 parks program that was summarily cut and is a  
24 reflection of this Administrations both failure in  
25

1  
2 commitment to parks and lack of vision in this  
3 budgetary process.

4       The Committee is looking forward to hearing  
5 testimony today relating to the Fiscal 2025  
6 Preliminary Plan, specifically PEGs, lifeguards and  
7 headcount. Before we begin with testimony, I would  
8 like to thank our Council staff for their hard work.  
9 Our Finance team of Chima Obichere, Jack Storey, and  
10 Michael Sherman, who as I mentioned before, went into  
11 the archives to find this historical material that  
12 we're relying on. Thank you for your dedication to  
13 our Parks and our Parks Budget.

14       Our Committee Staff and Counsel Kristoffer  
15 Sartori and Patrick Mulvihill and my own staff, Greg  
16 Clark, our Legislative and Budget Director, and  
17 Chief of Staff Chuck Park.

18       I'll also note that we've been joined by my  
19 colleague Council Member Bob Holden and I will now  
20 ask the Committee Counsel to go over some procedural  
21 items and swear in the representatives from the  
22 Department.

23       COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you Chair Krishnan.  
24 Commissioner Donoghue and Representatives of the  
25 Parks Department, please raise your right hand if you



1  
2 are able. Do you affirm to tell the truth, the whole  
3 truth and nothing but the truth in your testimony  
4 before this Committee and to respond honestly to  
5 Council Member questions?

6 PANEL: I do.

7 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you very much. You may  
8 begin your testimony when ready. Thank you.

9 SUE DONOGHUE: Thank you. Good afternoon, Chair  
10 Krishnan, members of the Parks Committee, and other  
11 members of the Council who are with us today. My  
12 name is Sue Donoghue, Commissioner of the New York  
13 City Department of Parks and Recreation, and I am  
14 pleased to be here today to testify, joined by  
15 members of my incredible senior staff and many of my  
16 Parks team that's behind me.

17 As always, I want to thank the Council for its  
18 continued support for our city's open spaces over the  
19 last year and for championing the importance of Parks  
20 for all New Yorkers. Thank you for allowing us the  
21 opportunity to discuss the agency's Preliminary  
22 Budget for Fiscal Year 2025, and to provide an  
23 overview of our agency's mission to build and  
24 maintain our city's green and open spaces.

1                   Though most New Yorkers are very familiar with  
2                   our robust and diverse park system, not everyone is  
3                   aware of the full array of properties, programs,  
4                   amenities and families that make up New York City  
5                   Parks portfolio. Our agency plans, maintains, and  
6                   cares for over 30,000 acres of green and open space,  
7                   encompassing 5,000 individual properties, ranging  
8                   from playgrounds and beaches to community gardens and  
9                   natural areas and over 5.7 million trees. These  
10                  properties span the entire city, from Great Kills  
11                  Park on the eastern shore of Staten Island, to Marine  
12                  Park in Brooklyn, to Idlewild Park in Queens, to  
13                  Riverside Park in Manhattan, to Orchard Beach, often  
14                  called "The Riveria of the Bronx."

15                 We provide thousands of recreational and  
16                 educational public programs throughout the year,  
17                 including free Shape Up NYC fitness classes hosted in  
18                 locations all over the city. Kids in Motion  
19                 children's programming led by our Playground  
20                 Associates and nature education provided by our  
21                 incredible Urban Park Rangers.

22                 Throughout our city's history, Parks have  
23                 provided vital and restorative spaces for New Yorkers  
24                 to exercise, enjoy themselves with family and  
25

1 friends, find solace, or just relish some sorely  
2 needed quiet time and solitude. Though we are moving  
3 farther and farther away from the COVID pandemic that  
4 drastically changed New Yorkers relationships to  
5 their parks and open spaces, the after effects are  
6 still being felt across the five boroughs. As mental  
7 health issues such as loneliness are on the rise,  
8 access to green, open spaces is only increasing in  
9 importance. Though our city and agency continue to  
10 face significant challenges, I am extremely proud of  
11 the hard work and dedication exhibited by our parkies  
12 as they work together to grow, maintain and program a  
13 world-class park system, prioritizing equity, access,  
14 safety, and nature for all. I'm pleased to report  
15 that the past year has been a very productive one for  
16 our agency, and our dedication to our core mission is  
17 stronger than ever.

18  
19 This past year, we launched "Let's Green NYC," a  
20 strategic initiative to engage a record number of  
21 volunteers in city parks through the end of 2024,  
22 improving the health of New Yorkers and their green  
23 spaces. Through this program, New York City Parks is  
24 celebrating and renewing our commitment to the  
25 hundreds of diverse volunteer groups who actively

1 care for green spaces and engage thousands of new  
2 volunteers to help enhance our parks and our city's  
3 environment. Through the initiative, we have  
4 partnered with the Broadway show "Wicked" and "We  
5 Love NYC" to enhance the profile of volunteer events  
6 and attract theater fans to help beautify their  
7 parks. We have also developed a new "Let's Green  
8 NYC" website where New Yorkers can browse a directory  
9 of over 100 active volunteer groups all over the  
10 city, who are looking to get more people involved in  
11 cleaning and beautifying our city's green and open  
12 space. In Calendar Year 2023, we engaged over  
13 410,000 volunteers in stewardship and engagement  
14 activities, and we greatly appreciate this outpouring  
15 of support.  
16

17 This enthusiasm from the public is a tremendous  
18 supplement to the dedication and hard work of our  
19 Maintenance and Operations staff, who are out in the  
20 parks every day, keeping them clean and safe for  
21 people to enjoy. The Preliminary Mayor's Management  
22 Report for Fiscal Year 2024 reported an 88 percent  
23 rating for the Overall condition of our parks and a  
24 94 percent rating for cleanliness, each metric  
25 reflecting a 4-point increase over the same period a

1  
2 year earlier. Our operations and citywide services  
3 staff are also making targeted repairs and  
4 improvements to parks facilities, such as installing  
5 diaper changing stations in more park restrooms, so  
6 that families with young children have increased  
7 access to the amenities they need.

8 I'm pleased to report that in accordance with  
9 Local Law 56 of 2023, we have installed these new  
10 amenities in nearly every park restroom where a  
11 changing station can feasibly be installed, several  
12 years in advance of a statutory deadline.

13 In Fiscal Year 2023, our capitally funded tree  
14 planting program planted close to 14,500 trees along  
15 streets and in landscaped parks, the highest total in  
16 the past six fiscal years. This program is on pace  
17 to plant over 17,000 trees in FY24, largely due to  
18 our expanded focus on engaging additional MWBE  
19 contractors for tree planting. We continue to  
20 strategically and equitably focus on our tree  
21 planting efforts on heat vulnerable neighborhoods and  
22 as we enter this spring planting season, our efforts  
23 will continue to prioritize greening the city and  
24 planting trees where they're needed most.

1                    This past year, our Parks Capital team remained  
2                    hard at work, making sure our park improvement  
3                    projects were completed on time and as quickly as  
4                    possible. As reported in the Fiscal Year 2024  
5                    Preliminary Mayor's Management Report statistics for  
6                    construction, Parks completed 53 projects in the  
7                    first quarter, 19 of which were completed ahead of  
8                    schedule. We look forward to continuing this upward  
9                    trajectory as the fiscal year nears its completion.  
10                    As part of the city's commitment to expanding open  
11                    space access and recreation to historically  
12                    underserved communities, we reopened Corporal Fischer  
13                    Park in the Bronx, renovated Monsignor Kett  
14                    Playground in Manhattan, and unveiled a beautiful new  
15                    facility in Queens, the Alley Pond Environmental  
16                    Center, the design for which demonstrates our strong  
17                    commitment to sustainability.

18                    We are also collaborating with our colleagues at  
19                    the New York City Department of Design and  
20                    Construction to advance major parks facility  
21                    projects, including groundbreakings at two brand new,  
22                    state of the art recreation centers, Mary Cali Dalton  
23                    in Staten Island and Shirley Chisholm in Brooklyn.  
24                     
25

1                   In October, alongside the Mayor's Offices, the  
2                   New York City Department of Transportation and the  
3                   New York City Economic Development Corporation, we  
4                   kicked off a historic expansion of our city's  
5                   greenways, which are critical in filling gaps in the  
6                   outer borough greenway network. This expansion will  
7                   create 60 miles of greenway corridors and more than  
8                   40 miles of new protected bike infrastructure, a  
9                   major investment that compliments the expansion of  
10                  the Harlem River Greenway, which will connect  
11                  Randall's Island to Van Corlandt Park, and the  
12                  recently completed East Midtown Greenway. Earlier  
13                  this month, we were thrilled to announce that the  
14                  city will be the recipient of \$117 million  
15                  competitive federal grant to further develop the  
16                  Queens Way, a new public park being built along a  
17                  vacant rail corridor. Thanks to this major federal  
18                  investment secured through the hard work of the Adams  
19                  Administration, this innovative project will create a  
20                  new signature park in the heart of Queens,  
21                  transforming an abandoned railing into a vibrant  
22                  greenspace where New Yorkers can enjoy all the health  
23                  benefits of time outdoors. With over a mile of mile  
24                  of new greenway paths for pedestrians and cyclists,  
25

1  
2 the Queens Way will connect neighborhoods and give  
3 New Yorkers a new way to get out and safely enjoy the  
4 fresh air.

5 We were able to leverage additional federal  
6 funding through the USDA Watershed and Flood  
7 Prevention Operations program, which awarded more  
8 than \$46 million to implement critical on-site  
9 infrastructure improvements and increase water access  
10 for more than 200 food producing Green Thumb  
11 Community Gardens across the city. We are currently  
12 in the planning phase for this effort and look  
13 forward to working with our federal partners to begin  
14 advancing project work as soon as possible. We have  
15 also begun to offer expanded public programming at  
16 Heart Island in the Bronx, which serves at the city's  
17 public cemetery and is a final resting place for over  
18 one million individuals. Operation of the island has  
19 fully transferred to our agency and the Human  
20 Resources Administration and we are committed to  
21 ensuring that visitors to this solemn resting place  
22 have a meaningful and positive experience. In  
23 addition to facilitating gravesite visitation for the  
24 loved ones of those buried on the Island, we are  
25 pleased to offer thoughtfully curated tours of the



1 island led by our knowledgeable Urban Park Rangers,  
2 helping New Yorkers learn more about the Island's  
3 unique past, present and future.  
4

5 Despite significant operational challenges, 2023  
6 was a very successful summer season for New York City  
7 Parks, with millions of visitors coming out to enjoy  
8 our beaches and pools. We launched our lifeguard  
9 recruitment efforts for the 2024 beach and pool  
10 season late last year and are well underway in our  
11 training and certification process to make the  
12 upcoming season as successful as possible. We were  
13 so pleased to recently announce that the city has  
14 reached an agreement on an increased hourly wage of  
15 \$22 an hour for seasonal lifeguards, as well as a  
16 \$1,000 bonus for all returning lifeguards that work  
17 through peak season. We've continued to explore  
18 every avenue to recruit and retain more qualified  
19 lifeguards for the 2024 season including increasing  
20 opportunities for potential lifeguards to test and  
21 qualify. While the hiring process for lifeguards is  
22 still ongoing, we remain optimistic about making the  
23 2024 beach and pool season the best that it can be.

24 Turning to the specific topic for this hearing,  
25 the Fiscal Year 2025 Preliminary expense operating

1 budget for New York City Parks is \$583.7 million,  
2 demonstrating the Administrations ongoing commitment  
3 to promoting equitable investments in a greener,  
4 healthier city, and giving our agency the resources  
5 we need to continue getting the job done. Though the  
6 budget reflects some of the difficult decisions that  
7 had to be made to demonstrate fiscal responsibility  
8 amid the ongoing economic challenges facing the city,  
9 this budget will allow us to continue delivering core  
10 services and keeping our city parks clean and safe.  
11

12 I'll close by noting some of the initial findings  
13 from a large-scale study that was recently conducted  
14 in partnership with CUNY. The Physical Activity and  
15 Redesigned Community Spaces study or PARCS, focused  
16 on the public health impacts of the Community Parks  
17 Initiative, also known as CPI, our signature equity  
18 driven investment program through which we are  
19 enhancing parks and playground in underserved  
20 neighborhoods.

21 According to the study, New Yorkers living near a  
22 CPI renovating park were 66 percent more likely to  
23 have recently visited their park than New Yorkers  
24 living near non-renovated parks. The CUNY study also  
25 found that all New Yorkers can benefit from having an

1 improved park in their neighborhood, thanks to  
2 quality-of-life improvements that uplift the entire  
3 community. Activating parks with community  
4 programming and amenities correlates with increased  
5 park usage, engaging more New Yorkers in their local  
6 green spaces. Parks and community greenspaces have  
7 historically fulfilled a basic human need for  
8 connection to self, family and friends, to community  
9 and neighborhood and to nature. Indeed many study  
10 participants described connecting with nature as an  
11 important motivator for visiting their local parks.  
12 As a further demonstration of the success of this  
13 approach, we were thrilled to announce 20 additional  
14 parks that will receive significant investment  
15 through CPI in 2025 and 2025, a total investment of  
16 over \$100 million across the five boroughs.

18 I want to thank Mayor Adams for granting me the  
19 privilege of leading this agency, and the opportunity  
20 to work with each of you to continue improving our  
21 parks and open spaces for all New Yorkers. Many of  
22 you are very familiar with our hard-working borough  
23 commissioners and their district teams who work  
24 alongside our dedicated central agency division staff  
25 to deliver for New Yorkers every day. We are always

1  
2 available to answer questions and address concerns  
3 from your offices and are happy to hear your thoughts  
4 on any topic, whether it regards a local park in your  
5 district or a citywide agency policy. New York City  
6 Parks looks forward to continuing our close  
7 partnership with the Council in order to create a  
8 bright, green future with a more equitable,  
9 inclusive, and resilient park system for all. Thank  
10 you for the opportunity to testify today and would  
11 now be happy to answer any questions you may have.

12 CHAIRPERSON KRISHNAN: Thank you so much  
13 Commissioner for your testimony, for your leadership.  
14 I also want to recognize we've been joined by Council  
15 Members Nurse and Carr. I'm going to ask a few  
16 questions and turn it over to my colleagues to ask  
17 their questions.

18 Let's first talk about the workforce itself. As  
19 I mentioned in my testimony, we've seen an  
20 unbelievable decrease in our Parks headcount over the  
21 last half century and in the last year itself but I  
22 really want to understand what that means. So, at a  
23 very basic level, can you first talk about what do  
24 our city parks workers do in our parks each day?  
25 What are their job responsibilities? What is their

1  
2 role and what is the impact of losing more than 650  
3 workers through these PEGs?

4 SUE DONOGHUE: Thank you Chair Krishnan for the  
5 question and for recognizing the importance of our  
6 park workers. They are critical assets as you know  
7 in our parks in their districts across the city and  
8 every single borough. I'm going to let my Deputy  
9 Commissioner talk about the very specific activities  
10 that they do throughout the day but there is no doubt  
11 they're critical to building communities and taking  
12 care of our parks. We did, as you said, we took a  
13 five percent reduction both FY24 November Plan and  
14 the FY25 Preliminary Plan but due to the success of  
15 these efforts to identify savings, we have not been  
16 asked to identify further savings in the FY24  
17 executive or April plan.

18 I'm happy to say the agency sees the hiring plan  
19 has been approved, which means that over 3,000  
20 seasonal employees will be brought onboard for the  
21 summer season to keep our parks clean and safe,  
22 including maintenance and operation staff, recreation  
23 staff, lifeguards, etc.. In terms of some of the  
24 specifics of what our M&O staff does on the ground,  
25

1  
2 I'm going to hand that over to Mark Focht, our Deputy  
3 Commissioner.

4 MARK FOCHT: Good afternoon. Mark Focht, Deputy  
5 Commissioner, Chief Operating Officer for Parks.  
6 Thank you for the question Councilman. You mentioned  
7 in your testimony our City Parks Workers, CPW which  
8 are the entries level -

9 CHAIRPERSON KRISHNAN: Bring the mic a little  
10 closer, sorry.

11 MARK FOCHT: Sorry, which are the entrance level  
12 position our City Parks Workers, CPWs are the entry  
13 level position in our maintenance and operation  
14 staff. They are the folks that you're most likely to  
15 see in the park every day. They are responsible for  
16 basic grounds maintenance, which is litter and trash  
17 removal, responding to turf and horticultural  
18 conditions in the warmer months, responding to snow  
19 and ice removal in the colder months. Responding to  
20 graffiti, removal of broken glass. It's the basic  
21 park maintenance. It's also keeping our over 680  
22 public restrooms stocked with toilet paper and  
23 cleaned.

24 CHAIRPERSON KRISHNAN: Thank you and I first want  
25 to note we've also been joined by Council Member

1  
2 Sandra Ung virtually and Council Member Lincoln  
3 Restler.

4 So, is it fair to say that our parks workers are  
5 directly responsible for cleaning all aspects of our  
6 parks every single day?

7 SUE DONOGHUE: Yes, that is fair to say.

8 CHAIRPERSON KRISHNAN: And is it fair to say that  
9 we need more parks workers to fully staff and clean  
10 our parks?

11 SUE DONOGHUE: Thank you Council Member for the  
12 question. You know we are committed as you know as  
13 an agency to deliver on our core mission to take care  
14 of our parks and we will get that done with whatever  
15 resources we are provided. We have really  
16 hardworking dedicated folks on the ground. You know,  
17 you see them every day in your parks. They're going  
18 to do all that they can to make sure our parks are  
19 clean and well maintained.

20 CHAIRPERSON KRISHNAN: And I do appreciate they  
21 are going to do all they can and I do know that too.  
22 I'll say, I think it is fair to say that we need more  
23 parks workers to support our parks to fully staff  
24 them. So, Commissioner, can you give a sense of then  
25 if we lose 160, sorry 650 workers as we are with

1 these positions being eliminated due to both PEGs.

2 What is the impact of that? What will it mean? Will  
3 we have, for example, our bathrooms fully open at  
4 regular hours? Will they all be opened at all times  
5 like they should be? What is the impact on a park  
6 level of losing this much in terms of headcount?  
7

8 SUE DONOGHUE: Thank you Council Member for the  
9 question. There is you know, no doubt that there  
10 will be impacts. We are committed to keeping our  
11 bathrooms open. All our bathrooms will be open.  
12 They'll be open until dusk. That is we know that  
13 that's a real important amenity for New Yorkers. As  
14 you mentioned earlier on for kids and families, we're  
15 very committed to keeping our bathrooms open and they  
16 will be open through this summer season until dusk.

17 As I said, we will be relying on our POP workers,  
18 on our seasonal workers that will start coming in,  
19 3,000 of them, so we're very committed to maintaining  
20 our bathrooms, keeping them open, available to New  
21 Yorkers.

22 CHAIRPERSON KRISHNAN: But what will not be done  
23 as a result of 650 positions being eliminated?

24 SUE DONOGHUE: We'll be looking to you know cover  
25 as we have done in the past. We'll be looking to



1  
2 move people and move resources where they're most  
3 needed, deploy staff where we can in order to get the  
4 job done as best we can with the resources that we  
5 have available.

6 CHAIRPERSON KRISHNAN: So, is it fair to say  
7 you'll be making due as best you can give these cuts?

8 SUE DONOGHUE: Yes.

9 CHAIRPERSON KRISHNAN: Making due being the  
10 operative word or words there. Let me give one  
11 example. There's a Second Shift program, there are  
12 100 hot spot sites through the city identified as  
13 parks that need a Second Shift of services. Can you  
14 explain what it means to be a hot spot park and will  
15 Second Shift program continue as a result of these  
16 PEGs?

17 SUE DONOGHUE: Thank you Council Member for the  
18 question and for recognizing the importance of this  
19 initiative. Yes, the Second Shift was a program that  
20 we started last year, specifically to target as you  
21 said 100 hot spot sites. 100 hot spot sites in 62  
22 parks across the city. The idea is to have workers  
23 from Thursday through Monday into the late afternoon  
24 and evening hours in order to cover high maintenance  
25 areas. We all know the barbeque sites, places where

1  
2 people congregate in our busiest parks. Because of  
3 the necessary savings reductions, we were forced to  
4 make some very difficult decisions as an agency and  
5 so, it was necessary for us to reduce currently  
6 vacant year-round positions, so due to the staffing  
7 impacts, we'll not be able to provide targeted Second  
8 Shift maintenance coverage. But as was done prior to  
9 establishing this new initiative, we will be  
10 continuing to maintain heavily used sites as we have  
11 in the past. We will be using our POP workers, our  
12 seasonal workers, we'll shift staff as needed to be  
13 able to provide the care and maintenance of these  
14 sites.

15 CHAIRPERSON KRISHNAN: And what, just go back to  
16 your testimony of what you just said, so what does  
17 that mean with the elimination of a Second Shift  
18 program for these 100 parks in concrete terms?  
19 Thursday through Monday, they had an extra shift.  
20 How many hours was that shift and what does that  
21 mean? What will be eliminated for those five days  
22 when you don't have a Second Shift Program?

23 SUE DONOGHUE: Thank you Council Member for the  
24 question and as I said, what we'll be doing is what  
25 we did prior to having a Second Shift. We'll be

1  
2 moving personnel around and we'll be covering those  
3 what we know are those very high maintenance sites,  
4 the hot spot sites with existing staff, with POP,  
5 with our seasonal workers through overtime in order  
6 to make sure that we can maintain those very busy  
7 sites.

8 CHAIRPERSON KRISHNAN: Will the Second Shift then  
9 remain as a result? Another words, by moving  
10 resources, will they get the same amount of hours of  
11 cleaning and maintenance?

12 SUE DONOGHUE: They will not be exactly the same  
13 hours as the dedicated Second Shift but we will be  
14 covering that was cleaning responsibilities and those  
15 maintenance responsibilities as best we can with  
16 existing resources.

17 CHAIRPERSON KRISHNAN: So, best you can, making  
18 due. It won't be the same as having a Second Shift  
19 Program. Another important point I think you  
20 mentioned was you'll be pulling other resources with  
21 existing ones to make due for a Second Shift Program  
22 that will no longer exist correct?

23 SUE DONOGHUE: Correct.

24 CHAIRPERSON KRISHNAN: Which it means that you'll  
25 be taking away resources dedicated to other programs

1  
2 or parks, within the Parks Department, taking those  
3 resources away to make due as best you can in a  
4 second shift program. Is that correct?

5 SUE DONOGHUE: Thank you for the question Council  
6 Member. As Parks always has done, we will be working  
7 hard with the workers that we have who are incredibly  
8 dedicated to getting the job done and will be  
9 providing the coverage that they can to yes, to cover  
10 these difficult spots.

11 CHAIRPERSON KRISHNAN: Thank you. I'll just you  
12 know summarize, I know we've been joined by Council  
13 Members Paladino and Council Member Menin on Zoom.  
14 It doesn't add up. If there's 650 worker positions  
15 missing, Second Shift program being cut for 100 park  
16 sites throughout our city having to pull resources,  
17 robbing Peter in other words to pay Paul. Taking  
18 from one area of Parks Department to cover another,  
19 this is not the way our Parks Department should be  
20 operated or funded.

21 Can you also explain the difference between  
22 having a seasonal and full-time workforce? What do  
23 full time workers do and what do the seasonal workers  
24 do?

1  
2 SUE DONOGHUE: Thank you for the question and it  
3 is the difference between people who come in at our  
4 busy season. We have always had a seasonal program  
5 so that we have personnel that we can deploy in the  
6 busiest times of the year. So, our seasonal  
7 personnel generally comes onboard from May through  
8 September about that, about 3,000 staff as I said,  
9 will be deployed on a seasonal basis. So, they come  
10 in just for that period of time and they're hired  
11 just for that period of time versus full-time  
12 staffing that is with us year-round, day in and day  
13 out.

14 CHAIRPERSON KRISHNAN: Is it fair to say that the  
15 Parks Department is relying more on seasonal workers  
16 than full time workers at this point given the PEGs?

17 SUE DONOGHUE: They have all - the Parks  
18 Department has always heavily relied on seasonal  
19 workers. They're an important part of how we get  
20 things done and will continue to be.

21 CHAIRPERSON KRISHNAN: And my last three  
22 questions before turning it over to my colleagues.  
23 What is the budget actual headcount for FY 2019 and  
24 FY- uh through FY23?

1  
2 SUE DONOGHUE: I believe, just bear with me one  
3 second, I'm going to make sure that I get to the  
4 right -

5 CHAIRPERSON KRISHNAN: And if you can, how much  
6 was seasonal and how much was full time?

7 SUE DONOGHUE: Uhm, so Council Member, can you  
8 just tell me again your question, sorry?

9 CHAIRPERSON KRISHNAN: What is the budgeted and  
10 actual headcount for Fiscal 2019 through Fiscal 2023  
11 in terms of full time and seasonal?

12 SUE DONOGHUE: So, for FY19 full time was 4,292,  
13 seasonal was 3,337. You want me to go through each  
14 of these numbers? FY20 was 4,407, seasonal was  
15 3,558, FY21 4,299, seasonal was 2,629, FY22 4,356,  
16 seasonal 4,460, and FY23 4,830, seasonal 3,387.

17 CHAIRPERSON KRISHNAN: So, substantial reliance  
18 on seasonal workers as opposed to full time.  
19 Finally, as of right now, how many positions will be  
20 expiring in July?

21 SUE DONOGHUE: Bear with us one second. Uhm,  
22 thank you for the question. I can't give you an  
23 exact answer because it's based on attrition. So -

24 CHAIRPERSON KRISHNAN: Let's me ask Commissioner,  
25 those that are funded by one-shot agreements, how

1 many are expiring in July? Sorry for the confusion.  
2 And as you look, these positions are funded one time  
3 only in the current fiscal year. They expire every  
4 June 30<sup>th</sup>.

5  
6 SUE DONOGHUE: Yes, uhm in terms of the Play  
7 Fair, the one-shot funding, it's about 110 positions.

8 CHAIRPERSON KRISHNAN: Thank you and what are  
9 these positions and how many of them are currently  
10 filled?

11 SUE DONOGHUE:A So, for the one-shot Council  
12 adds, which we so appreciate and are so important to  
13 the agency. There were Play Fair Rangers. There was  
14 Council one shot funding for 50 one-year rangers.  
15 All FY 24 funded positions have been hired for Play  
16 Fair Green Thumb positions. The Council one-shot  
17 funding was \$2.6 million. 11 positions have been  
18 hired and uhm, those resources are being utilized and  
19 then for the forest management framework funding,  
20 that was also Play Fair one shot funding. 51  
21 positions one shot were funded and a total of 35 were  
22 hired across the natural areas management team and in  
23 addition, six existing permanent staff members were  
24 stepped up into supervisory roles to support the  
25 expanded team.

1  
2       So, I mean as you can see it's a number of core  
3 positions that are funded by one shots every year as  
4 opposed to baseline full time staff and each year,  
5 we're scrambling to fill those positions. This is  
6 the world we're operating in every time when it comes  
7 to a Parks budget. Finally, there is still a hiring  
8 freeze in place for parks right? What does that  
9 hiring freeze mean exactly?

10       SUE DONOGHUE: Thank you for the question and  
11 you're right, there is still a hiring freeze in place  
12 for the Parks Department which means that when  
13 individuals leave, we're not able to hire.

14       CHAIRPERSON KRISHNAN: So, substantial lines in  
15 seasonal workers, one shot positions that expire  
16 every year, historically low headcount compared to  
17 prior decades and on top of that, a hiring freeze at  
18 the present moment. Is that correct?

19       SUE DONOGHUE: That is correct.

20       CHAIRPERSON KRISHNAN: Thank you. Now, I'll turn  
21 it over to my colleagues to ask some questions.  
22 Council Member Holden.

23       COUNCIL MEMBER HOLDEN: Thank you Chair and it's  
24 very frustrating that we don't seem to be getting  
25 anywhere in the budget area of parks and we don't get



1  
2 close to the one percent that we've been fighting for  
3 and that the Mayor agreed when he was running and he  
4 was campaigning to fund parks at one percent. And  
5 I've been doing this now with parks, I just counted  
6 the years. It's my 50<sup>th</sup> year working with parks.  
7 I'm going to laugh at that one. I'm getting harassed  
8 over here.

9       So, I'm proud of that. I'm proud of my working  
10 with Parks and I remember when we renovated Juniper  
11 Valley Park, as the Park went, the neighborhood went.  
12 That meaning, the old sudden surrounding, once we  
13 renovated Juniper Valley Park, the area around it  
14 flourished. That means people took better care of  
15 their property, they had a better investment in the  
16 neighborhood. They recognized that and it was  
17 amazing to see within a decade, there was a marked  
18 difference and the battle though was maintaining the  
19 capital project with the park, which we always still  
20 to this day have a problem with maintenance because  
21 we don't have enough maintenance workers, like the  
22 Chair was talking about. Uhm, so it's kind of uh,  
23 you know we had to scrounge really for workers. We  
24 had to get volunteers to help maintain it and one  
25 program that we did have and I worked with some of

1  
2 the people on alternate sentencing in our courts and  
3 the DA's. We worked with the DA's office and they  
4 would give me people who were let's say caught doing  
5 graffiti. They had to - we had to supervise them in  
6 the park and they would work a certain amount of  
7 hours and we would supervise them. Is that still  
8 happening? Because you know again, it's a shame that  
9 we had to go to this. We shouldn't have to but we do  
10 have to kind of use all the methods possible for  
11 funding our parks.

12 SUE DONOGHUE: Thank you Council Member Holden  
13 for the question and for the support of our parks  
14 over those 50 years. I know you've made a real  
15 difference and it's greatly appreciated.

16 COUNCIL MEMBER HOLDEN: Thanks.

17 SUE DONOGHUE: The support of the Council is so  
18 important. We absolutely rely on a whole manner of  
19 different volunteers and actively work with many  
20 different groups across the city and engage them in  
21 our parks system. There is no doubt that volunteers  
22 help us get work done but we also fully believe that  
23 it's also good work to engage in. It helps to build  
24 community. It helps to reduce loneliness, so as I  
25 said in my testimony, we started counting last year

1  
2 through our Lets Green NYC Initiative and we've  
3 engaged over 460,000 volunteers in our parks.

4 COUNCIL MEMBER HOLDEN: Alright, but in the  
5 alternate sentencing because it stopped during the  
6 pandemic and then it took, still I was trying to  
7 restart it. Last year's hearings, you know I asked  
8 the DA and they weren't sure. You know, did it start  
9 up because I really can't get a definitive answer on  
10 this.

11 SUE DONOGHUE: I would need to follow up with you  
12 on that. I know that we used a similar program and  
13 when I was in Prospect Park -

14 COUNCIL MEMBER HOLDEN: Because I hear - you know  
15 the Queens Parks people are like family to me. I  
16 mean I've watched them grow up actually and I  
17 remember when they came in. Phil Sparchio(SP?) was a  
18 young, he looked like a teenager but you know again,  
19 and he's still with us and I still keep in touch with  
20 him almost every single day. And so, I asked him  
21 this question to and you know but he would ask me, he  
22 would say, "can we get the program restarted? Can we  
23 get that program restarted because it really helped  
24 us clean up the Parks and help us."  
25

1  
2           So, again, if you can make that a priority if  
3 it's not happening? I'll talk to the DA's Office.  
4 Also, you know just creative capital, which I'd love  
5 to because I get corporations or I get even major  
6 league baseball interested in investment in capital.  
7 Do you have a public private partnership where I  
8 could take some city money and some private money to  
9 renovate our ballfields let's say, just in case of  
10 Major League Baseball?

11           SUE DONOGHUE: Yeah, thank you for the question  
12 and so appreciated. We do work actively with a whole  
13 number of various corporations. We have something  
14 called the Adoptive Park Program, that has been a  
15 very successful way for us to bring public and  
16 private money together. So, Nike, the NBA, we've  
17 worked with a number of different organizations. So,  
18 yes, we absolutely would be able to talk to you about  
19 that program and by no way -

20           COUNCIL MEMBER HOLDEN: Because I did ask the  
21 capital people and they said, "well, it's only if  
22 they fund it." I said, "well no, what if I did  
23 50/50? You know, do you do that? No? You kind of  
24 went like that.

1  
2 SUE DONOGHUE: Yeah, right, yes, exactly, if it's  
3 city money, it has to go through the city process  
4 absolutely.

5 COUNCIL MEMBER HOLDEN: So, we don't - we could  
6 do 50/50 if -

7 MATT DRURY: And yeah, I mean so certainly there  
8 can be joint funding but just signaling that if any  
9 city dollars are involved, like the entirety has to  
10 run through the city's procurement process if that  
11 makes any sense.

12 COUNCIL MEMBER HOLDEN: Yeah, it goes through  
13 procurement but I got a road block when I suggested  
14 it, the capital, Parks capital.

15 MATT DRURY: Sure, I mean, I think in a lot of  
16 ways it's a little cleaner.

17 COUNCIL MEMBER HOLDEN: But I'd like to know some  
18 creative you know past projects you've done that I  
19 could now you know look at and say, I'll model that  
20 mine after that, you know?

21 MATT DRURY: Yeah, no, I think we're always open  
22 to conversations and I think it's obviously on a  
23 case-by-case basis.

24 COUNCIL MEMBER HOLDEN: But I did speak to the  
25 Mets. They're interested. I did you know I'm

1 speaking to - I'll even try NHL, anybody soccer. You  
2 know just to get projects done in a timely fashion  
3 and maybe funded -

4 MATT DRURY: Yeah, I'll just note that mostly  
5 those projects are wholly in the pipeline.

6 COUNCIL MEMBER HOLDEN: Yeah, okay, I'm sorry,  
7 did I run out of time? Oh, I did. Just one more,  
8 actually two more. Uhm, because I asked about this  
9 last time, stump removal contracts, do we have that  
10 going?  
11

12 SUE DONOGHUE: We do, yes.

13 COUNCIL MEMBER HOLDEN: Alright, some backlogged  
14 30 years.

15 SUE DONOGHUE: Yup.

16 COUNCIL MEMBER HOLDEN: In stump removal.

17 SUE DONOGHUE: Yes, we do have a stump removal  
18 contract. There is a backlog.

19 COUNCIL MEMBER HOLDEN: And I could show you when  
20 I was a kid some of these trees came down and the  
21 stumps are still there. So, again, they're just  
22 landmarks now but so, we do have that going. Uhm,  
23 the - just an update because I always ask you this.  
24 On the in-house tree planting pilot program that you  
25

1  
2 were creating, how is that? What are we going to  
3 expand it?

4 SUE DONOGHUE: Yes, thank you for the question  
5 and it is an important pilot project for us and it's  
6 part of our work that we're doing to reduce the cost  
7 of tree planting across the city. We do have the  
8 pilot. It is getting up and running. We need to  
9 have it run for a period of time to figure out if it  
10 is going to be successful but it is an important  
11 initiative that we're trying to find alternative  
12 methods for planting trees, absolutely. Thank you.

13 CHAIRPERSON KRISHNAN: Thank you Council Member  
14 and before moving to our next Council Member, you  
15 know one question on the point that Council Member  
16 Holden mentioned is another impact of all these PEGs  
17 has been the delays in capital projects that have  
18 been pushed out further. We're already seeing long  
19 extended timelines for parks projects but what I  
20 wanted to highlight for example is the High Bridge  
21 recreation center where there's a pool wall  
22 stabilization project in Washington Heights that was  
23 rolled from Fiscal 2024 to 2030. So, 2024 to 2030 in  
24 the Preliminary Commitment Plan. This is an \$894,000  
25 project that has been rolled five years into the

1 future. Why was this project moved into the  
2 outyears?  
3

4 SUE DONOGHUE: So essentially Council Member it  
5 was an accounting exercise to free up space related  
6 to the city's bond borrowing limit but the capital  
7 roles did not affect any active capital projects.

8 CHAIRPERSON KRISHNAN: But the PEGs did push out  
9 projects for into the outyears correct?

10 SUE DONOGHUE: No, there was a - it was announced  
11 a 14 percent PEG to the capital uhm, plan but Parks  
12 worked with OMB to identify savings. So, the  
13 majority of the savings were from what are called  
14 lump sum ID's. Money that had not yet been broken  
15 out to the decret projects, essentially Mayoral  
16 dollars so the eventual reduction was 10.9 percent,  
17 not 14.3 percent and so, it was mayoral money that  
18 had not been spent or allocated, so it does not  
19 affect any present projects.

20 CHAIRPERSON KRISHNAN: I see. Next up we'll have  
21 Council Member Nurse.

22 COUNCIL MEMBER NURSE: Thank you Chair. Uhm, I  
23 wanted to talk a little bit about the cuts and the  
24 impacts. I have Highland Park and then I have parks  
25 in Brooklyn and Highland Park which I shared at one



1  
2 point I think with Council Member Holden, maybe not  
3 anymore, beautiful. A lot of PEP officers, full  
4 maintenance crew, never have any complaints there.  
5 When we were able to get another shift of PEP folks,  
6 all complaints stopped.

7 On the Brooklyn side, it is the being of my  
8 existence, my Brooklyn Parks. It is nonstop. All of  
9 every single one of my parks can never be closed.  
10 There are pools of urine all the time, feces,  
11 needles, trash, every single week, parties till one  
12 in the morning. Every single time we have a call  
13 with Parks, what's the plan? There is no plan. We  
14 have no capacity. Can you give me a design for doors  
15 that we can invest in so that we don't have to send  
16 the precinct every night to go close the park when  
17 they have other things to do? Sure, we'll get you a  
18 thing, nothing. So, we're buying locks. I'm buying  
19 locks out of my own money. Motorcycle chains, the  
20 precinct is buying them. They're getting cut  
21 repeatedly, repeatedly, repeatedly and I just feel  
22 like you're being very nice Chair in saying you know  
23 what will this look like? It just looks disgusting.  
24 It looks like my parks are disgusting and in one side  
25 in Queens, it's beautiful. In the other side, it's

1  
2 not and I just, we have nothing to offer to any of my  
3 community leaders, to the school leaders who are  
4 opening the school every morning and it just looks  
5 disgusting. There's nothing we're able to offer them  
6 and I just want to know what's going to be different  
7 this time?

8 SUE DONOGHUE: Well, thank you Council Member for  
9 the question and I'm sorry to hear there should  
10 absolutely not be a differential between your Queens  
11 Parks and your Brooklyn Parks. There's absolutely no  
12 reason for that and it shouldn't exist. Uhm, we do  
13 have a limited number of PEP officers. We do deploy  
14 them - we try and deploy them where they are most  
15 needed. We can absolutely work with you and look at  
16 deploying them you know in these Brooklyn Parks. I  
17 will say that late night activity in parks, crime in  
18 parks is the purview of NYPD and we work in close  
19 partnership with PD on activity like that. So, it  
20 needs to be a combination of our PEP officers and PD  
21 working in partnership.

22 COUNCIL MEMBER NURSE: Whose job is it to close  
23 the parks?

24

25

1  
2 SUE DONOGHUE: It is generally, it is the Parks  
3 Department but we have many parks that NYPD does  
4 close on our behalf.

5 COUNCIL MEMBER NURSE: When we have a small  
6 precinct with very few officers on the ground. So,  
7 when it's parks job to close the parks, if the park  
8 could actually be closed, it would be it for the  
9 complaints. They would seize to exist.

10 SUE DONOGHUE: Hmm, hmm. Hmm, hmm.

11 COUNCIL MEMBER NURSE: So, I'm asking for either  
12 more PEP Officers in North Brooklyn because when we  
13 call, it's about two to three hours before anyone can  
14 show up. So, that looks like me and some folks going  
15 down at one in the morning. Knife fights are  
16 happening. There's generators everywhere. I mean, I  
17 don't like to come here and say this. I know you all  
18 as individuals would love more money but just to  
19 really illustrate and you all know this; I mean we've  
20 been talking about it for two years. So, it would  
21 just you know, if there's an infrastructure fix for  
22 some of these gigs, make them stronger, make them  
23 harder, you know something. You know I think many  
24 members would be willing to invest in that out of our  
25 funding pots but we need some kind of solution

1  
2 because all we're being told is call the cops and  
3 it's your job to close the park and it's your job to  
4 say we need more PEP Officers here in these hearings.  
5 It's not just we'll make do, it's like this is what  
6 we have. We got 12 people in the whole borough of  
7 Brooklyn doing enforcement. That's wild to me but in  
8 Queens, there's three officers at any given time.  
9 There is a huge disparity and I just, I feel like  
10 we're banging our heads on the wall and I got nothing  
11 to show for it. For two years of being here, I have  
12 nothing to show this community other than I'll go buy  
13 another lock.

14 SUE DONOGHUE: I hear you and we absolutely don't  
15 want that to be the case. We'll follow up directly  
16 after this hearing and look at the individual parks  
17 that you're talking about and work with borough and  
18 see what we can do.

19 COUNCIL MEMBER NURSE: Thank you so much.

20 CHAIRPERSON KRISHNAN: Thank you Council Member  
21 Nurse. You know I think Council Member Nurse raises  
22 very serious concerns and also go to what I started  
23 out the hearing with my questions in terms of the  
24 actual impact of these cuts. If this is the state of  
25 things right now with the budget that parks has

1  
2 making due, I fail to see how commissions will get  
3 any better if their position is being eliminated and  
4 there are further and further cuts to our Parks  
5 Department and the reality is very stark on the  
6 ground when we lose workers and we lose funding for  
7 maintenance.

8 Before going to the next Council Member, just a  
9 couple questions. Commissioner, I wanted to follow  
10 up on the response on the capital because even though  
11 the 10.9 percent capital reduction does not impact  
12 current ongoing projects, isn't it true that it would  
13 impact the timing and completion of other projects in  
14 your portfolio?

15 SUE DONOGHUE: Uh, no because again, that was  
16 mayoral money that had not been assigned to active  
17 projects. So, it does not - it was money that wasn't  
18 being utilized for active projects so it wouldn't  
19 impact them.

20 CHAIRPERSON KRISHNAN: So, none of the capital  
21 projects that are in the pipeline or planned for the  
22 future would be affected by the PEGs?

23 SUE DONOGHUE: Right, no.

24 CHAIRPERSON KRISHNAN: Uh, a couple more  
25 questions. Let's go to tree planting and

1 maintenance. It's a very important issue for all our  
2 Council Members. How many tree pruners does the  
3 Parks Department employ? How many are budgeted each  
4 year or for this year?  
5

6 SUE DONOGHUE: Give me one sec. I definitely  
7 have this. Okay, thank you for the question. The  
8 agency currently has 80 climbers and pruners and 64  
9 foresters.

10 CHAIRPERSON KRISHNAN: 80 climbers and pruners  
11 and 64 foresters. Do you think that's enough to  
12 cover all the trees that need services across the  
13 city?

14 SUE DONOGHUE: Well, in addition, we also work  
15 with external vendors that perform routine street  
16 tree block pruning and maintenance and at present, we  
17 are funded to provide routine pruning on a seven-year  
18 cycle, which is inline with urban tree canopy  
19 maintenance and other localities across the country,  
20 the seven-year pruning cycle is pretty much standard.

21 CHAIRPERSON KRISHNAN: So, how many trees go  
22 without adequate pruning every year? Are they being  
23 pruned on the schedule of every seven years? Is  
24 parks sticking to the schedule with the current  
25 staffing it has?

1  
2 SUE DONOGHUE: Yup.

3 CHAIRPERSON KRISHNAN: No, the reliance on  
4 external contractors, we focused on that in prior  
5 hearings. Dragon Eddie is a very problematic  
6 contractor, indicted, convicted, on federal charges  
7 relating to insurance fraud. Do you feel that  
8 there's an adequate workforce when it comes to our  
9 trees and pruning both within parks and with external  
10 vendors to adequately prune and care for our trees  
11 across the city?

12 SUE DONOGHUE: Thank you for the question Council  
13 Member and we work hard to both oversee our existing  
14 climbers and pruner, climber and pruner effort. We  
15 also are really pleased with the fact that we  
16 developed a climber, pruner apprentice program. The  
17 climber pruner title is a very difficult to hire one  
18 and so we have worked hard internally to expand that  
19 by offering an apprentice program to add to our  
20 ranks, which we're excited about.

21 We have also worked hard to bring in more MWBE  
22 contractors into the fold in terms of our tree  
23 planting efforts, so we're very much focused on  
24 expanding the ranks when and where we can.

1  
2 CHAIRPERSON KRISHNAN: And it's the same way that  
3 I see it with the full-time verse seasonal workforce  
4 parks is relying. Significantly on the seasonal  
5 workforce, unable to baseline positions, hire full  
6 time workers but with our trees and our pruning too,  
7 there's a substantial line also on external vendors  
8 as well. One of which is very problematic and the  
9 lack of resources to hire more internally to have on  
10 staff, more trees, climbers and pruners and so, you  
11 know I mention that to say do you think with the  
12 PEGs, the vacant positions that were eliminated, 650  
13 positions was the tree, was forestry impacted at all  
14 at this point or is it still fully staffed?

15 SUE DONOGHUE: Thank you for the question and I  
16 do want to just state that with 5.7 million trees  
17 across the city, we would always need external help  
18 to take care of our trees. There's no way that we  
19 could do that today with the staff that we have or  
20 the workforce we have and we need support throughout  
21 the city in order to really be able to maintain that  
22 incredibly huge inventory in our urban canopy.

23 CHAIRPERSON KRISHNAN: Zooming out for a second  
24 to a much larger point. In your conversations with  
25 OMB, were there any PEGs that you submitted that were



1 denied? In other words, are these all PEGs that you  
2 have put forward as the Parks Department and were  
3 accepted or were there things that you had also  
4 proposed as alternatives to these cuts that were  
5 denied by OMB?  
6

7 SUE DONOGHUE: These were all PEGs that we put  
8 forward, yes.

9 CHAIRPERSON KRISHNAN: And in your conversations  
10 with the Mayor, as I mentioned before, this was a  
11 campaign promise that we are - that he is failing  
12 that but moving backwards not forward. What have  
13 been your conversations with the Mayor and with City  
14 Hall about achieving a goal of increasing our Parks  
15 Budget to ultimately one percent of our city budget?

16 SUE DONOGHUE: Thank you for the question Council  
17 Member and as I said in my testimony, on the  
18 Administration, we at the agency are very committed  
19 to the care and maintenance of our parks. We have  
20 regular conversations with the Deputy Mayor, with the  
21 Administration, the Mayor about the importance of our  
22 parks and they certainly are a strong recognition.  
23 The Administration has very recently stated their  
24 ongoing commitment to one percent for parks that has  
25

1 obviously been somewhat delayed given current fiscal  
2 realities but there still is that commitment there.

3  
4 CHAIRPERSON KRISHNAN: Well, I'm glad to hear the  
5 commitment is still here verbally but as I said,  
6 actions speak a lot louder and we're moving backwards  
7 as opposed to forward even in the universe where  
8 you're committing a certain amount each year and  
9 steadily trying to achieve that goal. Next up, we  
10 have Council Member Carr.

11 COUNCIL MEMBER CARR: Thank you Chair.  
12 Commissioner, always good to see you. I just want to  
13 start out by saying how much I love my borough parks  
14 teams. Knowing Borough Commissioner Ricky [INAUDIBLE  
15 01:06:50] for a long time, not as long as Council  
16 Member Holden knows the Queens Parkies but had a  
17 great collaboration with her always and I'm learning  
18 to value Borough Commissioner Maher greatly in these  
19 opening months in these opening months of the new  
20 term now that I have Brooklyn too.

21 I want to echo my colleagues comments regarding  
22 operations and funding in this budget because I think  
23 unfortunately, parks maybe more than any of its  
24 sister agencies is constantly trying to figure out  
25 how to maintain operational standards with less, and

1 I think you had some success historically over that  
2 which I think has kind of made you an opportune  
3 target when OMB has to try and figure out ways to  
4 make room in the budget and I think that's a shame.  
5 Because the truth is, is that we all see in our parks  
6 what happens when you don't have the ability to staff  
7 up or maintain staff in order to ensure standards.  
8 But I want to drill into in particular the PEPs  
9 issue. This is a problem even in good budget years  
10 and it's never gotten the investment it needed and  
11 there's literally no community or borough that  
12 doesn't have a PEP shortfall. So, if you could go  
13 into a little bit about how you assess your staffing  
14 needs in particular, is there a formula about  
15 population, acreage that needs to be covered etc.?  
16 And are you anywhere close to that standard in any  
17 place? And in particular, I'd love to know where you  
18 are with Staten Island and South Brooklyn.

19  
20 SUE DONOGHUE: Thank you Council Member Carr for  
21 our question and for your support of Commissioner  
22 Rigadone (SP?) and the Borough staff. I couldn't  
23 agree with you more, they're fantastic. So, in terms  
24 of cuts, the way that we allocate our PEP is really  
25 strategically at parks throughout the city. We try

1  
2 and do it as equitably as possible. We monitor park  
3 concerns closely and we adjust employment as we can.  
4 So, we know where there are difficult areas. We move  
5 staff when we need it.

6 In terms of our PEP division, we are currently  
7 funded for a tax levy baseline of 292 PEP officers as  
8 well as 79 grant funded officers and 52  
9 administrative support staff. We also to supplement  
10 our PEP staff, we do in the summer season and in the  
11 peak season we bring in summer PEP staff. It's  
12 called Park Security Service, so we add in the busy  
13 times when we're out there through Labor Day, we  
14 anticipate there will be 377 additional PEP staff  
15 assigned you know for beaches, pools and parks. In  
16 terms of Staten Island specially, the baseline staff  
17 for Staten Island is 37.

18 COUNCIL MEMBER CARR: 37 for a borough who a  
19 quarter of which city park land and it's great having  
20 all the park land but it also increases the burden on  
21 PEPs to protect these areas, particularly so much of  
22 it Passive Park and the illegal dumping that happens  
23 in so many places, too many places. It's just an  
24 unacceptable environmental degradation and unlike in  
25 Urban Park where you know we expect NYPD to kind of

1 supplement patrols, they don't have the vehicles to  
2 kind of go into the middle of the green belt and try  
3 to see what's going on there. Only PEPs and Parks  
4 Department has that, so I think we need to do better  
5 there. We could go on about this all day. I want to  
6 pivot to another issue, which is tree stump removals.  
7 Can you tell us where we are in that regard and then  
8 in particular, also the tree and sidewalk program.  
9 Based on the Prelim budget, what level of rating do  
10 you expect to be working on in Staten Island and  
11 Southern Brooklyn?  
12

13 SUE DONOGHUE: Thank you Council Member Carr for  
14 your question. I'm going to bring up our expert in  
15 that area, our Deputy Commissioner for Environment  
16 and Planning Jennifer Greenfeld, so she can give you  
17 more specific answers.

18 COUNCIL MEMBER CARR: Could we pause the clock as  
19 you swear in the new witness? Thank you.

20 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you. Please raise your  
21 right hand if you're able. Do you affirm to tell the  
22 truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth in  
23 your testimony before this Committee and to respond  
24 honestly to Council Member questions?

25 JENNIFER GREENFELD: I do.

1  
2 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you.

3 JENNIFER GREENFELD: Uh, thank you for that  
4 question Council Member and let's see, I think the  
5 question was about stumps and -

6 SUE DONOGHUE: And tree removal.

7 JENNIFER GREENFELD: Right, so we have active  
8 stump and tree stump removal contracts. I can get  
9 you a number of what the sort of backlog is. We've  
10 never been comfortable with that number and so, we're  
11 rechecking everything and so, our hope is by the end  
12 of this fiscal year, we'll have like a clean number,  
13 so we know really what we need and then trees and  
14 sidewalks, we haven't changed our rating, sort of  
15 prioritization. We have a certain number of tree and  
16 sidewalks that were rated over 80 at a particular  
17 time and we're still committing to do those and  
18 anything that comes in over 90 is what we look at to  
19 add to contracts. Most, if not all of our funding is  
20 capital funding, so we have to make sure we sort of  
21 stick with those capital eligibility for those sort  
22 of capital clusters and I can get you specifics in  
23 Staten Island to follow up.

24 COUNCIL MEMBER CARR: Thank you and just briefly  
25 Chair, I would just love to know what you need in

1 terms of extra funding to reach different targets?

2 Say, moving from 80 to 75 or even very ambitiously to  
3 70, because as the borough delegations come up with  
4 our particular priorities, it would be good to have a  
5 price tag on what we could talk to you about and the  
6 Speakers Office and the Chair.

7  
8 SUE DONOGHUE: Absolutely, we can make that for  
9 you. Thanks.

10 COUNCIL MEMBER CARR: Thank you Chair.

11 CHAIRPERSON KRISHNAN: Thank you so much Council  
12 Member Carr. Thank you Deputy Commissioner and I  
13 just wanted to reiterate, even the number for Staten  
14 Island. So, for overall for all of New York City, we  
15 have less than 300 PEP officers on staff, right?

16 Do you believe that that's enough to cover all  
17 the parks adequately across our city?

18 SUE DONOGHUE: As stated, we did the best we can  
19 with the resources we have available.

20 CHAIRPERSON KRISHNAN: Uhm, have there been any  
21 changes since adoption and where PEP officers are  
22 stationed across the city?

23 SUE DONOGHUE: No, we deploy them as I said  
24 earlier, we deploy them based on where they're most  
25 needed, hot spot areas and then uhm, and you know

1  
2 seasonal staffing. We deploy them to pools and  
3 beaches but no. We look to as best we can deploy  
4 them equitably and where they're most needed.

5 CHAIRPERSON KRISHNAN: Do you hear often from  
6 constituents or Council Members about PEP officers  
7 not being present or the need for more PEP officers?

8 SUE DONOGHUE: Thank you for the question Council  
9 Member. We hear often how important our PEP officers  
10 are and what a difference they make in their parks  
11 and how important their presence is in terms of  
12 enforcing park rules and being a uniformed presence  
13 in our parks.

14 CHAIRPERSON KRISHNAN: Thank you. Council Member  
15 Restler.

16 COUNCIL MEMBER RESTLER: Thank you so much Chair  
17 and thank you for your tremendous leadership. I -  
18 it's good to see you Commissioner. Yeah, I really  
19 just want to firstly say thank you on a variety of  
20 different fronts in District 33. We've had a really  
21 strong working relationship with the Parks Department  
22 and we got turf installed in Cadman Plaza in record  
23 time. We've got new containerization projects  
24 happening with Brooklyn Parks that we're really  
25 excited about. I am thrilled that we are just



1 beginning to explore major green infrastructure  
2 projects in McCarren Park, which could be a major  
3 game changer for flooding resiliency in our community  
4 in North Brooklyn. And I've been appreciative of  
5 your openness and partnership to a redesign of  
6 Columbus Park, which we're going to come back to you  
7 on in the very near future with some specifics. The  
8 thing that we've probably you know been most  
9 appreciative of the partnership of the Parks  
10 Department on though is around our plan to plant  
11 3,400 new street trees over the next few years and I  
12 have to say you know there were a lot of really bad  
13 new stories in the PMMR of city agencies moving in  
14 the wrong direction and the data that you all have to  
15 show on the improvement your making on tree care and  
16 management is really impressive. The number, in the  
17 PMMR year over year, we saw the number of street  
18 trees planted double. The number of street trees  
19 pruned tripled. Total trees planted doubled excuse  
20 me. The number of street trees pruned tripled and  
21 the number of tree inspections almost doubled,  
22 considering the limited resources you all have, like  
23 it's a real testimony to quality management and we  
24 appreciate it. But I am deeply concerned about the  
25

1  
2 very deep budget cuts that are proposed for FY25. If  
3 from our adopted FY24 budget that included headcount  
4 of 4,755, the Preliminary Budget for FY25 is down to  
5 4101. That reduction is a 16 percent reduction in  
6 Parks headcount and as Council Member Nurse and  
7 others have articulated, we need more people, not  
8 less and I just would hope and I apologize if I  
9 missed this but could you help me? 650 people, where  
10 are we losing those jobs? What headcount is  
11 disappearing?

12 SUE DONOGHUE: So, thank you Council Member both  
13 for the support of all our staff in Brooklyn. All  
14 the good work that's going on, the tree planting.  
15 It's so appreciated and it's helping us to expand the  
16 urban tree canopy, which we really appreciate.

17 In terms of those losses, they will be over time  
18 because it's based on attrition, so we are in a  
19 hiring freeze. As people leave, we won't be able to  
20 replace staff.

21 COUNCIL MEMBER RESTLER: Is there any positions  
22 that are not subject to the hiring freeze?

23 SUE DONOGHUE: Right now, for public safety is  
24 where our officers are not.

25

1  
2 COUNCIL MEMBER RESTLER: But every other position  
3 in the Parks Department, when we're losing folks,  
4 we're losing folks. I mean that's - I mean if with  
5 the two to one, they found placement, freeze is gone.  
6 If this budget were adopted as proposed by OMB, we  
7 would just be losing people for years to come across  
8 the Parks Department in valued positions that are  
9 doing Parks maintenance, that are cleaning, that are  
10 making the parks improvements happen that we depend  
11 on. Those positions are just not getting filled.

12 SUE DONOGHUE: Yes, the hiring freeze is in place  
13 for us until FY26.

14 COUNCIL MEMBER RESTLER: And so, it's just, there  
15 is no world in which we will not experience severe  
16 deterioration in the conditions in our parks, no  
17 matter the quality of the management when we're  
18 losing 16 percent headcount across the board. You  
19 know I'm a big fan of parks. They are our collective  
20 front yard, back yard in a dense city. They're  
21 critical for our resiliency. They're critical for  
22 air quality. They're critical for our joy and I just  
23 think these cuts make zero sense and it is an  
24 unfortunate thing that each and every year now we're  
25 having to play defense on the mayor's non-sensical

1  
2 and deeply harmful budget cuts and it's on Chair  
3 Krishnan and all of us to fight back to try to just  
4 hold on to what we have, which as Council Member  
5 Nurse said, is not enough.

6 So, I am, I'm just angry that anyone would  
7 propose this kind of severe, harmful across-the-board  
8 cuts to our parks and we're going to have a lot of  
9 work to do over the next few months to try to take  
10 care of it and improve it, improve this dire  
11 situation.

12 The last thing I just wanted to ask is as an  
13 aside, one of the things that we're trying to explore  
14 and I don't mean to put you on the spot or anything  
15 but it was features in the Times and I think there's  
16 a pilot on Roosevelt Island. We're really interested  
17 in tiny forests and the impact that they could have.  
18 Is this something that you're thinking about?

19 SUE DONOGHUE: Tiny forests.

20 COUNCIL MEMBER RESTLER: Is this something you're  
21 thinking about and is this something that you think  
22 we could potentially fund together?

23 JENNIFER GREENFELD: Thank you for that question.  
24 I am well aware of the tiny forest concept. I know  
25 there's one going in on Roosevelt Island. We're open

1  
2 to finding if there's an appropriate spot for it. We  
3 were approached first and we couldn't identify a spot  
4 that sort of fit that particular funders interest in  
5 terms of visibility in a place where it was going to  
6 be able to sort of survive for the long term.

7 COUNCIL MEMBER RESTLER: Well, I want to be the  
8 funder. So, we got some ideas for locations in  
9 Greenpoint that we think would be great. We'd love  
10 to explore that together.

11 JENNIFER GREENFELD: We'll talk. Thank you.

12 COUNCIL MEMBER RESTLER: Thank you, appreciate  
13 it.

14 CHAIRPERSON KRISHNAN: Council Member Restler,  
15 always on top of his tree game. Thank you Council  
16 Member Restler. Just two quick follow ups. One is  
17 the hiring freeze of course doesn't apply to  
18 lifeguards right?

19 SUE DONOGHUE: Right, it does not, no.

20 CHAIRPERSON KRISHNAN: Okay and have you had any  
21 conversations with the Mayor, OMB and City Hall about  
22 the possibility of the hiring freeze being lifted in  
23 the May Executive Budget?

24 SUE DONOGHUE: Thank you for the question Council  
25 Member. As I said earlier, it's an ongoing dialogue

1  
2 uhm with OMB, with the Administration regarding  
3 savings, regarding PEGs, regarding you know how we  
4 can move forward. There's an ongoing dialogue,  
5 absolutely.

6 CHAIRPERSON KRISHNAN: It was a double hit to  
7 Parks, both in terms of budgets being cut as well as  
8 a freeze on top of that too. Council Member Nurse,  
9 sorry I think before Council Member Nurse, Council  
10 Member Paladino first.

11 COUNCIL MEMBER PALADINO: Good afternoon and  
12 thank you very much. You know how much I love you  
13 guys. Everything is great in District 19. I have  
14 nothing but the highest praise for all of you and my  
15 parkies are amazing as well as the volunteerism that  
16 we see in the Parks. We all know what you're going  
17 through and it's really, really rough. I don't know  
18 for a city this large to be coming under such  
19 scrutiny, parks is our jewel in every single borough  
20 and has been expressed here today, the joy that it  
21 brings. It's just amazing.

22 So, mine is more concentrated on safety issues  
23 concerning dead trees. We have fortunately had 50  
24 years ago, very many trees planted street lining are  
25 blocked and a lot of those trees now are dead and

1 they need to be removed. Biggest complaint that  
2 comes to my office concerning parks is trees. It's  
3 not just the pruning, it's the removal and we heard  
4 it talked about today about the stumps. The tree  
5 comes down somebody else, another subcontractor has  
6 to come in and take down - uh take out the stump.  
7 Being in landscaping, I understand that. We dealt  
8 with bartlett trees and in doing so, it was also  
9 brought up here today about us privately funding you  
10 know our districts and I think that right now, out of  
11 our discretionary funding our own pockets, basically  
12 the tax payers pockets because this is what they  
13 want. I know my office is going to be supplementing  
14 a lot of that through my discretionary funding so  
15 that trees can get pruned but also climbers, I know  
16 forest, you got a rough hire there. Can you tell us  
17 a little bit more about the climbers and how many do  
18 we have and how is that going to work with forestry?

20 SUE DONOGHUE: Yes, thank you Council Member  
21 Paladino for the question and for the support of our  
22 parkies in Queens and for all of our park workers.  
23 So, right now the agency currently has 80 climbers  
24 and pruners and 64 foresters and as I said, this has  
25 historically been for the Parks Department a hard to

1  
2 recruit title. It's not something that everyone  
3 thinks about. It's not an easy job to do or to fill  
4 and so that's why we took on under DC Greenfeld, the  
5 idea of creating a climber pruner apprenticeship  
6 program. So, that in house, we could train staff and  
7 be able to have them - it's a great job with the  
8 agency and we're excited about the potential of  
9 training people in house to add to the ranks of our  
10 climbers and pruners in a job that's hard to fill  
11 otherwise.

12 COUNCIL MEMBER PALADINO: At what level can I  
13 help you, high school? Like, these kids are often  
14 looking for something outdoors, something outside the  
15 box and I'm all about that. So I was wondering if  
16 there's any kind of apprenticeship that we could set  
17 up in some of our high schools or at least introduce  
18 the idea of what it is, it's exciting that you're  
19 outside your, you know in all elements and a lot of  
20 these people want to do that. These kids want that,  
21 so if there's anything that we could do, if you have  
22 any ideas, let me know and I would love to talk more  
23 in depth with you about this. Because again, if we  
24 start to take our kids at 16, 17 and put them  
25 outside, doing things constructively, getting



1  
2 actively involved but seeing results from their work.  
3 You know that's also very gratifying. It's not  
4 something they have to wait to see, it's instant and  
5 I think that I'm very concerned about our young  
6 people and I think that if we introduce them to - you  
7 know, it's very difficult. Like I said when I was in  
8 landscape before for over 30 years, it was very hard  
9 to find local people who wanted to do the work. It  
10 was somewhat beneath them; you know yet my husband  
11 was out there every day with the shovel sweating like  
12 everybody else and climbing trees and pruning. So,  
13 this is not new to me but I'd love to bring in the  
14 young people and make it appealing to them so we'll  
15 talk more about that, okay?

16 SUE DONOGHUE: Absolutely thank you and just so  
17 you know Council Member we do have, we are very uhm,  
18 strong users of the Summer Youth Employment Program  
19 but we have over 700 youth that come in in the  
20 summers to work in the Parks Department in a whole  
21 range of different positions, so that's something we  
22 can talk to you about too.

23 COUNCIL MEMBER PALADINO: I want to talk to you  
24 about that.

25

1  
2 SUE DONOGHUE: Citywide program but very actively  
3 utilized by the Parks Department and it gives people  
4 a great introduction to the variety of work that we  
5 do, so we can talk more about that.

6 COUNCIL MEMBER PALADINO: That's terrific. Thank  
7 you very much.

8 SUE DONOGHUE: Thank you.

9 CHAIRPERSON KRISHNAN: Thank you Council Member  
10 Paladino. Council Member Nurse.

11 COUNCIL MEMBER NURSE: Yes, just a few questions.  
12 Regarding your PEP hot spots you just mentioned. You  
13 know you deploy them as needed but what, how do you  
14 determine what is a hot spot? What are the like kind  
15 of threshold or criteria that you're using to say  
16 this is a consistent spot we need to put more  
17 resources towards?

18 SUE DONOGHUE: Thank you Council Member for the  
19 question. We're usually analyzing things like 311  
20 data, where we're getting complaints from the  
21 community. We have you know kind of both fixed post  
22 people and then folks who are PEP officers who do  
23 travel and so, we're looking to deploy those  
24 resources when and where they're most needed but also  
25

1  
2 having equitable distribution across the five  
3 boroughs.

4 COUNCIL MEMBER NURSE: Okay, it would be great in  
5 the follow up if we could request what the current  
6 hot spots are across the city so that the members can  
7 know where those more consistent appointments are  
8 happening. Uhm, and in some relationship to the data  
9 that's creating that threshold because I know for  
10 sure that and sorry to circle back to my own district  
11 problems but I mean I would love to get to the status  
12 that my counterparts here are, that kind of level  
13 that they're sharing but it would be really helpful  
14 to know you know we always try to tell people to do  
15 311 but you know the thing about 311 is when cases  
16 are closed and no one shows up and then nothing  
17 changes. People don't do it anymore, so they just  
18 call us instead. And so, you know I think criteria  
19 should be added that you know outreach from elected  
20 officials and community leaders should be counting  
21 towards those thresholds because 311 fails our  
22 communities often in terms of changing the conditions  
23 on the ground. And so, I think it would be really  
24 helpful for a level of transparency and for our

1  
2 better advocacy to have that information more readily  
3 available to us.

4 SUE DONOGHUE: And I will absolutely say that we  
5 are very much responsive to when we hear from elected  
6 officials. We hear a situation that's continually  
7 difficult and electeds call me directly, they call  
8 Borough Commissioners and we do deploy our PEP staff  
9 based on you know inquiries request from electeds,  
10 from communities and as well as looking at 311 data.  
11 So, we use a very broad range of different inputs to  
12 be able to deploy the staff.

13 COUNCIL MEMBER NURSE: Okay, I'm hoping that that  
14 translates into changes. At least from neighborhood,  
15 I know had reached out to you, I've reached out to  
16 our Brooklyn Commissioner. I have regular meetings  
17 with Parks and PD. I would really love to see a  
18 change. I'm hoping that me bringing the level of  
19 energy I'm bringing in this hearing translates to  
20 that. Unfortunately, I wish that wasn't the case but  
21 I do think it would be helpful to see how you all  
22 make those evaluations, so thank you Chair.

23 CHAIRPERSON KRISHNAN: Thanks so much Council  
24 Member Nurse. I totally echo Council Member Nurse's  
25 concerns and I think again it goes back to the lack

1  
2 of budget you all have but the importance of also  
3 highlighting these issues and finding ways to address  
4 them even with the resources that you have, despite  
5 them being limited. I think that data would be  
6 really helpful because standard PEP Officers across  
7 the whole city uhm, I think raises some serious  
8 questions and challenges, so it would be good to see  
9 how they're divided up, how and based on what data.

10 Finally, Council Member Carr had a follow up and  
11 Council Member Paladino.

12 COUNCIL MEMBER CARR: Thank you Chair.  
13 Commissioner, I want to talk a little bit about  
14 Freshkills Park. North Park is beautiful. It's a  
15 wonderful window into the rest of the park. I still  
16 think we need that zipline put in there one day but  
17 that aside, that aside. Uhm, I want to talk a little  
18 bit about the relationship between Parks and  
19 Sanitation right because you still have this sort of  
20 joint custody relationship. I know a couple budgets  
21 ago, Sanitation kicked in very large with the  
22 security funding for the site. So, can you talk a  
23 little bit about have you assumed any additional  
24 budgetary responsibilities for Freshkills besides  
25 North Park and what's your expectation for the coming

1  
2 fiscal years about how you're going to kind of  
3 gradually be taking the financial and other  
4 responsibilities from Sanitation and how that's going  
5 to impact your bottom line?

6 SUE DONOGHUE: Thank you Council Member Carr for  
7 the question and absolutely agree with you, North  
8 Park is fantastic and so exciting and it gives you a  
9 visual of what's to come, which is wonderful. We do  
10 have a very close working partnership with DSNY,  
11 you're right on the site. It is still an active  
12 landfill and so we need to be respectful of that  
13 situation and work collaboratively.

14 In terms of you know we are moving forward with  
15 you know kind of next phase and thinking about the  
16 next phase of capital commitment there. In terms of  
17 taking more financial responsibility beyond North  
18 Park, I don't think there is any more financial  
19 responsibility we're taking on at this point,  
20 although we are very much thinking forward thinking  
21 in terms of the design of the rest of the park.

22 COUNCIL MEMBER CARR: So, at this point, there's  
23 no set pattern or schedule for you to assume any  
24 financial burden beyond North Park until those  
25 capital projects are done?

1 SUE DONOGHUE: Right, yes.

2 COUNCIL MEMBER CARR: And when do you think we're  
3 going to have a conversation about the confluence in  
4 some of these other places that are a little more  
5 programmable because they're not landfilled? I mean-

6 SUE DONOGHUE: Yeah, we definitely can come back  
7 to you on that. We're always open to thinking about  
8 how we can move forward. It's a very exciting  
9 project for us at Parks and we're really committed to  
10 it so happy to have those ongoing conversations.

11 COUNCIL MEMBER CARR: Thank you Commissioner.  
12 Thank you Chair.

13 CHAIRPERSON KRISHNAN: Thank you Council Member  
14 Carr. Before Council Member Paladino, we do have  
15 unfortunately we need to make a quick detour because  
16 we have two students who want to testify and they  
17 have a hard dismissal from school at 2:45, so if you  
18 all can, we appreciate you Commissioner and team  
19 staying for their short testimony and then we can go  
20 back to Council Member Paladino's questions.

21 We have virtual - hey everyone, good to see you  
22 all. Thank you for joining. Sorry it took so long.  
23 We got a lot of questions, things to go through but  
24 we know you're on a clock so let's do this. We have  
25

1  
2 both Christian Mia(SP?) and Daniella Jimenez(SP?) and  
3 their parent Santa Singundo(SP?). So, if Daniella  
4 you want to go first?

5 DANIELLA JIMENEZ: Uh, yes sure, thank you. Good  
6 afternoon. My name is Daniella Jimenez, I'm a 7<sup>th</sup>  
7 grade student at Leonardo Da Vinci Middle School in  
8 District 24. Thank you to the Parks Committee for  
9 allowing me to testify about parks. I also want to  
10 thank Parks Chair Shekar Krishnan for making  
11 investments playgrounds in New York City. A big  
12 thank you to the NYC Park Commissioner Susan Donoghue  
13 for support New Yorks Parks.

14 I'm here to testify about the Flushing Meadow  
15 Parks, Corona Park, and are that my family visits to  
16 their own spare time. This park is important for my  
17 family events because we can relax through social  
18 connections and increase our productivity. I ask the  
19 City Council to invest in the future by allocating  
20 one percent of the city budget to the NYC Parks, so  
21 that our parks and playgrounds are clean and safe.

22 Mayor Adams committed to this investment and we  
23 ask him to follow through. When kids are in parks,  
24 we need access to water and sprinklers include  
25 bathroom.



1  
2 My cousin and I will feel safe in our beloved  
3 community parks. When we someone who is homeless  
4 next to a playground, a person who does not have a  
5 place to call home and who feels uncomfortable and  
6 even sad, our community leaders and elected officials  
7 must find compassionate services and keep us safe.  
8 The budget should ensure parks workers making it  
9 possible for the agency to ensure parks are safe and  
10 clean across the city. My friends and I often come  
11 across trash, plastic containers, and empty alcohol  
12 bottles. There is no police personnel to control our  
13 parks and help us prevent vandalism, which make us  
14 feel unsafe, especially when fights break out. I  
15 believe parks should be a place where we can relax,  
16 socialize and have fun.

17 Our local park is under funded and under staffed.  
18 There is not enough park authorities who keep people  
19 from smoking or vaping, making it hard to breath.  
20 Please fund the parks so we can all be safe. We ask  
21 the City Council to commit to one percent for Parks.  
22 Please upkeep the parks across the city who notice  
23 for us, we're all New Yorkers and those chose to  
24 visit our city and open public places. Thank you.

1  
2 CHAIRPERSON KRISHNAN: Thank you so much  
3 Daniella. I love and my kids love Flushing Meadows  
4 Corner Park too, so thank you for your testimony.  
5 Next up, Christian Mia.

6 CHRISTIAN MIA: Yes. Good afternoon everyone.  
7 First and foremost, I want to express my gratitude to  
8 each and every one of you for being here today. Your  
9 presence speaks volumes about your dedication to our  
10 community and it filled me with gratitude and hope.  
11 My name is Christian Mia and I'm honored to stand  
12 before you as a 7<sup>th</sup> grade student from I61 and a  
13 proud member of the Junior Lighthouse Program. I am  
14 a passionate advocate for the families of Queens  
15 including my own.

16 Our parks hold a special place in my heart.  
17 They're not just spaces, they are the beating hearts  
18 of our communities. They are why families gather,  
19 children play and cherish memories; however, as we  
20 gather here today, I could not ignore the challenges  
21 that our parks face. Broken equipment, littered  
22 paths and neglected areas paint a stark picture of  
23 neglect. These issues not only marred the beauty of  
24 our parks but also deprive families of the safe and  
25 welcoming spaces they deserve. The safety of our

1 families is paramount and it deeply troubled me to  
2 see dangers like broken glass and smoke in our parks.  
3 Our families deserve better and it's up to us to make  
4 a change. One of the major obstacles we face is the  
5 lack of sufficient funds for parks, maintenance and  
6 improvements. Today, I urge our city to allocate one  
7 percent of the budget specifically for maintaining  
8 park services. This allocation will ensure that our  
9 parks receive the necessary funds to address,  
10 maintain issues, improve safety measures and create a  
11 more enjoyable experience for families.  
12

13 Imagine a future where families can gather and  
14 play in safe and vibrant parks. Children's laughter  
15 echoes freely and where our parks reflect to the love  
16 and care of our united community. As I embark on  
17 this heartfelt journey with you, I am filled with  
18 hope and optimism. Together, let's ignite the flames  
19 of passion and compassion, knowing that our actions  
20 today will shape a brighter and more joyful tomorrow  
21 for all of our families. Thank you for joining me in  
22 this vital mission.

23 CHAIRPERSON KRISHNAN: Thank you so much  
24 Christian. Thank you Dianella. Thank you, you both  
25 did such an amazing job. IS61 is not too far from my

1 district the Jackson Heights in Elmhurst Queens, so  
2 I'm proud to see both two amazing Queen students and  
3 I really want to say to both of you and to Ms.  
4 Singundo too, you all, you both did such an amazing  
5 job. We'd love to hear from you. Thank you so much  
6 and you stayed on time too, which is difficult for us  
7 as Council Members to do. So, thank you so much and  
8 great, great work and Santa Singundo is now going to  
9 testify.  
10

11 SANTA SINGUNDO: SPEAKING IN SPANISH [01:37:16]-  
12 [01:40:51].

13 INTERPRETER: Good afternoon. The following, I  
14 will paraphrase what the parent had mentioned. We  
15 gather here today. We are united by a concern that  
16 touch our families and our beloved parks. We kindly  
17 ask that our community parks be upkept. The current  
18 parks are ridden with drug abuse and violence. Our  
19 children need to be safe and we thank the Park for  
20 allocating one percent of the city budget to New York  
21 City Parks so we could all be safe with everyone.

22 CHAIRPERSON KRISHNAN: SPEAKING IN SPANISH  
23 [01:41:30]- [01:41:53]. Thank you so much. To  
24 conclude, now we'll turn back to the Administration's  
25 panel. I think we're almost at the end here, so

1  
2 Council Member Paladino, I know you had a second-  
3 round question.

4 COUNCIL MEMBER PALADINO: Thank you. This is for  
5 Evelyn in my office because - so Evelyn, if you're  
6 watching, this one's for you. She's ahead of  
7 Constituent Services and as you know the biggest  
8 problem we have is the removal of the trees as I  
9 said. What she want's to know is when we have to  
10 tell our constituents that there's a two to three  
11 year delay, and when we go through the A rating, the  
12 B rating, the C,D rating, it's so difficult to  
13 explain to these constituents. Can you just help  
14 Evelyn out because she's probably watching and uh, so  
15 we can give our constituents a tighter timeframe  
16 because there's nothing worse than somebody hearing,  
17 it's going to be another six years. When it's been  
18 there for six years prior, the cement has been  
19 lifted, people have fallen and uh, like I said, this  
20 one is for you Evelyn. So, help me out.

21 SUE DONOGHUE: Thank you for that question. I  
22 understand it's very difficult to hear the stories  
23 and to try to explain limited or prioritized  
24 resources and I mean; I think it makes sense just for  
25

1  
2 us to have a conversation with her to sort of give  
3 her some talking points.

4 COUNCIL MEMBER PALADINO: That would be perfect.  
5 Thank you.

6 SUE DONOGHUE: Some things to help her out and  
7 uhm, yeah, so, but I appreciate you.

8 COUNCIL MEMBER PALADINO: Because she told me,  
9 "two out of three calls that come into this office  
10 every day is about trees." I go, "okay, alright,  
11 I'll go, I'll ask." But I know the answer. You are  
12 very short handed and it's just trying to translate  
13 what's going on here now with the hiring freeze and  
14 every, I mean how do you keep up. I mean, but it's  
15 very difficult to explain that to a home owner or  
16 somebody who has had to pay somebody through a  
17 lawsuit because they tripped over something. It's  
18 very difficult, so thank you. I know we will work  
19 together and through that partnership we will figure  
20 out what we're going to do with District 19. Thank  
21 you very much.

22 CHAIRPERSON KRISHNAN: Thank you Council Member  
23 Paladino. My final question for you all in this  
24 panel in the hearing is just to close out, we spoke  
25 at the beginning, the very beginning about the Second

1  
2 Shift program, 240 workers park staff deployed on  
3 evenings and weekends at certain hot spots around the  
4 city that is now going to be cut because of these  
5 PEGs. Commissioner, can you just conclude the  
6 hearing by telling us what are the benefits of the  
7 Second Shift program? Why is it so important?

8 SUE DONOGHUE: Thank you Council Member for the  
9 question and as I said earlier, the benefits of the  
10 second shift have been that you know we have park  
11 workers in the park in the late afternoons into the  
12 evenings, over the weekends but as I said, we'll be  
13 looking to do is just redeploy existing staff, POP  
14 workers, seasonal workers to be able to cover that  
15 time.

16 CHAIRPERSON KRISHNAN: I would encourage it also  
17 and I'm sure you're doing it but to continue having  
18 conversations with the Second Shift workers about  
19 their working conditions, the importance of the  
20 support they need as well but we should be investing  
21 in this program and expanding it, not cutting it  
22 unfortunately as we're facing now.

23 I want to thank you all so much for your  
24 testimony. For answering all our questions and for  
25 your dedication to our parks. I hope that City Hall

1  
2 ultimately comes through on its campaign promise of  
3 one percent of our parks. The questions you heard  
4 today made clear how desperately that funding is  
5 needed at the very least. Thank you all.

6 SUE DONOGHUE: Thank you.

7 [01:45:40]- [01:45:51]

8 CHAIRPERSON KRISHNAN: Now, we will open up the  
9 hearing for our public testimony. Before we begin  
10 with the testimony, I want to remind members of the  
11 public that this is a formal government proceeding  
12 and that decorum shall be observed at all times. As  
13 such, members of the public shall remain silent at  
14 all times. 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 recording that's 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, please  
22 fill out an appearance card with the Sergeant at Arms  
23 and wait to be recognized. When recognized, you will  
24 have two minutes to speak on today's hearing topic on  
25 our parks budget specifically. If you have a written



1 statement or additional written testimony beyond two  
2 minutes that you wish to submit for the record,  
3 please provide a copy of that testimony to the  
4 Sergeant at Arms. You may also email written  
5 testimony to [testimony@council.nyc.gov](mailto:testimony@council.nyc.gov) within 72  
6 hours of this hearing. Audio and video recordings  
7 will not be accepted and now, I'd call up the first  
8 panel, Meredith Thomson, Maximus Alexander Barton,  
9 and Christopher Loscalzo. You may begin.

11 MAXIMUS BARTON: Good afternoon, my name is Max  
12 Barton and I represent Labors Local 1010 and 2,500  
13 plus members and retirees that our union represents  
14 in the construction industry. We are a member of the  
15 Play Fair for Parks Coalition which includes over 400  
16 organizations from across the five boroughs, many of  
17 whom are testifying today to advocate for the  
18 importance of our city's park system. We thank the  
19 City Council Committee on Parks Chair Krishnan for  
20 holding this important and timely hearing.

21 And while New York City Parks and capital  
22 projects are important to Local 1010 because it's  
23 primarily where our members work. As a union, it is  
24 our duty to not only help our members but to support  
25 the communities where our members work and live.

1  
2 As a homeowner and a father of a four-year-old in  
3 South East Queens, New York City Parks are important  
4 to me because it's primarily where I take Adam during  
5 the spring, fall months and it's embarrassing knowing  
6 that a fully funded, safer, cleaner park system is  
7 just a little about East and Long Island and that any  
8 money that we spend when we go out there is not going  
9 to our communities.

10 As a Community Board Member on the Parks  
11 Committee, New York City Parks are important to me  
12 because they are the window to our back yard. Anyone  
13 outside your Committee that visits or drives by parks  
14 and sees trash everywhere reflects wholly on the  
15 community. One does not drive by a dirty, trash-  
16 filled park and think that you're in a pleasant  
17 community. Our communities deserve a fully funded  
18 park system to carry out the basic work to do, at the  
19 very least slow down the devastation currently being  
20 done to its infrastructure and green spaces by these  
21 unfair budget cuts, play fair.

22 The Parks Budget has already been cut five  
23 percent for this fiscal year as we heard earlier  
24 today, play fair. 1,000 fewer parks workers in our  
25 communities for this fiscal year, play fair. Parks

1  
2 are critical infrastructure and must be treated as  
3 such for this fiscal year and for others going  
4 forward. We say play fair a good deal and say play  
5 fair outside these halls and in Chambers today.  
6 Playing fair helps everyone as a group grow and  
7 thrive. Playing fair shows respect and sympathies  
8 towards everyone and I will end early by saying  
9 playing fair is to behalf honestly and honorably and  
10 to obey the rules.

11 CHAIRPERSON KRISHNAN: Thank you for your  
12 testimony. You may begin.

13 CHRISTOPHER LOSALSZO: Good afternoon. My name  
14 is Chris Losalzo and I represent Local 1010 Laborers  
15 Employers Cooperation and Education Trust, also known  
16 as 1010 LECET. 1010 LECET brings Laborer's Local  
17 1010 and its signatory contractors together to  
18 address issues of importance to both. Laborers and  
19 our employers share a lot of common ground. Working  
20 as a team, we secure projects and jobs, increase  
21 union-sector market share, advertise our services,  
22 develop a workforce and advance shared market related  
23 interests. Local 1010 members work together to build  
24 streets, bridges, and highways throughout the five  
25 boroughs in addition to building parks for New York

1 City families to enjoy. We are a proud member of the  
2 Play Fair for Parks Coalition, which includes over  
3 400 organizations from across the five boroughs, many  
4 of whom will testify today.

5 We thank City Council Committee on Parks Chair  
6 Shekar Krishnan for holding this hearing. New  
7 Yorkers deserve a fully funded, safe, clean, green  
8 and resilient park system. The budget cuts to New  
9 York City Parks this year and the proposed budget for  
10 next fiscal year will jeopardize the very heart of  
11 our communities. For years, Local 1010 and 1010  
12 LECET have witnessed New York City Parks Projects,  
13 suffer from delays, waste, wage theft, and  
14 corruption. Proposed budget cuts to the New York  
15 City Parks agency would be further devastating to  
16 parks infrastructure and recreational and green space  
17 for all New Yorkers. We don't need more cuts to  
18 Parks. We need investment, transparency, oversight  
19 and accountability to receive better results for New  
20 Yorkers and the works tasked with performing Parks  
21 work across the city.

22 Beyond parks, these cuts will hinder the agencies  
23 ability to manage its 15 miles of beaches, 51  
24 recreation centers, 65 pools, 9,900 acres of natural  
25

1 areas, 2,300 athletic courts, 800 ballfields, and  
2 1,000 playgrounds. Parks are a critical  
3 infrastructure for public health and safety and are  
4 drivers for social equity. They should be funded as  
5 such. Thank you.

7 CHAIRPERSON KRISHNAN: Thank you for your  
8 testimony and for all the great work that Laborers  
9 1010 does within our city and for our parks. Next up  
10 for testimony we have Alia Soomro, Adam Ganser and  
11 Lynn Kelly.

12 I also want to mention that we've been joined by  
13 Council Member Linda Lee. You may start Alia.

14 ALIA SOOMRO: Good afternoon. My name is Alia  
15 Soomro and I'm the Deputy Director for New York City  
16 Policy at the New York League of Conservation Voters.  
17 Thank you Chair Krishnan and members of the Parks and  
18 Recreation Committee for the opportunity to testify.  
19 I've submitted longer written comments.

20 As cofounders of the Play Fair for Parks  
21 Coalition, we stand with New Yorkers for Parks, DC37  
22 and over 400 coalition members to demand a city  
23 budget that gives parks the fair funding they  
24 deserve. Mayor Adams, Speaker Adams and 43 other  
25 Council Members have already committed to funding one

1 percent of the city's budget to Parks and our  
2 coalition of advocates have been strong supports of  
3 adequately funding the maintenance, safety, and  
4 accessibility of our parks. NYLCV is also a member  
5 of the Forest for All Coalition, a coalition  
6 committed to protecting, maintaining and expanding  
7 the city's urban forest and equitably achieve 30  
8 percent tree canopy by 2035.

9  
10 Despite all of this support for parks, in  
11 November Mayor Adams made a devastating announcement  
12 regarding budget cuts affecting all city agencies.  
13 Among these cuts was a \$25 million reduction to the  
14 Parks Department, slashing its budget by five  
15 percent. Now, in the Mayor's Preliminary Budget,  
16 there is a proposed additional reduction of \$55  
17 million in funding for the Parks Department. These  
18 cuts are unacceptable, short sided and they represent  
19 yet another major setback for an agency that has long  
20 suffered from disinvestment.

21 The impacts of the PEGs are profound with one  
22 year hiring delays evolving into program eliminations  
23 totaling \$10 million per fiscal year and the loss of  
24 about 119 positions. Moreover, these budget cuts  
25 directly contradict the Mayor's campaign pledge to

1  
2 increase parks funding and undermines the climate  
3 goals outlined in the administrations Plan NYC  
4 Sustainability Plan. Parks have so many benefits and  
5 yet, due to stored disinvestment and structural  
6 racism, such as residential redlining our trees,  
7 parks and green spaces are not equitably distributed.  
8 So, this is also an equity issue. Parks serving  
9 primarily non-White populations are half the size of  
10 parks that serve majority White populations.

11 So, in conclusion, as members of the Play Fair  
12 for Parks and Forest for All Coalitions, our top line  
13 priorities are ending the hiring freeze and returning  
14 to Pre-COVID headcount and having the Administration  
15 commit funding for a robust multiagency planning  
16 process for the Urban Forest Plan.

17 NYLCV stands with the Play Fair Parks and Forest  
18 for All Coalitions calling for increased funding and  
19 equitable allocation for our parks, trees, and green  
20 spaces. Thank you.

21 CHAIRPERSON KRISHNAN: Thank you so much Alia.  
22 Lynn.

23 LYNN KELLY: Thank you Council Member and thank  
24 you for having the hearing today. My name is Lynn  
25 Kelly, I'm the Executive Director of New York

1  
2 Restoration Project. I'm a proud founding and member  
3 of the Play Fair Coalition and also a Co-Chair of the  
4 Parks and Open Space Partners. I'm here today to  
5 make sure that the Mayor keeps to his promise of the  
6 one percent of the city's budget committed to parks.

7 For nearly 30 years, NYRP has stewarded over 80  
8 acres of city parkland, planted well over 350 new  
9 green spaces and operate and maintain 52 community  
10 gardens. In fact, 1.6 million New Yorkers live  
11 within a ten-minute walk of a green space but sadly,  
12 I'm here again in my role because of the state that  
13 we're in with the city budget.

14 New York City Parks has been operating on an  
15 austerity budget for over 40 years, which I will  
16 point out is eight years longer than the tree stump  
17 that has been sitting in Council Member Holden's  
18 district sadly and how can expect that an agency  
19 that's stewards twice the amount of park land than  
20 other major cities, including Chicago and  
21 Minneapolis. How can we expect that they're going to  
22 keep our parks safe and clean? In fact, Chicago and  
23 Minneapolis commit between four and five percent of  
24 their total operating budget to their parks, where we  
25 can't even manage one percent. Further disinvestment



1  
2 you know, I know, we all know, leaves parks in  
3 disrepair, creating further inequalities. We can do  
4 better. We have to do better. We can't wait any  
5 longer. So, I join my colleagues today to proudly  
6 say to City Hall that we need one percent of the  
7 city's budget to go towards our parks system and I  
8 sincerely hope that I am not sitting at this table  
9 next year with the same message.

10 The 40-year austerity budget and the 32-year-old  
11 tree stump in Council Member Holden's district really  
12 makes me scratch my head. So, I join you all in  
13 fighting for one percent for parks. Thank you.

14 CHAIRPERSON KRISHNAN: Thank you so much. Adam.

15 ADAM GANSER: Thank you Chair Krishnan for the  
16 opportunity to speak today. My name is Adam Ganser.  
17 I am the Executive Director of New Yorkers for Parks.  
18 We founded the Play Fair Coalition with several other  
19 organizations, which now as you've heard includes  
20 more than 400 organizations across the city. I want  
21 to be absolutely clear and be more direct than the  
22 Commissioner could be. New York City's Parks system  
23 is in crisis. The agency is approaching record lows  
24 in headcount with budget cuts in November and the  
25

1  
2 proposed \$55 million cut that will happen in the  
3 Preliminary budget if that goes through as proposed.

4 That's going to amount to 1,000 staffing lines.  
5 In addition to that, there are 200. I want to be  
6 clear there are 200 existing employees on one-shot  
7 deals that will lose their positions at the end of  
8 the year. These are urban rangers, gardeners, city  
9 parks workers, folks that are in our city's parks.

10 The Commissioner could not answer what this is  
11 going to look like. I will tell you what it's going  
12 to look like. We're going to have unsafe parks. We  
13 have nearly 150 fewer PEP officers than we did just a  
14 few years ago, dirty parks, closed bathrooms, that's  
15 going to happen. Reduced programming in rec centers,  
16 funding for which is at the lowest level its been in  
17 40 years. Reduced care of our city trees as we've  
18 heard. Today, we and our coalition deliver 20,000  
19 letters and petitions to the Mayor and to the Speaker  
20 of the Council. All demanding to stop these cuts and  
21 demanding one percent of the city budget. In  
22 addition, we delivered more than 40 letters from  
23 Community Boards across the city, many of those  
24 letters from the Mayor's backyard.

1  
2 Community Boards, when we do these presentations,  
3 there's nothing more complicated and hard to do than  
4 to get a community board to agree. These meetings  
5 take five minutes. They're like yes. To get there,  
6 we need to stop cuts to parks now. That's the first  
7 thing.

8 Second, simply put, the Parks Department needs  
9 more people. We've lost 200 positions so far with  
10 the hiring freeze. That's going to go up to 600,  
11 1,000 positions less than the preliminary budget in  
12 previous years. Time to make a change. New Yorkers  
13 deserve a safe, clean, and equitable park system and  
14 I'm looking at you all to help make that change.

15 Thank you.

16 CHAIRPERSON KRISHNAN: Thank you so much Adam and  
17 thank you to the Play Fair Coalition for putting in  
18 stark terms where we all know when our parks are  
19 indeed in crisis and that these cuts will severely  
20 impact. To keep our parks clean. To keep many of  
21 the facilities open as long as they should be in a  
22 time when we need to be investing far more in them.  
23 Appreciate your testimony. Thank you. Thank you.

24 Next, we'll call up Morgan Monaco, Emily Walker,  
25 and Isaac Kirk-Davidoff.

1  
2 MORGAN MONACO: Good afternoon Council Member  
3 Krishnan and the Parks Committee. I'm Morgan Monaco,  
4 President of the Prospect Park Alliance, the  
5 nonprofit that operates Prospect Park in Partnership  
6 with the Parks Department. I'm here today to support  
7 the efforts of the Play Fair Campaign to advocate for  
8 critical funding for parks in the upcoming budget  
9 including rolling back the five percent budget cut  
10 currently in place for NYC Parks, and for the city to  
11 fulfill the Mayor's Campaign promise of one percent  
12 of the city budget for parks.

13 The pandemic made it resoundingly clear that  
14 parks and open spaces are essential to the wellbeing  
15 of our communities. Prospect Park is truly  
16 Brooklyn's backyard and welcomes more than 10 million  
17 visitors each year from every zip code in Brooklyn  
18 and beyond. In a recent community survey conducted  
19 by the alliance, 82 percent of respondents cited that  
20 the park is a key reason for why they live in their  
21 neighborhood and we are bordered by some of the most  
22 diverse neighborhoods in the city from the little  
23 Caribbean in Flatbush to little Bangladesh in  
24 Kensington. All 585 acres provide fresh air and  
25 respite to Brooklyn residents, home to neighborhoods

1  
2 with some of the lowest amount of green space per  
3 resident.

4 Making Prospect Park a welcoming and accessible  
5 space for diverse communities of Brooklyn is a key  
6 part of our mission and without the support of the  
7 city and our elected officials, our work would not be  
8 possible. Since the pandemic, visitor ship to the  
9 city park has increased significantly. In Prospect  
10 Park, we've seen a record number of visitors to the  
11 park throughout the year and the resulting impact in  
12 terms of significant wear and tear in the park.

13 At the same time, the city has not kept up with  
14 this record use in funding of parks in the city  
15 budget and Prospect Park Alliance relies on this  
16 partnership with the city, with the Parks Department  
17 for basic maintenance, trash management and general  
18 upkeep of Prospect Park. Parks are essential  
19 infrastructure that are critical to our health and  
20 wellbeing and are drivers of social equity. The  
21 Citizens Budget Commission recently released a survey  
22 on quality-of-life measures and noted that  
23 neighborhood parks are part of what contributes to  
24 excellent quality of life for New Yorkers.

1  
2 Parks have been operating with an austerity  
3 budget for more than 40 years with only 0.5 percent  
4 of the city budget allocated to parks despite the  
5 fact that parks comprise 14 percent of city land. We  
6 applaud the city for reinstating the Parks  
7 Opportunity Program but the current five percent  
8 budget cuts represent a loss of 900 park staff and  
9 \$55 million in critical funding, which includes as  
10 discussed earlier, the elimination of the  
11 tremendously successful second shift program and  
12 further reductions in the Urban Park Rangers and  
13 Parks Enforcement officers, which is incredibly  
14 disheartening considering that currently there are  
15 only two parks enforcement officers in Central  
16 Brooklyn at any one time.

17 We implore the Council to increase funding for  
18 parks in this budget cycle. In addition, we applaud  
19 the Council for recognizing our parks as essential  
20 infrastructure by not only restoring current cuts but  
21 by moving beyond cycle-to-cycle funding model. One  
22 percent of our budget must be for parks. Parks saved  
23 us during the pandemic. It's time to make sure they  
24 get their fair share of the budget. Thank you.

1  
2 CHAIRPERSON KRISHNAN: Thanks so much Morgan.  
3 Emily.

4 EMILY WALKER: Good afternoon. My name is Emily  
5 Walker and I'm the Senior Manager of External Affairs  
6 at the Natural Areas Conservancy. Thank you for the  
7 opportunity to speak today Chair Krishnan.

8 Our written testimony includes our FY25 budget  
9 asks to support natural areas but I'm actually going  
10 to go off script today with the blessing of our  
11 executive director. Last Earth Day, the NAC was  
12 asked to stand beside Mayor Adams in Alley Pond Park  
13 as he made an announcement of an historic \$2.4  
14 million investment and our citywide 300-mile network  
15 of nature trails.

16 Seeing our Executive Director Sarah standing  
17 beside the Mayor, Commissioner Donoghue and the head  
18 of MOCEJ, was a proud moment for our entire team. It  
19 was even more exciting to see the Mayor help complete  
20 a wooden punch and trail structure with my colleague  
21 Gabe. My colleague Jazelle was thrill to know that a  
22 new pipeline of 26 permanent jobs at NYC Parks had  
23 been created. Jobs that were perfectly suited to our  
24 network of talented CUNY interns who she helps mentor  
25 and manage each year.

1  
2 Last fall, however, our hopes for this funding  
3 were erased with the Mayor's announcement that five  
4 percent of the FY24 Parks budget was being cut.  
5 Former interns who were in the process of  
6 interviewing for trails positions were suddenly told  
7 that the program wasn't moving forward, dashing their  
8 hopes of full-time work in our natural areas. It was  
9 devastating for our entire team and frankly left us  
10 feeling like props used to burnish the sustainability  
11 Bonafede's of the Mayor without an actual commitment  
12 to do the work.

13 For less than the cost of new park bathroom, the  
14 city could have created dozens of green jobs, opened  
15 up safe access to 10,000 acres of park land and taken  
16 meaningful action to protect our urban forest and  
17 natural areas. Instead, as is so often the case with  
18 the parks budget, the city walked back on its  
19 promise. We believe the answer is simple, fund  
20 people, create jobs, fund forestry, fund trails, fund  
21 rangers, fund maintenance and operations, fund green  
22 thumb, fund PEP, just fund parks.

23 I'm in awe of the hundreds of park advocates who  
24 have been doing this work for years. They've never  
25 given up on pushing the city to do right by every day



1  
2 New Yorkers by better funding its parks. Right now,  
3 City Hall has the opportunity to reverse these  
4 harmful cuts and finally acknowledge what advocates  
5 have been saying for decades, that every single New  
6 Yorker deserves access to clean, safe, beautiful and  
7 resilient parks. With your leadership, this can be  
8 the year that the city finally Plays Fair for parks.  
9 Thank you.

10 CHAIRPERSON KRISHNAN: Thank you so much Emily.  
11 Thank you for your powerful testimony and moving  
12 words. Next we have Heather Lubov, Sarah Balistreri  
13 and Christina Taylor.

14 HEATHER LUBOV: Good afternoon Chair Krishnan.  
15 I'm Heather Lubov, Executive Director of City Parks  
16 Foundation. A citywide nonprofit that supports a  
17 vibrant, thriving park system by offering a free,  
18 environmental, performing arts, sports and community  
19 building programs. We manage the New York City Green  
20 Fund, which raises private support that is  
21 distributed through grants to our city's most under  
22 resourced parks and open spaces. We co-manage  
23 Partnership for Parks, a joint program of city parks  
24 foundation and NYC Parks that supports 28,000  
25 volunteers and almost 500 community park groups each

1  
2 year by offering critical outreach training and  
3 technical assistance.

4 And we also staff and support the New York City  
5 Parks and Open Space Partners Coalition of more than  
6 50 nonprofits stewards and conservancies. We raise  
7 millions of dollars in private support to do our work  
8 but we also rely on the City Councils Visionary Parks  
9 Equity Initiative, as do so many parks organizations.  
10 Despite years of insufficient public funding, New  
11 Yorkers support and appreciation for parks is  
12 incredibly high and yet, just as the Parks Department  
13 has launched Let's Green NYC to encourage more  
14 volunteerism in parks, the agency staffing and  
15 resources are being cut. The five percent reduction  
16 that was enacted last fall, layered upon decades of  
17 systemic defunding of parks is deeply destabilizing  
18 for the Parks Department, for nonprofit providers and  
19 the countless New Yorkers who use their parks.

20 Aside from the significant challenges that short  
21 staffing poses to parks operations and maintenance  
22 generally, our own Partnerships for Parks team has  
23 already lost two administration funded community  
24 engagement coordinator positions out of a team of 15  
25 with two more to be cut, making it difficult for us

1  
2 to reach out to and support the many volunteers who  
3 work in parks, leading to a cycle of staff burn out  
4 and more departures. On the City Parks Foundation  
5 side, we rely on a combination of private and  
6 initiative support to provide the intensive outreach  
7 and technical assistance that volunteers need to be  
8 sustainable in the long term. From training,  
9 coaching, fiscal sponsorship and microgrants, to  
10 coordinators who organize service projects for  
11 volunteer park stewards.

12 We are seeking not only the renewal of but an  
13 increase to the Parks Equity Initiative to  
14 accommodate for this ever-expanding work. We're  
15 doing everything we can to generate new private  
16 support and to use the New York City Green Fund to  
17 help identify alternative revenue streams that can  
18 compliment city funding and stabilize our parks but  
19 the Administration is not off the hook. We are a  
20 member of the Play Fair Coalition and call for an end  
21 to the hiring freeze adding back the parks workers  
22 and reinstating crucial programs. We urge the city  
23 to step up and invest in a fair budget by restoring  
24 the budget cuts and providing one percent of the city  
25 budget to support parks.

1                   CHAIRPERSON KRISHNAN: Thank you Heather. Sarah.

2                   SARAH BALISTRERI: Thank you. Hello, my name is  
3 Sarah Balistreri and I am an Environmental Educator  
4 with Trees New York. A nonprofit organization whose  
5 mission is to plant, preserve and protect New York  
6 City's trees. Thank you for the opportunity Chair  
7 Krishnan to provide testimony about the importance of  
8 funding parks and the essential maintenance they  
9 perform of our urban forest.  
10

11                   Trees New York engages community volunteers,  
12 students, block associations, garden groups,  
13 businesses and corporate volunteers and activities  
14 that promote the health of urban trees like pruning  
15 and tree bed care. Incidentally, Trees New York was  
16 formed in the 1970's by neighbors who observed gaps  
17 in the ongoing maintenance of their street trees,  
18 even when as Committee Chair Krishnan shared, Parks  
19 at the time received 1.2 percent of the city's  
20 overall budget.

21                   We are proud of the work that our volunteer  
22 stewards and citizen pruners take on to maintain our  
23 city's trees, but they're there to augment not  
24 replace the central role that the city plays in tree  
25 and park maintenance.

1  
2 Parks and street trees are not a luxury. They  
3 are part of our city's essential infrastructure and  
4 provide countless environmental and social benefits  
5 and as such, they deserve adequate funding.

6 There has been promising energy and commitment  
7 toward increasing New York City's canopy cover to 30  
8 percent. Many immediately think that this means  
9 plant more trees but the data shows that the biggest  
10 contributor to canopy expansion is actually the  
11 growth and maturing of existing trees. As I have  
12 testified before, we often say that it actually take  
13 five years to plant a tree. About an hour to put it  
14 in the ground and then the remaining time to ensure  
15 that it becomes properly established. Trees that  
16 survive these first crucial years in the ground are  
17 much more likely to grow to maturity and provide the  
18 maximum benefits of canopy cover, heat reduction,  
19 carbon sequestration and stormwater interception.  
20 Things that ultimately save New Yorkers money.

21 This is why funding the maintenance of the urban  
22 forest makes sense. Caring for the trees we have now  
23 and promoting their long-term health will pay off in  
24 the long run. Thank you again for the opportunity to  
25 testify today.

1                   CHAIRPERSON KRISHNAN: Thank you so much Sarah.  
2  
3 Christina.

4                   CHRISTINA TAYLOR: Good afternoon, I'm Christina  
5 Taylor, Deputy Director of the Van Cortlandt Park  
6 Alliance.

7                   CHAIRPERSON KRISHNAN: Can you turn your mic on  
8 please?

9                   CHRISTINA TAYLOR: Sorry. Good afternoon, I'm  
10 Christina Taylor, Deputy Director of the Van  
11 Cortlandt Park Alliance. We are proud members of the  
12 Play Fair for Parks Coalition and we thank you for  
13 holding this hearing today.

14                   New Yorkers deserve a fully funded, safe, clean,  
15 green and resilient park system. The budget cuts to  
16 New York City Parks this year and the proposed cuts  
17 for next year jeopardize the very heart of our  
18 communities. These cuts will make it even more  
19 difficult for the already understaffed, under-sourced  
20 Parks Department to carry out the basic work needed  
21 to ensure parks are equitable and accessible for all  
22 New Yorkers.

23                   As you know, the Parks Budget was recently cut by  
24 \$25 million and now we're looking at another \$55  
25 million cut. Year after year, New York City Park

1 Staff does more with less. The staff is already  
2 stretched too thin. They are tired and frustrated  
3 and so are we. The hiring freeze and reduced budget  
4 will result in nearly 1,000 park workers. How are  
5 park staff supposed to keep all of our parks clean  
6 with no Second Shift? Second Shift means that  
7 yesterday's mess gets cleaned up before today's  
8 visitors arrive. Without it, staff will never get on  
9 top of the garbage and parks will look awful.

11 Parks Enforcement Patrols numbers are already at  
12 their lowest they have been in several years. The  
13 work of PEP is to ensure public safety and quality of  
14 life for all New Yorkers. Without them, mopeds and  
15 scooters will run amuck in our parks. Since the  
16 Mayor is so concerned about trash and safety, he  
17 ought to fund parks and make sure they are clean and  
18 safe. To be sure with these budget cuts, it is New  
19 Yorkers who will suffer. Without enough staff,  
20 playgrounds will not open on time, if at all.  
21 Bathrooms will not be clean and will not stay open  
22 late on summer nights. Sports fields will not be  
23 groomed, graffiti will not be removed, garbage will  
24 not be picked up, PEP will be practically  
25 nonexistent, pools will not be fully staffed so you

1  
2 can forget about any special programs like Learn to  
3 Swim and late hours on the hottest days of the year.  
4 It's not a pretty picture. We demand one percent of  
5 the city's budget for NYC Parks. Mayor Adams  
6 repeatedly committed to this and he needs to follow  
7 through. Thank you.

8 CHAIRPERSON KRISHNAN: Thank you so much for your  
9 testimony. Our next panel is Rosa Chang, Giulietta  
10 Fiore and Scott Daly.

11 SCOTT DALY: Good afternoon Chair Krishnan,  
12 members of the Committee. My name is Scott Daly and  
13 I'm the Senior Director of the New York Junior and  
14 Learning, better known throughout the city as NYJTL.  
15 We provide free tennis for all kids 5-18 years of age  
16 in all five boroughs, 12 months a year. We are not a  
17 one and done organization. We don't go in one day  
18 and then come out. We provide extended programs, 6-8  
19 weeks throughout the city 12 months a year. We hit  
20 over 90,000 kids. Let me repeat that over 90,000  
21 kids are reached only because of the funding that we  
22 get from the New York City Council. We are funded  
23 under the Physical Education and Fitness Initiative  
24 and through various Council Members.



1                   You know nobody can deny the benefits of physical  
2 fitness on these kids. We allow kids to be kids.  
3 They go out and play. We're not putting a book in  
4 front of them. We get to them. We reach them in all  
5 the five boroughs. A lot of the high school seniors  
6 that we have, they come and they start working for us  
7 after they come up through the program. We have our  
8 own kind of SYEP. You know let me just talk about  
9 the money aspect for a minute. We get \$800,000 from  
10 the City Council. Now, we've been at that number for  
11 16 years, since we were cut back back in 2008.

12                   Since that time nobody can deny how much prices  
13 have gone up. Wages, minimum wage is more than  
14 double. Permit fees have tripled. Our equipment  
15 costs are up. Buses, transportation, we can't do it.  
16 We don't get a COLA increase by the way. There's no  
17 COLA for anybody who works when we're funded in this  
18 fashion through the Council discretionary money. We  
19 could use the extra money. With the extra money, if  
20 you fund us for the million dollars, we'll be able to  
21 provide extra hours, extra site, more Saturday  
22 programs. All this translates into more kids being a  
23 kid, being able to participate. Kids who wouldn't  
24 otherwise have the opportunity.  
25

1  
2 I want to thank you for your time. I want to  
3 thank you for your continued support. Thank you very  
4 much.

5 CHAIRPERSON KRISHNAN: Thank you for your  
6 testimony.

7 SCOTT DALY: Thank you.

8 GIULIETTA FIORE: Hello there, my name is  
9 Giuletta Fiore and I am testifying on behalf of the  
10 Historic House Trust of New York City. First, I want  
11 to thank Chair Krishnan for holding this hearing and  
12 for advocating for our critical parks infrastructure.  
13 As a member of the Play Fair Coalition, the Historic  
14 House Trust calls upon the city to invest in our  
15 parks and their diverse resources by dedicating one  
16 percent of the budget to New York City Parks.

17 As some of the oldest structures in New York, the  
18 23 city owned sites that we help steward sit on over  
19 400 acres of land that have remained green space for  
20 hundreds of years. Thanks to the partnership of over  
21 20 community-based nonprofits that operate the sites  
22 as museums, these historic places tie the history of  
23 New York City to our present day lives and provide  
24 opportunities for residents to be outside, to learn  
25 and to engage with their neighbors.

1  
2 Located in areas that are often underserved by  
3 larger cultural institutions, our partner sites serve  
4 many communities that historically under represented.  
5 Head to the Valentine Varian House to learn about one  
6 of the earliest interracial housing complexes in the  
7 Bronx, the Allerton Coops or experience LGBTQ+  
8 history first hand through exhibitions and  
9 photography workshops at the Alice Austin House on  
10 Staten Island.

11 Experience the Annual Thunderbird American Indian  
12 pow wow with the Queens County Farm Museum or  
13 purchase vegetables farmed in Brooklyn through the  
14 Wykoff House Museums Youth Garden Apprentice Program.  
15 The budget cuts to New York City Parks jeopardize the  
16 very heart of these communities. These cuts will  
17 make it even more difficult for the already  
18 understaffed, under resourced Parks Department to  
19 carry out the basic work needed to ensure parks are  
20 equitable and accessible for all New Yorkers,  
21 especially in communities that are unable to  
22 supplement New York City Park services with private  
23 funding. These public spaces have begun to suffer.

24 Despite the best efforts of hardworking New York  
25 City Parks employees who are constantly being asked

1  
2 to do more with less. Years of disinvestment in New  
3 York City Parks have taken a toll on these public  
4 resources.

5 In addition to trash built up and overgrown  
6 lawns, we're seeing unsafe conditions on pathways,  
7 deteriorating roofs and wood siding, water  
8 infiltration and even hate speech graffiti. Without  
9 funding for maintenance workers, specialized trades  
10 people like carpenters and general investment across  
11 all five boroughs, we fear that communities will no  
12 longer see these parks resources as safe and  
13 welcoming places. By allocating more funds to New  
14 York City Parks in the FY25 budget you will be  
15 supporting livable communities citywide and  
16 empowering millions of New Yorkers in their own  
17 communities.

18 On behalf of our partners and neighbors, thank  
19 you for this opportunity to voice our needs.

20 CHAIRPERSON KRISHNAN: Thank you.

21 ROSA CHANG: Hi Chair Krishnan, how are you  
22 doing?

23 CHAIRPERSON KRISHNAN: Good, how are you?

24 ROSA CHANG: Very good. Hi, my name is Rosa  
25 Chang, I'm the Cofounder of Gotham Park, a grassroots

1  
2 community led nonprofit that successfully advocated  
3 for the opening of new public space beneath the  
4 Brooklyn Bridge a block away from here. In two short  
5 years, our advocacy opened our first of an eventful  
6 nine-acre plan and in our third year, we will have  
7 opened three acres and we are hurdling toward our  
8 goal to deliver open space in a neighborhood that has  
9 been historically disadvantaged and has been under  
10 invested in for generations.

11 Because we are located beneath the landmark  
12 Brooklyn Bridge and its associated steel spaghetti of  
13 on and off ramps, we are a DOT plaza and not a park.  
14 So, why am I here today? Gotham Park is a proud  
15 member of the Play Fair Coalition because no matter  
16 the legal definition, we are park to any New Yorker  
17 who comes to visit the space, and we are here to  
18 advocate for all the green spaces in our beloved  
19 city. What I call the sanity spaces that are  
20 essential to the health and wellness of our residents  
21 and the space where community gets built and comes  
22 together. Because cities are built by people, for  
23 people and if they do not benefit the people who live  
24 here, then they fail and that's literally that  
25 simple. In a city where the vast majority of us live

1  
2 in tiny apartments have zero access to outdoor space  
3 and live on top of each other, and my own building  
4 actually has 408 apartments so I do mean that  
5 literally.

6 We need to invest in the parks and open spaces  
7 that are our shared backyards. Within a city as  
8 dense as ours, parks are as essential component of  
9 urban infrastructure as our sewers, our lights and  
10 our streets and like these fundamental components of  
11 civic infrastructure, public dollars must go into  
12 their maintenance. We would not accept a 50 percent  
13 of our street; street lights and our sewers did not  
14 work. One percent of our city's budget is the floor  
15 and not the ceiling of what we need. Without care  
16 and maintenance, our parks are dangerous and  
17 unusable.

18 This past weekend in Gotham Park, our team of  
19 volunteers picked up and backed 420 pounds of trash.  
20 That's what was in one acre in one week. If that's  
21 what we can pick up from one week of use, imagine the  
22 need for maintenance across our park throughout this  
23 city. It's beyond time we put our money where our  
24 values are and that should be in our people and in  
25 our parks. Thank you.

1  
2 CHAIRPERSON KRISHNAN: Thank you so much for your  
3 testimony and all your great work across the  
4 organizations. Our next panel is Joe Puleo, Morlena  
5 Giga, and John Sorico.

6 JOE PULEO: Okay, good afternoon Chair. My name  
7 is Joe Puleo. For those of you who don't know me, I  
8 am the President of Local 983. I represent the urban  
9 park rangers, the PEP officers, the associate park  
10 service workers and all the city seasonal aids. This  
11 year again, we hear what's known as the dance, I  
12 believe you call right, where our funding gets cut.  
13 But what makes this year different is, we started off  
14 at the best of times when we were supposed to get one  
15 percent. So, not only did we not get the one  
16 percent, we got probably the most severe cuts in  
17 recent years. So, it's really a detriment to the  
18 people who use our New York City Parks.

19 Our parks are going to be dirty; they're going to  
20 filthy; the parks aren't going to be safe. There's  
21 not going to be enough people there to patrol and  
22 make sure that undesirable things do not happen.

23 I'm asking right that we have all of this funding  
24 restored and in addition to this, we would like to  
25 see the one percent that was promised to us. And

1  
2 also on behalf of Ms. Delsy Bentz, who could not be  
3 here today, she has said that her city park workers  
4 are facing safety concerns closing parks.

5 In recent times, she stated to me that these  
6 parks are becoming more difficult to have people exit  
7 the parks at closing time. People are not being -  
8 when they're instructed to leave are not leaving and  
9 it's posing a serious danger to her members. Again,  
10 I praise you for your work. I know you've been a  
11 strong advocates and we thank you but we cannot sit  
12 here and take this while we're being deprioritized I  
13 think is a good definition here. Because money is  
14 out there, money is being spent but we feel like it's  
15 not being spent where it should be spent. Thank you.

16 CHAIRPERSON KRISHNAN: Thank you Joe. Please  
17 thank Delsy as well for her hard work every day.  
18 Marlana.

19 MARLENA GIGA: Hi, my name is Marlana Giga and I  
20 am a New York City Park Enforcement Officer/also  
21 Ranger. We're responsible for patrolling all of New  
22 York City parklands, natural forests, the beaches and  
23 all of the city pools. And I can tell you that the  
24 staff has been dwindling. It's getting harder and  
25 harder to keep the parks and the pools and the



1 beaches safe. We really need the funding to keep New  
2 York City going. We are encountering a lot more  
3 homeless individuals living inside of parks and one  
4 of the things that we do is we assist getting the  
5 help that the homelessness needs into shelters and  
6 SRO. We're finding people in the woods, really in  
7 the middle of nowhere and we just, we need the  
8 funding for the security. The PEP officers and the  
9 Rangers are designated at protecting all parkland,  
10 not NYPD. So, we really need the public and for  
11 everybody to understand that. The Park Rangers are  
12 also responsible for doing all kinds of nature walks  
13 and tours for New York City children and it's so  
14 important because a lot of the interactions that  
15 children have sometimes with a horse or the New York  
16 City Native Wildlife is with a park ranger and we  
17 don't want those programs to be cut. We also need  
18 the funding to keep the parks clean, so please we  
19 have to invest in all these titles. Thank you.

21 CHAIRPERSON KRISHNAN: Thank you so much Marlana.

22 JOHN SORICO: Good afternoon. I'm John Sorico,  
23 the Senior Fellow for Climate and Opportunity at the  
24 Center for an Urban Future. An independent think  
25 tank focused on creating a stronger and more

1  
2 inclusive economy in New York. I'm also the proud  
3 son of two former NYC Park parkies.

4 Thank you to Chair Krishnan and members of the  
5 Committee for the opportunity to testify today. New  
6 York's parks, playgrounds, and open spaces have  
7 experienced record usage in recent years, becoming  
8 even more vital to the health of New Yorkers and more  
9 critical to the city's economic future but today our  
10 30,000 acres of parks and natural areas face hundreds  
11 of millions of dollars in unmet needs and for years,  
12 if not decades, New York City has struggled to  
13 provide sufficient funding to pay for them.

14 We strongly support the City Council's effort to  
15 reverse the nearly \$54 million in cuts proposed for  
16 FY 2025. Without deeper changes, it's unlikely that  
17 this budget process will meet New Yorks ever growing  
18 parks and open space needs in the near future.

19 That's why city leaders need to get creative and seek  
20 out new sustainable sources of revenue for parks.

21 Our news report at Center for an Urban Future  
22 outlines 20 specific and achievable ideas to do  
23 exactly that. A new dollar surcharge on tickets sold  
24 at stadiums located on park land like City Field and  
25 Arthur Ash Stadium could help offset a significant

1 share of the park systems maintenance needs. At City  
2 Field alone, this surcharge would generate more than  
3 \$2.5 million for parks, enough to hire more than 50  
4 full-time gardeners. A moss expansion of  
5 restaurants, cafes and other concessions and parks  
6 could generate new funding for parks while enhancing  
7 the experience of park goers.  
8

9 City Officials can also consider enacting fees on  
10 gas powered landscaping and storm water management as  
11 well soliciting involuntary contribution from hotel  
12 guests. For profit events held in parks from soccer  
13 camps to music festivals should be asked to  
14 contribute more to parks bottom line and by investing  
15 in the infrastructure needed to monetize organic  
16 waste from parks, the city can convert a  
17 multimillion-dollar annual expense into a steady  
18 stream of revenue.

19 Similarly, the city should enable more New  
20 Yorkers to directly support their green spaces. For  
21 example, a membership program with corporate tiers  
22 ticketed special events and well designed merchandize  
23 could tap New Yorkers pride and generosity to benefit  
24 parks and New York City should make it much easier  
25 for nonprofit organizations and community groups to

1 step in and support their local park groups. A  
2 process too often bogged down in bureaucracy. The  
3 Center commends the City Council for consistently  
4 championing parks and open spaces. Thanks also to  
5 Chair Krishnan for his thoughtful consideration of  
6 the ideas in our recent report. By getting creative  
7 about generating dedicated new revenues for parks,  
8 city leaders can deliver the healthy vibrant parks  
9 and open spaces New Yorkers need now and for decades  
10 to come. Thank you.

12 RALPH BASELICE: Thank you everyone for hearing  
13 us today. Chair Krishnan, thank you for all the work  
14 you continue to do. My name is Ralph Baselice, I am  
15 also a Park Enforcement Sergeant/Urban Park Ranger  
16 and as my coworker explained, not only do we make  
17 sure the park patrons are safe and protected when  
18 they're enjoying their time in free recreational  
19 space. We also provide emergency service. The urban  
20 park rangers do free pop-up educational courses for  
21 the children of the City of New York. Not to many  
22 things are free. These are free classes for children  
23 all throughout the five boroughs. In addition to  
24 those two titles, Local 983 also represents the  
25 APSW's, Associate Park Service Workers. I heard some

1 of them behind me mention 420 pounds of garbage.  
2 That's nothing. Our APSW's require to maintain a CDL  
3 driver's license throughout their employment to  
4 operate all the heavy-duty equipment that is used to  
5 keep not only the parks clean, the beaches clean, the  
6 beach rakes and right now, we're having major issues  
7 because parks cannot maintain the big packers, the 30  
8 yard roll off containers which transport this garbage  
9 once it leaves the receptacle you throw it in to the  
10 New York City dumps. We need the one percent; we  
11 need more than one percent but all the titles we  
12 represent play a major role in making sure these free  
13 recreational spaces in New York City operate daily.  
14 I mean I go back to the pandemic, how many  
15 christenings, graduation parties. People weren't  
16 working, they had no money. This is where they went.  
17 The parks was at maximum usage. People in New York  
18 City, rent is expensive. You need a place to go for  
19 free. Rec centers, we operate all these things so  
20 even though it's a small part of the budget, it is a  
21 main, main, yes, - thank you Joe. And that's it, I  
22 just wanted you guys to be aware of all the stuff our  
23 members actually do in the park in addition to Ms.  
24 Delsy Bentz members, you know clean, sanitary, these  
25

1  
2 are big, big, especially after COVID. Thank you very  
3 much everyone, have a good day.

4 CHAIRPERSON KRISHNAN: Thank you so much Ralph  
5 for your work, for your members work too. Appreciate  
6 all DC 37 does and for all of you really making clear  
7 in stark personal terms, the work that you all do  
8 every single day in our parks. We wouldn't have the  
9 park system we do without you all and it's the  
10 responsibility of our city, of City Hall, to be  
11 supporting each and every one of you. Thank you for  
12 your work. Thank you John for your testimony.

13 Next we'll call up Merritt Birnbaum, Joby Jacob  
14 and Kathleen Carrigan. Thank you. That's okay.  
15 Merritt.

16 MERRITT BIRNBAUM: Good afternoon, my name is  
17 Merritt Birnbaum, I'm the President and CEO of  
18 Riverside Park Conservancy. We are also one of the  
19 over 400 organizations who are members of the Play  
20 Fair Coalition and thank you Parks Committee Chair  
21 Krishnan for calling this hearing and for your  
22 tireless advocacy on behalf of our city's parks,  
23 which are in crisis. Riverside Park Conservancy  
24 works through an agreement with NYC Parks to help the  
25 city care for 450 acres that's spread across five

1  
2 parks along six miles of the waterfront in upper  
3 Manhattan from West 59<sup>th</sup> Street to 181<sup>st</sup> Street.

4 We're fortunate to have built a 35-year history that  
5 leverages thousands of volunteer hours, as well as  
6 significant funding to supplement the city's  
7 dwindling workforce.

8 We recognize that the vast majority of the parks  
9 in our city do not have the benefit of conservancy  
10 groups, so our situation really only underscores how  
11 dire the current crisis is for the parks in our most  
12 vulnerable communities. And make no mistake, the  
13 crisis is real, we see it every day in Riverside,  
14 Fort Washington, West Harlem Piers and Secora Parks  
15 as we struggle to keep them clean, safe and green.

16 I want to say that in June 2008, between the full  
17 time and seasonal CPW's in our park, we had  
18 approximately 79. This June, we will be lucky if we  
19 have 20 of them. CPW's as was discussed before do  
20 everything from picking up trash to cleaning  
21 bathrooms, to removing graffiti. They are the  
22 frontline of the Parks Department and in our park  
23 alone, their ranks have fallen to 25 percent of what  
24 they were 16 years ago.

1                   In smaller parks around the city, we're not  
2 talking about one parks worker at this point, we're  
3 talking about a fraction of a parks worker. How can  
4 we accept this? Parks are critical infrastructure  
5 and they need to be funded the same way that we fund  
6 roads and bridges and hospitals and police and  
7 sanitation. I want to call attention to one thing.  
8 In the last five decades, the city has proudly claim  
9 to have created 200 new parks and in 1970, as was  
10 pointed out, the Parks Department headcount was  
11 11,000. So, how do we get to 7,000 parks workers for  
12 200 more parks? It's a simple math question. How  
13 can our government say it prioritized sanitation and  
14 safety and not consider the public parks but occupy  
15 14 percent of our city's surface area?

17               Just this past Sunday in our park, NYC Park staff  
18 were slated for spring landscape work and they were  
19 pulled away to paint over an incident of major  
20 graffiti in the high traffic location. They dropped  
21 what they were doing and they pivoted because that is  
22 what CPW's do. They respond to the needs on the  
23 ground and they get the work done. If we want  
24 bathrooms open and clean, we need staff. If we want  
25 lawns that are green and not filled with rotting



1 trash, we need staff. If we want stairs and pathways  
2 that are clear of safety hazards, we need staff. If  
3 we want healthy trees and plants, we need staff. We  
4 demand that the city fulfill its promise and deliver  
5 one percent of our budget for parks. This is a  
6 rounding error for City Hall and it is a lifeline for  
7 all of us. Thank you.

9 CHAIRPERSON KRISHNAN: Thank you Merritt,  
10 couldn't agree more.

11 JOBY JACOB: My name is Joby Jacob. I'm a  
12 Professor at LaGuardia Community College and I'm here  
13 in my capacity as a lifelong Queens resident and  
14 Cofounder of the Eastern Queens Greenway. We started  
15 Eastern Queens Greenway almost ten years ago to  
16 advocate for filling in the gaps in the trails that  
17 connect Alley Pond Park to Cunningham Park to Casino  
18 Park to Flushing Meadows Corona Park in the 50's, in  
19 the 70's, and in the 80's plans were put forward to  
20 link these parks with a 13-mile trail but the funding  
21 never materialized. The Destination Greenways  
22 Program gave us a new plan and thanks to this Mayor  
23 and to this Council, a good portion of the plan was  
24 funded. But there are two critical gaps that  
25 correspond to Destination Greenway's projects four

1  
2 and eight between Utopia Parkway and the Vanderbilt  
3 Motor Parkway and between Main Street and College  
4 Point Boulevard.

5       So, imagine this, sometime in the future, this  
6 world class greenway is build. Kids and families  
7 from all over the city come to enjoy this 13 mile  
8 trail, which is completely off the streets and in our  
9 parks. But on the 13 mile stretch, there are two  
10 half mile gaps. One gap would have children  
11 navigating a five way all-way stop on wide streets  
12 and the other would have them riding their bikes for  
13 Queens residents, you'll know this streets, Booth  
14 Memorial Avenue, where former Assemblywoman Young was  
15 struck and seriously injured while riding her bike in  
16 2008.

17       We would never tell children to ride on this  
18 stretch but that's in fact what we will be doing if  
19 we don't build these remaining portions of the  
20 Greenway. So, I'd ask you to consider funding to  
21 filling these two gaps in the trail. Again, one  
22 between Main Street and College Point Boulevard and  
23 the other between Utopia Parkway and the Vanderbilt  
24 Motor Parkway and of course, we do support the Play  
25

1 Fair one percent for parks. One percent should be  
2 the minimum. Thank you. Thank you Shekar.

3 CHAIRPERSON KRISHNAN: Thank you so much Joby.

4 KATHLEEN CARRIGAN: Hello, I'm Kathleen Carrigan,  
5 I'm a retired pediatrician from the East Village and  
6 I'm here today on behalf of our all-volunteer group  
7 Friends of Tompkin Square Park. We're testifying  
8 that New York City Parks deserve one percent of the  
9 budget where members of the Play Fair for Parks  
10 Coalition and we thank you today for hosting this  
11 hearing.

12 Tompkin Square Park with the ten and a half acres  
13 has no bathrooms. We have no gardener and our small  
14 maintenance crew of six people clean the park.  
15 Currently, the park staff is responding to the  
16 unexpected challenges as asylum seekers take respite  
17 in the South East quadrant of the park while they  
18 await entry to the Saint Bridges Church reticketing  
19 center. And as our local mutual aid groups welcome  
20 and provide meals to the asylum seekers, our parks  
21 staff has increased trash collection and general  
22 maintenance.

23 Since January, we have witnessed their  
24 compassion, their empathy and their willingness to  
25

1  
2 welcome the asylum seekers and accept the extra work  
3 that's needed to carry out their basic duties. You  
4 may be aware of the shooting in the park last  
5 Saturday as we hosted 13 volunteers assisting the  
6 park staff in cleanup and again, we witnessed the  
7 park staff, their dedication and their resiliency as  
8 they responded with grace under pressure to this  
9 tragic event. Over the past year, our group has  
10 swept under benches, collected trash, we've weeded,  
11 amended the soil, planted, watered hundreds of new  
12 plants and we've learned first hand the tremendous  
13 amount of physical labor that's done by our park  
14 staff. Our park staff is critical to a thriving park  
15 and a thriving community. And lastly, Tompkin Square  
16 Park has no bathrooms. Thank you.

17 CHAIRPERSON KRISHNAN: Thank you for your  
18 testimony and for those important points.

19 KATHLEEN CARRIGAN: Thank you.

20 CHAIRPERSON KRISHNAN: Merritt just one question,  
21 I just want to clarify, you said there are 200 more  
22 parks now since the 1970's while the budget and  
23 workforce has gone down from that point?

24 MERRITT BIRNBAUM: Yeah [INAUDIBLE 02:42:16].  
25

1                   CHAIRPERSON KRISHNAN: Thank you very helpful.  
2  
3 Thank you for your testimony.

4                   KATHLEEN CARRIGAN: Thank you.

5                   CHAIRPERSON KRISHNAN: The next panel is Leona  
6 Chin and Aislinn Klein. Leona, you may begin.

7                   LEONA CHIN: Okay, my name is Leona Chin and I  
8 represent Kissena Synergy. A proactive inclusive  
9 diverse multigenerational multilingual, multi-abled  
10 volunteer team and in on the ground public facing New  
11 York City Parks Friends Group, serving out of Kissena  
12 Park in Flushing New York.

13                   We are here to support and ask that the one  
14 percent funding pledge to the Parks Department be  
15 fulfilled. Our volunteer team serve five mornings a  
16 week and are powered and informed by the New York  
17 City Parks Department, Natural Areas Conservancy and  
18 the New York Restoration Project. Our efforts are  
19 directed and coordinated by a collaboration of these  
20 organizations. We are two years into a collaborative  
21 reforestation project as well as a designation green  
22 ways project based and running through Kissena Park  
23 respectively.

24                   Our volunteers mobilize each week to clean,  
25 plant, mulch, and weed and to care for and sustain

1  
2 the forest and trails in our park. Our volunteer  
3 leads are trained forestry and trail maintenance  
4 stewards. Our overworked gardeners staff and parks  
5 manager oversee and support our focused efforts.  
6 Just yesterday at the request of community members,  
7 our teams painted lines on a basketball court, which  
8 was last refreshed seven years ago.

9 Our volunteer teams are young and old students  
10 and professionals working and retired as well as  
11 prevocational individuals learning and gaining  
12 transferable and protective skills and skill sets.  
13 Our volunteers are both servants and patrons of our  
14 parks, which have provided respite and safe, healthy  
15 opportunities to walk, job, bike, dance and recreate  
16 alone or together with community.

17 Each July, our teams brace themselves for the  
18 inevitable announcement that our project staff and  
19 leads will not be returning. As volunteers, we  
20 cannot emphasize enough the collective talent and  
21 wisdom that is embodied by these managers and staff  
22 that have survived many years of budget cuts.  
23 Together we have adapted and pivoted together to stay  
24 on our service timelines to maintain, preserve,  
25 nurture and assist in the forestry projects and trail

1 maintenance assignments so sorely needed for safe and  
2 clean green spaces for our communities.

3  
4 Our communities cannot afford to lose anymore  
5 park staff or their knowledge bases. Parks staff are  
6 day-to-day frontline personnel that continue to serve  
7 our communities while lacking basic supplies and  
8 resources. We see it every day. Lastly, I invite  
9 you all to visit us at Kissena Park in person or  
10 virtually to see our collaborative progress despite  
11 past budget cuts. Please support and reinstate one  
12 percent of Fiscal Year 2025 budget funding for parks.  
13 Thank you all for your kind consideration of my  
14 testimony Committee Chair Krishnan and members of the  
15 Parks Committee. Thank you.

16 CHAIRPERSON KRISHNAN: Thank you for your  
17 testimony.

18 AISLINN KLEIN: Thank you Council Member for this  
19 opportunity to testify. My name is Aislinn Klein,  
20 I'm with the Municipal Art Society of New York, MAS.  
21 MAS is a member of the Play Fair for Parks Coalition  
22 and the NYC Forest for All Coalition and we support  
23 our partners and their demands to allocate one  
24 percent of the city budget to the Department of Parks  
25

1  
2 and Recreation, NYC Parks, and to fund our urban  
3 forest.

4 For the past 130 years MAS has advocated on  
5 behalf of the city's public realm including an  
6 equitable and resilient system of parks and open  
7 spaces and adequate funding to ensure that these  
8 public assets thrive. The importance of our city's  
9 parks and urban green spaces can not be overstated,  
10 as they are essential to our wellbeing and health and  
11 are critical infrastructure in the fight to address  
12 climate change and support our long-term  
13 sustainability goals.

14 In addition to providing maintenance to 30,000  
15 acres of public park land, NYC Parks also operates  
16 community and recreation centers that are part of the  
17 city's life blood and administer crucial public  
18 programs to New Yorkers of all ages. Further, NYC  
19 Parks maintains the city's urban forest, which helps  
20 improve public and environmental health by mitigating  
21 the heat island affect, lowering emissions and  
22 supporting biodiversity. Thus, it is vital that NYC  
23 Parks is sufficiently funded to serve New Yorkers  
24 across all five boroughs, across all seasons and for  
25 years to come.



1                   The continued underfunding of NYC Parks has  
2 contributed to growing inequity across our  
3 communities. Parks are the back yards for millions  
4 of New Yorkers but to be usable, they need to be  
5 maintained. The city budget must allocate one  
6 percent to NYC Parks and retain pre-pandemic staffing  
7 levels to affectively uphold these vital public  
8 resources. Further, meeting Forest for All demands  
9 for the city to fulfill its commitment to a 30  
10 percent tree canopy coverage by 2035 necessitates  
11 investment now to return greater cost savings in the  
12 future.  
13

14                  While Mayor Adams pledged one percent for NYC  
15 Parks in his initial campaign, the Adams  
16 Administration has reversed this assurance. NYC  
17 Parks faces devastating budget cuts with even less  
18 funding than in Fiscal Year 2024. These cuts will  
19 ride in systemic inequities, diminish public health,  
20 eliminate park programs, limit accessibility and add  
21 to the already present overburden on NYC Parks staff  
22 and resources.

23                  MAS stands by Play Fair and Forest for All in  
24 calling on the Adams Administration to reevaluate  
25 these detrimental cuts. Our newest commitment to NYC

1  
2 Parks, issuing the one percent funding commitment,  
3 increasing parks staff headcount to pre-pandemic  
4 levels, baselining 300 agency positions and creating  
5 an urban forest plan to ensure our public spaces are  
6 clean, green, resilient and so that NYC Parks can  
7 maintain our city's critical public realm for  
8 generations. Thank you very much.

9 CHAIRPERSON KRISHNAN: Thank you.

10 UNIDENTIFIED: Hi, thanks Council Member Krishnan  
11 for having us today. You know I've been to many  
12 parks in all five boroughs. I seek these places out.  
13 I have taken buses, boats and trains to visit these  
14 places. I have traveled for more than – for the  
15 train starts to where it ends just to visit a park.

16 I started a You Tube channel focused on that. I  
17 have sense spoken to many people including some  
18 Council Members. I have been spending a lot of time  
19 at Crispus Attucks Playground in Brooklyn. Crispus  
20 Attucks was the first person killed in the  
21 Revolutionary War. He became a martyr and American  
22 hero. The park that bears his name was the first  
23 park named after an African American figure in New  
24 York City. 20 years ago, this playground was called  
25 by another name, Prostitution Park. Since that time,

1 a new playground with new playground equipment was  
2 built. The basketball court was renamed for Biggie  
3 Smalls, who grew up nearby. It now retracts people  
4 of all ages throughout the community. I see glimpses  
5 of this playgrounds past reputation though. Council  
6 Member Robert Holden talks about a return to the  
7 battle days of New York City. I'm from California,  
8 so my New York City experience is formed by TV and  
9 movies.  
10

11 What I witnessed at the bathroom at Crispus  
12 Attucks was as graphic as any scene from a gritty  
13 70's movie. The bathroom is often a drug den and the  
14 esthetic is there. The flickering lights, the deep  
15 shadows, the dirt. Many of the bathrooms are like  
16 this and you know it. This park is often filled with  
17 trash and has many dead trees that have never been  
18 replaced. It has a sizable community center that is  
19 only used for one class. All of this makes me sad.  
20 Parks need a larger investment and a reassessment on  
21 how that investment is spent. We need parks to keep  
22 us - we need parkies to keep these places clean, to  
23 make us feel safe, to make us feel connected.  
24 Without safe, clean, parks New York City would be a  
25 pretty shitty place to live.

1  
2 CHAIRPERSON KRISHNAN: Thank you so much for your  
3 testimony. Next, we have up Sally Burns, Raphael  
4 Schweizer, and Savona McClain.

5 SALLY BURNS: Thank you Committee. My name is  
6 Sally Burns and I am the Planning Associate at Union  
7 Square Partnership. We're the nonprofit business  
8 improvement District working to create a safe, clean,  
9 and vibrant neighborhood for Union Square's  
10 residents, businesses, and visitors. Union Square  
11 Park is a critical open space and an important civic  
12 gathering place for the entire city. It's not only a  
13 green oasis in a bustling mixed-use district but a  
14 site for free expression and the chosen venue for  
15 hundreds of demonstrations, performances and public  
16 events each year, including the city's flagship green  
17 market operating four days a week. Due to this  
18 intensive use, the infrastructure beneath our  
19 beautiful park is aging and failing, which has  
20 resulted in deteriorating plumbing and drainage  
21 systems that have caused sink holes and eroding  
22 pathways.

23 With failing irrigation, the park plantings rely  
24 on make shift and expensive work arounds that have  
25 caused the landscaping to decline. The current

1 conditions are not only a detriment to plant and tree  
2 health but create unsafe conditions for pedestrians.  
3 The park is located above the fourth busiest subway  
4 station in New York City and rather than waiting for  
5 a disaster when waterpipes break, we're calling for  
6 our city leaders to be proactive and fund these  
7 repairs before it's too late.  
8

9 We're here today to advocate for funding to  
10 repair Union Square Parks plumbing, drainage systems  
11 and pathway reconstruction. The full \$8.9 million  
12 estimated by the Parks Department. We would like to  
13 thank Manhattan Community Board 5 for their letter of  
14 support and Council Members Rivera, Bottcher, Powers,  
15 Chair Krishnan, and Manhattan Borough President Mark  
16 Levine staff for taking the time to meet about this  
17 important project.

18 Our parks are essential public spaces for our  
19 city's health and sustainability, so we urge the  
20 Council and the city to ensure a fully funded, safe,  
21 clean, green and resilient park system. We look  
22 forward to the Council's support and working with  
23 Commissioner Donoghue on this effort. Thank you.

24 CHAIRPERSON KRISHNAN: Thank you for your  
25 testimony.

1  
2 SAVONA MCCLAIN: Good afternoon. My name is  
3 Savona Bailey McClain, I am the Executive Director of  
4 the West Harlem Park Fund. We're a small public art  
5 and media organization. Now, you might wonder why  
6 we're here talking about parks. Well, landscaping,  
7 parks, trees, goes hand and hand with public art.  
8 You can't have one without the other.

9 I have a written testimony that I shared  
10 regarding soil because there is a severe soil,  
11 erosion and compaction problem in West Harlem. With  
12 that said, St. Nicholas and Jackie Robinson Park but  
13 after hearing the testimonies I have heard today, I'm  
14 going to speak freely. One, we're not going to get  
15 the one percent from Mayor Adams, let's just forget  
16 about that. We need City Council to really work hand  
17 and hand with the public to come up with innovation  
18 innovative projects and solutions for our parks.

19 We can't rely on just increased money for the  
20 Parks Department. It's just not going to happen.  
21 The second thing is the Parks Department needs to  
22 kind of change the way they operate as well. We have  
23 been complaining for years, at least I have, about  
24 the way they do not include people of color. How  
25 they do not listen to our solutions, our ways of

1 dealing with the problems that they're facing today.  
2 Instead of just talking about trash and homeless  
3 people, why don't we inspire New Yorkers? Why don't  
4 we ask them to help? Not so much to clean but to not  
5 throw trash, to curb their dogs, to have a real  
6 quality of life and if you don't say the words, it's  
7 not going to happen. And I'm advocating City Council  
8 Members to come to various parks, spend the day with  
9 workers. You will see that the majority of park  
10 workers don't have the skills, nor the tools to do  
11 what they need to do.

12  
13 So, I'm asking you today to really rethink how we  
14 approach parks so therefore, we still advocate for  
15 the one percent but we look for other ways, monies,  
16 means to take care of our parks. Thank you.

17 CHAIRPERSON KRISHNAN: Thank you for your  
18 testimony and I couldn't agree more about the  
19 connection between public art and public space in the  
20 parks. Thank you.

21 Now, we have — that concludes our in-person  
22 testimony. We do have some virtual witnesses as  
23 well. Isaac Davidoff followed by Elise Herschlag.

24 ISAAC DAVIDOFF: Hi, can you hear me?

25 CHAIRPERSON KRISHNAN: Yes.

1  
2 ISAAC DAVIDOFF: Okay, So I am speaking today as  
3 a parks worker, a New Yorker, a union member, and a  
4 lifelong parks user. I urge the City Council to  
5 restore and baseline permanent funding for the 51  
6 forest restoration workers, and baseline permanent  
7 funding for a citywide trails formalization program.  
8 My lower back can testify that this is hard,  
9 technical, skilled work. It cannot rely on just  
10 volunteer and seasonal labor. Not renewing these  
11 lines will mean scores of acres of forest, dozens of  
12 miles of trails will go without maintenance and care  
13 for one, maybe more years, probably more years.  
14 Already there is so much more to do than what we have  
15 the staff for. These 51 people are so called "full  
16 time seasonals." So, I don't know until like June  
17 25<sup>th</sup> if I'm going to have a job the next week.  
18 That's nuts. Picture the weight it puts on you to  
19 not know until the end of June if you have a job in  
20 July. Picture the uncertainty, the stress, the  
21 competition for the one or two permanent positions  
22 that open up.

23 There's a banner hanging in the forest  
24 restoration trailer that everyone signs when they  
25 leave, after a few months it is already filling up



1  
2 with signatures. Last year, the Mayor made a promise  
3 to finally fund a citywide trails program, just like  
4 his promise to fund one percent for parks. But just  
5 as work plans were being made and resumes were being  
6 sent in, the funding was paused and then canceled.  
7 Trails are how working-class people can connect to  
8 wildness, for free, right in the middle of the city.  
9 Good trail work lasts for decades, and I do carry  
10 good trail work. It's strong, resilient and it's  
11 made of rock and timber but right now the city is  
12 giving us a foundation built of sand.

13 CHAIRPERSON KRISHNAN: Thank you for your  
14 testimony. Next, Elise Herschlag followed by Lonnie  
15 Portis.

16 SERGEANT AT ARMS: You may begin.

17 ELISE HERSCHLAG: Hi, can you hear me okay?

18 CHAIRPERSON KRISHNAN: Yes.

19 ELISE HERSCHLAG: Thank you. Good afternoon, my  
20 name is Elise Herschlag. I am a member of City  
21 Council District 22, in Astoria Queens and I'm also  
22 speaking as a parks worker. Thank you to the Council  
23 who serve on this Committee and thank you for the  
24 opportunity to testify today.  
25

1  
2 My neighborhood park is Astoria Park, but I've  
3 spent a lot of time in this position in forests all  
4 over the city like Idlewild, Alley Pond, and  
5 Cunningham Park and I've grown to love our city's  
6 natural areas and have become heavily invested in  
7 their future. I'm here today to ask the Council to  
8 restore the \$2.5 million in funding for Fiscal Year  
9 25 for the 51 forestry management staff whose jobs  
10 are set to expire in June.

11 PlaNYC, the ten year, citywide, sustainability  
12 plan set by the Adams administration includes  
13 initiatives to quote "achieve 30 percent canopy  
14 cover", improve the health of our forested areas, and  
15 grow NYC's green workforce". Forestry management  
16 staff are a critical part to achieving these goals.  
17 They plant thousands of trees, slow the damage of  
18 invasive species, care for street trees, steward our  
19 urban forest with volunteers, and provide 51 green  
20 job opportunities. So, cutting these positions is  
21 completely antithetical to the PlaNYC initiatives.  
22 We can't say as a city that we prioritize forests and  
23 then cut all the jobs that take care of them. It's a  
24 disservice to staff, it's a disservice to citizens  
25

1  
2 like myself as well, who want fresher, cooler, air to  
3 breath and the forest that provides them. Thank you.

4 CHAIRPERSON KRISHNAN: Thank you for your  
5 testimony. Lonnie Portis followed by Diana Finch.

6 LONNIE PORTIS: Okay, good afternoon Chair  
7 Krishnan and the Committee on Parks and Recreation.  
8 I'm Lonnie Portis, New York City Policy and Advocacy  
9 Manager at We Act for Environmental Justice. Given  
10 the time constraints we also submitted written  
11 testimony as well. We as proud members of both the  
12 Play Fair Coalition and Forest for All New York City  
13 Coalition, We Act is calling on the Mayor and the  
14 City Council to dedicate one percent of the city's  
15 budget to New York City Parks Department so that New  
16 Yorkers can find secure equitable 21<sup>st</sup> Century Park  
17 system they deserve and commit funding for a robust  
18 multiagency planning process to create a citywide New  
19 York City Urban Forest Plan. Disinvestment and  
20 structural racism such as redlining our parks, green  
21 space and access to the city's waterfront are not  
22 equitably distributed. Access to green space is on  
23 average much lower in environmental justice  
24 neighborhoods that are already plagued by adverse  
25 health programs and pollution.

1  
2 New York City Parks does not have the resources  
3 it needs to provide access to green spaces and  
4 infrastructure in every neighborhood. Even though  
5 Mayor Adams proposed austerity cuts fell short of  
6 what was originally expected, only full restoration  
7 of the parks budget will allow the Department staff  
8 to adequately care for New York City's green spaces.

9 Mayor Adams cuts to New York City parks is shorts  
10 value planning and a disservice to New Yorkers who  
11 rely on park not only to improve neighborhood  
12 resiliency but as spaces where play, joy, and  
13 connection to nature. Further, we urge you to save  
14 the roles of 100 city parks workers that will lose  
15 their position at the end of June and to add 200 city  
16 park workers positions to restore staffing to pre-  
17 COVID levels. CPW's help clean our parks, which  
18 enable more access to trees and green space.

19 Public sector jobs create a pathway to the middle  
20 class for many families to build wealth and economic  
21 stability that have never existed before granting  
22 them equal access to decent pay, good healthcare,  
23 pension benefits and job stability. Pay cuts and  
24 hiring freezes on these very jobs that deliver these  
25 benefits do in otherwise underserved communities -

1  
2 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time is expired.

3 LONNIE PORTIS: The public workforce. One more  
4 line - is detrimental. When Mayor Adams was running  
5 for the position he was elected to, he publicly  
6 committed to increasing the parks budget to one  
7 percent of the total city budget, which would mean  
8 that nearly one billion dollars annually. Since  
9 then, he has continuously cut funding for parks  
10 budget. Advocates want the Mayor to fulfill his  
11 campaign promise. For some, it was the only reason  
12 they even voted for him.

13 We need the City Council to hold Mayor Adams  
14 accountable and push back on these short sided budget  
15 cuts. We cannot accept an adopted budget that does  
16 not include one percent funding for parks. Thank  
17 you.

18 CHAIRPERSON KRISHNAN: Thank you for your  
19 testimony. Diana Finch followed by Jessica Burk.

20 SERGEANT AT ARMS: You may begin.

21 DIANA FINCH: My name is Diana Finch and I'm  
22 speaking as a Board Member of the Bronx Park East  
23 Community Association, which is a member of the Play  
24 Fair Coalition. Thank you Chair Krishnan for this  
25 hearing. Our neighborhood features two major Bronx

1 Parks, the Pelham Parkway Malls, connecting Fordham  
2 to Pelham Bay and Bronx Park that contains the Bronx  
3 River and contains or borders the Bronx Zoo and New  
4 York Botanical Gardens. Our parks or city  
5 infrastructure is crucial as roads and bridges and as  
6 a need of maintenance so essential to our physical  
7 and mental health. Their feature is so significant  
8 that our neighborhoods take their names and even  
9 identities from them. The New York City Parks  
10 Department deserves full funding for maintenance and  
11 development of this critical city infrastructure.  
12

13 A few weeks ago, the Bronx Park East Community  
14 Association signed up through Partnership for Parks  
15 to do Earth Day weekend cleanups in both our parks.  
16 Including mulching at Flavio, the single gardener  
17 responsible for miles of park land cannot do alone.

18 We were dismayed to learn that we could only do  
19 one of these cleanups because our outreach  
20 coordinator is only budgeted now to work one day per  
21 weekend. We will work with our much appreciated and  
22 very dedicated North Bronx Parks Manager Matt Drury  
23 to figure out a solution to this and we thank him for  
24 offering but how have we come to a situation where  
25 the Parks Department Budget is so constrained that

1 the community volunteers, volunteers of the Parks  
2 Department depends on to supplement a too small  
3 underpaid workforce. Our restricted from caring for  
4 our parks as much as we want to. This makes no  
5 sense. Please vote to restore the budget cuts to the  
6 Parks Department and please go beyond to give parks  
7 the funding we deserve, at least one percent of the  
8 New York City Budget. Thank you.

9  
10 CHAIRPERSON KRISHNAN: Thank you so much. Now we  
11 have Jessica Burk.

12 SERGEANT AT ARMS: You may begin.

13 JESSICA BURK: Hello, my name is Jessica Burk.  
14 Sorry, my video isn't working we just thought that I  
15 had the office to myself, which I did not. I am a  
16 member of the Friends of Crocheron & John Golden  
17 Park. I'm actually the founding president of the  
18 organization. We started in the summer of 2020.

19 We help steward a 62-acre park in Queens, which  
20 is the 46<sup>th</sup> largest in the city. We are one of the  
21 400 plus organizations that are members of the Fair  
22 Play Coalition for Parks. We want to thank Chair  
23 Krishnan and the Committee for holding this important  
24 hearing on parks and we echo what others have said,  
25 parks are a place where people go to find relief and

1  
2 discover a place for happiness. We call for Fair  
3 Play for Parks in New York City.

4 As I said, our organization has been operating  
5 since the summer of 2020. We have had a few  
6 transitions that became much easier once we cut the  
7 middle man out, Partnerships for Parks. While the  
8 traditional parking that existed before this public,  
9 private partnership was pushed so strongly in the  
10 1980's, that has now created a two-tier system of  
11 funding, had been great. The Partnerships for Parks  
12 employees have not been so great.

13 Partnerships for Parks staff and leadership has  
14 failed our volunteers and organizational leaders time  
15 and time again. Financially, according to their own  
16 webinar, City Parks Foundation, a \$24 million  
17 organization takes ten percent from groups that have  
18 them as their fiscal sponsor, aka their bank.

19 While other nonprofits like ours that works with  
20 FJC are only asked to give five percent. City Parks  
21 Foundation also promotes that grants that they  
22 provide, they then funneled back into their nonprofit  
23 saying, "hey, hire a city parks foundation worker to  
24 pay for graphics and website design." Like there  
25 aren't enough graphic designers in the city.



1  
2 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Thank you, your time is  
3 expired.

4 JESSICA BURK: Sorry, so yes, we believe that  
5 there are better ways to do this than to use a  
6 public, private partnership that has proven to not be  
7 beneficial. We also received straight up bad advise  
8 from Partnerships for Parks saying, "yes photograph  
9 children without their parents consent or yes, you  
10 should pay \$25 for event permits." Which ironically  
11 I did research on my own and City Parks Foundation  
12 had put out in a publication for other city parks  
13 districts to say, "start your own volunteer group.  
14 You guys can give them free permits."

15 We have the best park -

16 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Once again, your time is  
17 expired.

18 JESSICA BURK: The absolutely best. Excuse me?  
19 Okay, so yes, I just hope that we stop this public  
20 private partnership. That we make it disgustingly  
21 transparent as Paul Delone helped us realize in 2020  
22 that Partnerships for Parks, I'm sorry, City Parks  
23 Foundations was receiving 20K for allowing permits.  
24 Thank you.

1  
2 CHAIRPERSON KRISHNAN: Thank you for your  
3 testimony. Number Seven, Tami Lin Moges.

4 SERGEANT AT ARMS: You may begin.

5 TAMI LIN MOGES: Good afternoon, my name is Tami  
6 Lin Moges and I'm the Intern Director of the Nature  
7 Conservancy's New York City Program. The Nature  
8 Conservancy is the world's largest conservation  
9 organization. We have 90,000 members across New York  
10 State, 35,000 of whom reside in New York City.

11 The Nature Conservancy of New York is a member of  
12 the Play Fair Coalition and we're also a leading  
13 member and convener of Forest for All NYC, a  
14 coalition of nearly 140 organizational members. Many  
15 of whom are also providing testimony today. Forest  
16 for All NYC works together to increase investment in  
17 the Urban Forest and to expand the tree canopy cover  
18 from 22 percent to 30 percent citywide by 2035 in an  
19 equitable manner.

20 I'm here today to express support for growing the  
21 New York City Parks budget to one percent of the  
22 total city budget and to commit full funding to the  
23 New York City urban forest. Thank you to Committee  
24 Chair Krishnan and the members of the Parks and Rec  
25 Committee for the opportunity to speak about these

1 issues. I won't be able offer my testimony in two  
2 minutes and have submitted a longer written  
3 testimony. We commend the city's previous  
4 commitments to Parks and the urban forest, including  
5 Mayor Adams pledge to increase New York City's parks  
6 funding to one percent of the total budget and the  
7 unanimous council passage of two historic bills last  
8 fall that mandated the city's first urban forest plan  
9 and required the city to consider the worlds of trees  
10 and tree canopy in its long-term sustainability  
11 planning.

12  
13 However, the recent cuts in the FY24 budget and  
14 the proposed additional cuts in the FY25 budget are  
15 not in line with these commitments. To support the  
16 care and growth of the urban forest as well as clean,  
17 safe, and accessible parks, the New York City Parks  
18 Department needs consistent, sufficient and baselined  
19 funding for both capital and operation's needs. This  
20 includes ending the hiring freeze now and restoring  
21 funding to pre-COVID levels.

22 Furthermore, to ensure the requirements of Local  
23 Law 148 are on track, we strongly encourage  
24 committing funding for the Mayor's Office of Climate  
25 and Environmental Justice at the lead agency to

1  
2 develop the New York City Urban Forest Plan by the  
3 legally mandated due date of July 2025, which is just  
4 shy of a year from now.

5 The Nature Conservancy is proud to join with  
6 hundreds of diverse organizations from across the  
7 city to call for one percent –

8 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Your time is expired.

9 TAMI LIN MOGES: And full funding. Thank you to  
10 the Committee Chair and members of the Parks  
11 Committee for considering the benefits of Parks and  
12 Urban Forest as you continue to work on the next city  
13 budget. Thank you.

14 CHAIRPERSON KRISHNAN: Thank you so much Tami and  
15 to the Forest for All Coalition. Next, we have Lynn  
16 Kennedy.

17 SERGEANT AT ARMS: You may begin.

18 LYNN KENNEDY: Hi, good afternoon. My name is  
19 Lynn Kennedy and I represent the friends of Astoria  
20 Heights Park. We are a member of the Play Fair for  
21 Parks Coalition, which includes over 400  
22 organizations from across the five boroughs and many  
23 of whom you have heard testify today. We are proud  
24 to testify with them as well. We thank the City  
25 Council Committee on Parks Chair Krishnan for holding

1  
2 this hearing as well as other Parks community  
3 members.

4 I am the Cofounder of the Friends of Astoria  
5 Heights Parks, which is a group of volunteers from  
6 the neighborhood surrounding the park located at 46<sup>th</sup>  
7 Street and 30<sup>th</sup> Road in Astoria and adjacent to  
8 middle school IS 10. Our group has been in existence  
9 since 2013, when we began advocating with our  
10 electeds for safer, more beautiful park space. We  
11 are the recipients of funding that allowed for  
12 renovation of the park space and reopened in May  
13 2018. We received \$2.2 million on behalf of Mayor de  
14 Blasio at that time, through the CPI initiative and  
15 Parks without Borders programs. \$1.5 million from  
16 the Department of Environmental Protection and \$1.1  
17 million from Council Member Constantinides and \$1  
18 million from the Borough President Melinda Katz to  
19 make this project possible.

20 So, that's pretty amazing but it does have to be  
21 maintained. The park remains as heavily utilized as  
22 ever in our densely populated neighborhood and since  
23 COVID, even more so as it serves as a hub for many to  
24 relax, exercise, socialize, serving as a small and  
25

1 yet vital green oasis in the otherwise cemented urban  
2 environment.

3  
4 Recently with less staffing and oversight, we  
5 have seen more litter, more dogs, broken equipment,  
6 and vandalism amongst other safety issues, including  
7 some violence that happened last year to one of our  
8 parents.

9 The positives though of having had funding for  
10 our parks -

11 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Your time is expired.

12 LYNN KENNEDY: More program for our youth, clean  
13 areas to sit and walk, maintained and safer bathrooms  
14 and increased positive moral when having Parks  
15 Department support and safety. We cannot afford to  
16 lose any park space, especially in our district,  
17 which falls short with the citywide average of green  
18 acreage. We also cannot afford to let parks lapse  
19 into another 25-to-30-year cycle of neglect, as is  
20 what happened prior to the Friends group advocacy in  
21 2013.

22 The Friends of Astoria Heights Park joins with  
23 others in demanding the Mayor hold true to his  
24 promise.

25 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Your time is expired.

1 LYNN KENNEDY: Thanks so much and good luck.

2 CHAIRPERSON KRISHNAN: Thank you. Jennifer Seda.

3 JENNIFER SEDA: Thank you so much. Can you hear  
4 me?  
5

6 CHAIRPERSON KRISHNAN: Yes.

7 JENNIFER SEDA: Okay, perfect. Good afternoon,  
8 my name is Jennifer Seda and I'm the Volunteer  
9 Program Assistant at the Bronx River Alliance. I am  
10 providing a testimony on behalf of the Bronx River  
11 Alliance about the proposed budget and the importance  
12 of restoring full funding to our parks. I'm also  
13 speaking on the behalf of Nilka Martell, the Chair of  
14 Bronx River Alliance, Founder and Director of Loving  
15 the Bronx and a lifelong Bronx net. Thank you so  
16 much for the opportunity to testify.

17 In 2024, New York City Parks has fewer workers  
18 than it did before the pandemic, despite increased  
19 demand include need for these spaces and thousands  
20 few workers than it had a decade ago. The budget  
21 cuts to NYC Parks this year and Proposed Budget for  
22 next year, jeopardize the very heart of our  
23 communities and threaten the progress that has been  
24 made along the Bronx river. The nearly \$55 million  
25 in proposed cuts will make it even more difficult for

1  
2 the already understaffed, under-resourced Parks  
3 Department to carry out the basic work needed to  
4 ensure parks are equitable and accessible for all New  
5 Yorkers.

6 The Bronx River Alliance stands with all those  
7 who are calling for the city to play fair and to  
8 fully reinstate funds that were cut from the Parks  
9 Budget. Specifically, we ask you to allocate one  
10 percent of the city budget for NYC Parks. We ask you  
11 to prioritize funding for parks as they are a  
12 critical infrastructure. We ask you to provide  
13 workers a park system that is safe, clean, green and  
14 resilient, and we ask you to hold Mayor Adams  
15 accountable for committing to allocating one percent  
16 of the city budget for NYC Parks.

17 New York City parks are at a tipping point. With  
18 a proposed budget that will result in nearly 1,000  
19 few parks workers, parks needs more PEP Officers,  
20 city workers, gardeners, clean, coworkers and not  
21 less my beloved parks deserve better than trashed  
22 playgrounds –

23 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Your time is expired.

24

25



1  
2 JENNIFER SEDA: Thank you so much. Unprecedented  
3 summer heat, long term bathroom closures and  
4 neglected tree canopy in the midst of climate crisis.

5 Parks are critical to our public health and  
6 safety and drivers of social equity. They should be  
7 funded as such. Thank you again for your leadership  
8 and for the opportunity to express the Bronx River's  
9 support for increased investment in New York City  
10 Parks. Sincerely and on the behalf of Nilka Martell  
11 and the Board of Directors of the Bronx River  
12 Alliance. Thank you so much.

13 CHAIRPERSON KRISHNAN: Thank you so much for your  
14 testimony. Now, we have Suebeen Kim.

15 SERGEANT AT ARMS: You may begin.

16 SUEBEEN KIM: Good afternoon. My name is Suebeen  
17 Kim and I am a former intern under both the Natural  
18 Areas Conservancy and a New York City Parks  
19 affiliate, the Greenbelt Native Plant Center. Thank  
20 you for the opportunity to speak today.

21 I would like to voice my support for the Play  
22 Fair Parks campaign in allocating one percent of the  
23 city budget to the New York City Parks Department and  
24 alleviating its historically underfunded resourcing.  
25 I would also like to voice support in restoring the

1  
2 \$2.4 million originally set aside for the Trails  
3 Formalization program, as well as pushing for the  
4 permanent establishment of many of New York City  
5 parks seasonal line such as forestry management and  
6 urban park ranger, which are as mentioned, currently  
7 set to expire this summer.

8 I strongly believe our parks are a valuable  
9 avenue for increasing equity in the city. They  
10 provide spaces for fellow New Yorkers to foster a  
11 sense of community and compassion for nature.  
12 Furthermore, they act as one of our leading defenses  
13 against excessive heat and flooding, which are  
14 compounded by our high concentration of impervious  
15 infrastructure. As such, in these unprecedented  
16 times of climate extremes, it is more crucial than  
17 ever that these areas remain hospitable and  
18 efficiently maintained.

19 Additionally, on a more personal note, being a  
20 recent graduate in the environmental sciences, I am  
21 well acquainted with the pervasive concerns of job  
22 insecurity among those entering the field. As we  
23 emerging professionals inherit responsibility for the  
24 land around us, as well as the people who rely on it,  
25 it's my hope that the heightened need for green jobs

1 is properly acknowledged and an accessible  
2 environmental workforce is promoted during these next  
3 critical decades.  
4

5 Thank you very much for your time, and to the  
6 City Council for their past and current advocacy for  
7 New York City's natural areas.

8 CHAIRPERSON KRISHNAN: Thank you so much for your  
9 testimony and before we go further, I do want to also  
10 welcome, I know we have our esteemed, amazing state  
11 Senator John Lui. Another brother from Queens who is  
12 doing great work for us. I know his government  
13 finance class from Columbia. It's such an honor to  
14 have you all here and we are about three quarters of  
15 the way through our budget hearings for our City  
16 Council with the Mayor's, what they call the  
17 Preliminary Budget, so it's his first proposal and  
18 then we have our hearings. We have more  
19 negotiations. They'll come out with this next  
20 revised budget based on our negotiations in May with  
21 the final budget due at the end of June, June 30<sup>th</sup> by  
22 City Charter. So, what you're hearing today is, we  
23 got a number of, a lot of hearings from different  
24 committees over the course of the last month and  
25 today, we have our Parks Committee Hearing which

1 started at one o'clock. We heard testimony from the  
2 Parks Commissioner and their leadership team and now  
3 we're hearing testimony from the public, both in  
4 person and virtual. We're really pushing on here and  
5 I find as the Parks Chair of Jackson Heights and  
6 Elmhurst, where we have some of the least amount of  
7 park space in New York City unacceptable is that  
8 Mayor Adams campaigned on a budget of one percent for  
9 our parks, one percent of our city budget. So, for  
10 \$100 billion budget, roughly over \$1 billion for  
11 parks. Instead, we are seeing a number of cuts to  
12 our Parks Department in the last year. Over 700  
13 positions cut as a result of these different rounds  
14 of cuts and we as City Council find it unacceptable  
15 and are getting testimony about the impacts of those  
16 cuts, what it will mean for maintenance services in  
17 our parks. At one point, we had another program that  
18 was cut before by the Mayor in the fall, that we  
19 fought back and restored that supports our parks  
20 workers.

22 So, today we heard a lot of testimony about, not  
23 only are we so far moving backwards from one percent  
24 of our city budget for parks but we are facing a  
25 number of massive cuts that affect our workers and

1  
2 affect park services. At a time when we know how  
3 important our parks are across the city for our  
4 health, for our well-being and at a time when every  
5 other major city in America invests more than one  
6 percent of their budget for parks. So, we are not in  
7 good shape for a mayor who again campaigns on  
8 increasing funding for parks significantly.

9 So, with that, welcome. It's great to have you  
10 all here. You've got an amazing Professor and  
11 Professor Liu and thank you for stopping by our  
12 hearing today.

13 Now, we'll go back to our virtual witnesses. We  
14 now have Marieke Bender.

15 MARIEKE BENDER: Hello. Can everybody hear me?

16 CHAIRPERSON KRISHNAN: Yes, we can hear you. You  
17 may begin.

18 MARIEKE BENDER: Wonderful. Thank you. Thank  
19 you Councilman Krishnan and Council Members for  
20 holding this hearing. Sorry about my video, I'm  
21 getting an error message here.

22 CHAIRPERSON KRISHNAN: Can you speak a bit  
23 louder? Sorry, can't hear you too well.

24 MARIEKE BENDER: Yes I can.

25 CHAIRPERSON KRISHNAN: Thank you.

1  
2           MARIEKE BENDER: Okay, we have video, we have  
3 audio, alright. Thank you all very much for holding  
4 this hearing and for the opportunity to testify. My  
5 name is Marieke, I'm a member of the Forest for All  
6 Coalition and my work centers on educating park goers  
7 on the importance of a healthy tree canopy and the  
8 importance of stewarding our green spaces.

9           I worked in national city and state parks over  
10 the course of my career but today, I'm speaking on my  
11 own behalf as a New Yorker who loves our parks. I  
12 have been spending time in New York City Parks for my  
13 whole life and I can see that our city is doing so  
14 much to protect our neighborhoods from the impacts of  
15 climate change and to protect these incredibly  
16 important green spaces but we have a long way to go.

17           We need trees and green spaces in our city and  
18 this isn't a luxury or a frivolous request. Our  
19 climate is warming and the shade from well developed  
20 mature tree canopies protects our most vulnerable  
21 from the impact of urban heat island affect. Urban  
22 heat island affect is heat islands are urbanized  
23 areas that experience higher temperatures than  
24 outlying areas. There's a lot of pavement, a lot of  
25 heat. There's not a lot of shade.

1  
2 As has been the case historically and continues  
3 today, non-White low-income neighborhoods bear the  
4 brunt of this affect. Without appropriate resources,  
5 which the proposed budget cuts would curtail, we  
6 cannot keep our parks and green spaces thriving for  
7 the public and we create a dangerous environment for  
8 people who live without them.

9 New York City is falling behind other major  
10 cities the world over by proposing to disinvest from  
11 our parks. I live in a neighborhood that's been  
12 historically underserved and we don't have the parks  
13 and tree cover the wealthier, more privileged  
14 neighborhoods have.

15 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Your time is expired.

16 MARIEKE BENDER: Thank you. Thank you for your  
17 time.

18 CHAIRPERSON KRISHNAN: Thank you so much. Now we  
19 have Georgia Silvera Seamans.

20 SERGEANT AT ARMS: You may begin.

21 GEORGIA SILVERA SEAMANS: Hello, good afternoon.  
22 I would like to thank you Chair Krishnan and Council  
23 Members on the Parks Committee. I'm representing  
24 Washington Square Park Eco Projects and Initiative  
25 Local Nature Map. We offer biodiversity and nature

1 programming in the park and we're also members of the  
2 Forest for All New York City and Play Fair for Parks  
3 Coalitions. We need more than making do and relying  
4 on volunteers in tough times for a world class park  
5 system to flourish.  
6

7 The city must dedicate itself to funding public  
8 parkland, which is 14 percent of the city's land  
9 area. A one percent budget is the bare minimum if we  
10 want a 21<sup>st</sup> Century Parks Department. I will focus  
11 on urban heat and tree canopy for the remainder of my  
12 remarks.

13 On May 28, 2022, the New York Times published an  
14 article titled, "It's going to be a hot summer. It  
15 will be hotter if you're not rich." And I'm quoting  
16 here from the article where it says in the Bronx,  
17 vegetation covers 63 percent of wealthy Riverdale,  
18 several neighborhoods to the south and no income Mott  
19 Haven, only 18 percent is green, which affects  
20 temperature.

21 A fully funded parks department could mitigate  
22 this injustice. On July 27<sup>th</sup> of last year, the  
23 Mayor's Office released a transcript of Mayor Eric  
24 Adams's briefing to discuss New York City's heat  
25 advisory and this is a quote. "As we saw with COVID,



1 during the pandemic, extreme heat also does impact  
2 all people equally." It does not impact people  
3 equally. Black New Yorkers, New Yorkers of color are  
4 twice as likely to die from heat related causes as  
5 White New Yorkers.  
6

7 We are taking actions like installing cool roofs  
8 and committing to a 30 percent tree canopy cover. A  
9 fully funded Parks Department can help New York City  
10 achieve its 30 percent canopy cover—

11 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Your time is expired.

12 GEORGIA SILVERA SEAMANS: The final quote, "Urban  
13 Parks provide important mid-day cooling and cooling  
14 benefits from street trees, which are found to occur  
15 around six or seven p.m. and after sunset.

16 A fully funded parks department can create street  
17 tree networks and park systems that keep our city  
18 cooler during climate change fueled extreme heat  
19 events and also again, the city must dedicate itself  
20 to funding public park land which is 14 percent of  
21 its land area. A one percent budget is the bare  
22 minimum if we want a 21<sup>st</sup> century parks department.  
23 Thank you.  
24  
25

1  
2 CHAIRPERSON KRISHNAN: Thank you very much and  
3 the last two virtual's Susan Littman followed by -  
4 well, Susan Littman.

5 SERGEANT AT ARMS: You may begin.

6 CHAIRPERSON KRISHNAN: Susan Littman?

7 SERGEANT AT ARMS: You may begin Susan.

8 SUSAN LITTMAN: Okay. I am testifying as an  
9 individual, senior and lover of parks. Just for a  
10 minute because we can't have any more cuts to park  
11 and thank you for doing this. Parks are fundamental  
12 to mental and physical health, relaxation, and a  
13 sense of community. Deterioration of our parks will  
14 undoubtedly results in funding cuts that will  
15 increase crime, where [INAUDIBLE 03:28:17] and  
16 activities will substantially decrease crime. And  
17 that has been well documented and there are already  
18 too few healthy activities for our youth, especially  
19 during the summer months.

20 Organized sports activities in parks can do a lot  
21 to provide healthy recreation and keep kids out of  
22 trouble and keep our city safer for everyone. Thank  
23 you.

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2 CHAIRPERSON KRISHNAN: Thank you very much for  
3 your testimony Susan and our last virtual witness is  
4 Demi Amideneau.

5 SERGEANT AT ARMS: You may begin.

6 DEMI AMIDENEAU: Good afternoon. Inaudible  
7 [03:28:51]. I'm a parks employee and I want to thank  
8 the Council for allowing us to speak at this time for  
9 parks that we love so dearly.

10 CHAIRPERSON KRISHNAN: It's a bid hard to hear  
11 you.

12 DEMI AMIDENEAU: Sorry. Can you hear me?

13 CHAIRPERSON KRISHNAN: Yes, that's better.

14 DEMI AMIDENEAU: Okay, sorry. Uhm, yeah, I just  
15 want to say thank you again for the City Council for  
16 the one-shot funding of Play Fair Parks. However,  
17 these employment lines desperately need to be  
18 baselined and added to the annual budget in our  
19 natural resource group every year over 50 staff don't  
20 know if they'll have a job on July 1<sup>st</sup> and they don't  
21 find out until a week or two before then. This is  
22 not a proper way to really run a city agency that  
23 cares about its employees who have bills and families  
24 and the circumstances force people to look for new  
25 jobs and leave our agency.

1  
2 As a result, it leaves the rest of us having to  
3 pick up some – all the work and we experience high  
4 turnover rates and lose invaluable institutional  
5 knowledge and talent. Trees and restoration take  
6 time and we need professionals invested in this  
7 field. As you can imagine, this puts our agency at a  
8 disadvantage, constantly having to scramble for new  
9 staff and train them and constantly onboard them.

10 It doesn't have to be like this because \$2.5  
11 million towards these employment lines can transform  
12 our capacity at parks to maintain healthier forest  
13 and wetlands that New Yorkers deserve. It will offer  
14 the job security people need to live healthy and safe  
15 lives and it's time the city invest in its green  
16 workforce as it is promised. Thank you again and  
17 have a great day everyone.

18 CHAIRPERSON KRISHNAN: Thank you so much for your  
19 testimony. We're going read through the witnesses  
20 who are here on virtual before, Betsy Silverman, Babe  
21 Dunnington(SP), Faye Hill(SP?), Danielle  
22 Rennells(SP?), Elizabeth York(SP?), Meredith Thomson,  
23 Olga Cato(SP?). Oh, Meredith Thomson, we'll call you  
24 in one second in person. Olga Cato, Ruth Diana  
25 Cabrera, Vameer Levingia(SP?) and Serel Garino(SP?).

1  
2 That's our virtual witnesses, now I will go back to  
3 in person Meredith Thomson and also Rosamond  
4 Fletcher. You may begin Meredith.

5 MEREDITH THOMSON: Hi, good afternoon. Thank you  
6 for hearing us today. My name is Meredith Thomson, I  
7 am a resident of Council District 37. I'm a Parks  
8 Employee and a Natural Area Super Steward Volunteer  
9 in my spare time.

10 Before I begin, I would like to acknowledge that  
11 the land that we are here fighting to continuing  
12 caring for today is the homeland of the Lenape  
13 people. The original caretakers of what is now New  
14 York City. We are standing here in front of you  
15 today in person and in virtually to ask the City  
16 Council to permanently fund the care for this land  
17 because we acknowledge that it is our responsibility  
18 and ours alone to do so.

19 The time scales between human and trees differ by  
20 an order of magnitude. As such, our work must  
21 operate according to both time scales. We simply  
22 cannot do our jobs if our funding is not permanently  
23 stable. Every single one of our natural areas needs  
24 management and care, for example, a restoration  
25 project for the forest requires at least five years'



1  
2 and care for the city's residents, human and non-  
3 human every year for the future.

4 CHAIRPERSON KRISHNAN: Thank you for your  
5 testimony and for all your work on behalf of our  
6 parks across the city.

7 ROSAMOND FLETCHER: Hello, good afternoon. MY  
8 name is Rosamond Fletcher and I'm Executive Director  
9 of the Fort Greene Park Conservancy. We are a proud  
10 member of the Play Fair for Parks Coalition. Thank  
11 you Chair Krishnan for holding this hearing.

12 In case you haven't had the pleasure of spending  
13 time in Fort Greene Park, I'll share a bit of  
14 information. At 30 acres, the historic homestead  
15 park is neither large nor small but it is well used  
16 and well loved. The park is located in the heart of  
17 Fort Greene Brooklyn and directly adjacent to the  
18 ever-expanding downtown Brooklyn. The density and  
19 growth of the area over the last decade has  
20 dramatically increased use of the park by people and  
21 dogs.

22 As the stewardship partner of the park, we  
23 welcome this use but we have to content with the  
24 impacts like erosion of the parks hills, which  
25 requires intensive seasonal lawn rotation and

1 restoration. And the overflowing garbage cans, which  
2 require constant day and evening trash pickups. The  
3 parks heavy use demands additional resources that we  
4 happily provide as well as adequate park staffing.  
5 We filled the staffing gap during the pandemic but  
6 our role is not to alleviate the city from its  
7 responsibility to staff the agency. Our role is to  
8 provide complementary services.  
9

10 Fort Greene Park Conservancy stands with all Play  
11 Fair Coalition members in demanding that the Mayor  
12 end the hiring freeze now, restore positions lost to  
13 this freeze and return to the pre-COVID headcount.  
14 To provide further context, the area north of Fort  
15 Greene Park is an environmental justice zone and now  
16 state designated disadvantaged community with over  
17 12,000 residents living in public housing, 36 percent  
18 below the poverty line.

19 In stark contrast the areas south of Fort Greene  
20 park boast a median income of \$118,000. At its best,  
21 when well cared for on all sides, the park transcends  
22 these disparities, bringing people together,  
23 community members enjoy in celebration, to chill out  
24 on the sunny hills, to barbeque on Juneteenth. Our  
25 mission supports Fort Greene Park as a public



1 gathering space for events large and small, to enrich  
2 the park through community organizing, arts and  
3 culture and we benefited last year as a Second Shift  
4 Park. That was so important to us but this is  
5 threatened. During the height of the programming  
6 season, we rely on park staff to help us and other  
7 community partners navigate the hilly terrain for  
8 event set up and take down, and as we enter the  
9 spring season, the budget cuts have forced us to have  
10 hard conversations with our New York City Parks  
11 partner about limiting our programs and events.

12 This would be devastating to all community  
13 members who benefit from the parks offerings and our  
14 cultural partners who rely on the park as a venue.  
15 Imagine less Chinese and Spanish film nights. Less  
16 dance with kumbaya workshops, less jazz fests. This  
17 would be an incredible loss.

18 In summary, we need adequate staffing in Fort  
19 Greene Park and in all parks. New York City should  
20 not shirk from its responsibility to fund its park  
21 system. We demand one percent now. Thank you.

22 CHAIRPERSON KRISHNAN: Thank you so much for your  
23 testimony and for your work. I want to say thank you  
24 everyone who has come today for all your testimony to  
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COMMITTEE ON PARKS AND RECREATION

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our Parks Department and I look forward to continuing  
our work together to make sure we get a budget that  
actually funds our parks at the level it deserves.  
Thank you all so much and that concludes today's  
hearing. [GAVEL]

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 30, 2024