

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 23, 2026
Start: 11:37 a.m.
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HELD AT: 250 Broadway - 8th Floor - Hearing
Room 2

B E F O R E: Ty Hankerson,
Chairperson

COUNCIL MEMBERS:

Alexa Avilés
Christopher Banks
Gale A. Brewer
Kamillah Hanks
Shekar Krishnan
Linda Lee
Virginia Maloney
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Frank Morano
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Lincoln Restler
Yusef Salaam
Pierina Ana Sanchez
Kayla Santosuosso
Lynn Schulman

COUNCIL MEMBERS: (CONT.)

Sandra Ung
Susan Zhuang

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

Parks:

Tricia Shimamura

Matt Drury

Mark Focht

Margaret Nelson

David Stark

David Cerron

Joy Wang

Ben Osbourne

Marit Larson

Eric Boorstyn

Public:

Dejon Williams

Ralph Baselice

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

Marilyn Vogt-Downey

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Sonia Ferraro

Chancy Young

John Surico

Biana Varga

Patrica Caro

Iraida DeJesus

Penn Genthner

Savona Bailey-McClain

SERGEANT AT ARMS: Good morning this is a microphone test Committee on Parks and Recreation in HR 2, recorded by Taisha Sherman. Today's date is March 23, 2026.

SERGEANT AT ARMS: Good morning and welcome to today's New York City Council Hearing for the Committee on Parks and Recreations. At this time ladies and gentlemen, we please ask that you silence all electronic devices. If you would like to fill out a testimony slip, then please see the Sergeant at Arms at the back. At no point and time is anybody to approach the dais. Chair, you may begin.

CHAIRPERSON HANKERSON: Thank you. Good morning and welcome to the Parks and Recreations Committee Hearing on the Fiscal 2027 Preliminary Budget and the Preliminary Mayors Management Report for the Department of Parks and Recreation.

My name is Ty Hankerson and I am the Chair of the Parks and Recreation Committee. I'd like to acknowledge my fellow Council Member Dr. Yusef Salaam who is also here present today and I'll acknowledge others as they come in.

Today we will be hearing testimony from the Department of Parks and Recreation on its Fiscal 2027

Preliminary Budget, which totals \$654 million, a decrease of \$33.7 million compared to the Fiscal 2026 Adopted Budget. It may seem like this amount is enough to properly fund our Parks Department, but this is still nowhere near the one percent goal that the Mayor campaigned on. We need to strive to create better park systems for all New Yorkers, and that starts with proper funding. This budget moves in the wrong direction. No one doubts the dedication of our parks workers and no one disputes that this agency can point to real progress in some areas, let me make that clear. But New Yorkers cannot be asked to confuse progress in some areas with stability.

When core services still depend on one shots, the message to workers and families is that standard care is still negotiable. Public safety still leans on temporary funding. Fully funded capital projects are still waiting because the staffing capacity needed for review is not there. We're now just trying to recover from the Adam's Administration two for one hiring reduction. Too many neighborhoods still go through hotter summers with less shade and less relief because the tree canopy remains uneven. And as we head into summer, beaches and pools will again

depend on lifeguards and other seasonal staff to open strong and to stay safe. Routine expiration does not make the impact routine. If these services are essential every year, then the funding should be there every year. Our workers, our parkies need stable jobs, better pay and real protections. And our communities need a park system that serves every borough with the same standard of care.

The Fiscal 2027 Preliminary Budget includes \$50,000 in new needs for Fiscal 2027. \$127,000 in other adjustments and no savings. There are only two new needs included in the plan with the majority of the funding coming from mold and asbestos removal at the Owen Dolan Recreation Center.

There is also a state grant of \$1.6 million for lifeguard recruitment. The Committee is excited to hear testimony related to the FY27 Preliminary Plan. Specifically one shots, lifeguards and recreation centers.

Before we begin with testimony, I would like to thank Council staff for their hard work, our finance team, Eisha Wright, Jack Storey, Michael Sherman, and our Committee Staff Kris Satori, and Patrick

Mulvihill. And my own staff, Chief of Staff
Maricela Cano, Clive Destiny, and Mari Johnson.

I will now as the Committee Counsel to go over
some procedural items and swear in the
representatives from the Department but before they
do so, let me acknowledge Council Member Shekar
Krishnan, Council Member Sandra Ung, Council Member
Frank Morano, uh, I think that's all we have so far.
With that I give it to the Committee Counsel.

COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you Chair. Will the
Commissioner and representatives of the Parks
Department please raise your right hand if you are
able. Do you affirm to tell the truth, the whole
truth, and nothing but the truth in your testimony
before this Committee and to respond honestly to
Council Member questions?

PANEL: I do.

COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you and you can begin
when ready. Thank you.

TRICIA SHIMAMURA: Alight, great. Good morning
Chair Hankerson, Members of the Parks Committee, and
Members of the Council. My name is Tricia Shimamura,
Commissioner of New York City Department of Parks and
Recreation. I am pleased to be here today to testify

1
2 regarding the agency's Fiscal Year 2027 Preliminary
3 Budget and to be joined by several members of our
4 agency's senior leadership.

5 Since this is my first opportunity to testify at
6 a Council Budget hearing as Commissioner and some of
7 you may be new to the Council or the Parks Committee,
8 before we speak to the proposed budget, I'd like to
9 offer a brief overview of our agency, outlines and
10 recent successes we've enjoyed and provide a sense of
11 what we want to achieve in the years ahead.

12 New York City Parks is responsible for over
13 30,000 acres of land. 14 percent of New York City's
14 surface area, including more than 5,000 individual
15 properties, spanning from Rockaway Beach to Pelham
16 Bay Park with an incredible array of uses and
17 functions, ranging from tiny community gardens to
18 miles of green streets.

19 In the properties under our jurisdiction, you'll
20 find over 800 athletic fields and nearly 1,000
21 playgrounds, 1,800 basketball courts, 700 public
restroom buildings, 550 tennis courts, 65 public
pools, 51 recreational facilities, 15 nature centers,
14 miles of beaches, 1,200 monuments, 23 historic
house museums, and over 5 million trees.

Two months ago, I was appointed by Mayor Mamdani to lead this incredible agency tasked with improving the lives of millions of New Yorkers each and every day. The Mayor has outlined his vision for a more affordable city, and I am very proud to be leading the agency of affordability because parks are for everyone. Our park spaces are free and open to all New Yorkers regardless of your zip code, your ethnicity, or your tax bracket. To go out and enjoy our city parks, you just need a comfortable pair of shoes and clothing on your back. In a city where a gym membership can cost you hundreds of dollars every month, and a simple family night at the movies can break the bank. We are providing completely free recreational, educational and cultural programming in parks throughout the year, as well as free and low-cost access to our recreation centers that every New Yorker can enjoy.

As Commissioner, I will work to ensure that our parks and facilities aren't just accessible. They need to engage in active spaces that New Yorkers can be proud of, whether they're looking for a chance to exercise, get closer to nature, gather with family or neighbors, or simply just sit and take in a moment of

1 peace from our crowded and noisy streets. New
2 Yorkers rely on our city parks as essential city
3 infrastructure, so our staff needs to care for these
4 spaces just like their own back yards because for so
5 many New Yorkers, that's exactly what they are, and
6 they need to be lean and welcoming public spaces that
7 provide a sense of longing and joy.

8 In just these few past months, I have already
9 seen countless examples of the hard work and
10 dedication that our incredible employees, who are
11 essential workers striving for excellence in the
12 public realm and delivering for New Yorkers every
13 single day. When New York experienced record levels
14 of snow and severe weather from the recent winter
15 storms, including a deep freeze that felt like it
16 would never end, Parks employees were out on the
17 frontlines working 12 hour shifts, cleaning our park
18 perimeter sidewalks and intersections, resolving
19 dangerous tree related conditions, and patrolling the
20 lakes and ponds within our parks, keeping New Yorkers
21 safe. This is the level of dedication that our
employees bring to this agency every day and I look
forward to living up to the example that they set.

Last month, we were thrilled to celebrate the opening of Shirley Chisholm Recreation Center, the first new Park recreation center in over a decade. The first ever in Central Brooklyn, and the largest recreation center in the entire borough. Located right in the heart of Little Haiti, the residents of East Flatbush and Midwood finally have access to a state of the art facility with 74,000 square feet of space, offering swimming in a competition sized six lane pool, team sports, exercise, educational programming, a teaching kitchen, and even an audio, visual production media lab.

Like all of our Parks Recreation Centers, memberships are entirely free for kids and young adults. And incredibly affordable for New Yorkers of all ages. We're grateful to our partner agencies for their collaboration, especially the Department of Design and Construction for delivering the project through a design build contracting, years faster than would have otherwise been possible. And to our elected officials and local community members for their tireless advocacy and support for the project.

Shirley Chisholm is an American icon, as well as a hero to me and millions of others. Opening this

1 facility in her honor is an incredible testament to
2 her legacy, and a reminder that our government can,
3 and must, deliver for everyone, not just the rich and
4 powerful.

5 This commitment to equity and fairness means that
6 we also believe all New Yorkers should have access to
7 vibrant high quality parks, so we were excited to
8 recently announce the newest phase of our Community
9 Parks Initiative, also known as CPI. \$50 million in
10 new capital investment will deliver the
11 transformative reconstruction of ten parks, serving
12 neighborhoods in all five boroughs that have
13 historically been neglected and underserved. Through
14 this initiative, we are using data driven methodology
15 and working with local communities to create and
16 revive thriving public spaces.

17 Over the past decade, we have wholly reimagined
18 and reconstructed 70 CPI projects for local
19 neighborhood parks, with dozens more actively
20 underway. Over half a billion dollars of capital
21 funding for rebuilding parks and playgrounds that
haven't seen significant investment in decades.

Many of those underserved neighborhoods are also
impacted by higher heat vulnerability and some

1 communities aren't benefiting equally from the city's
2 urban tree canopy, which is vital living
3 infrastructure. We believe that every New York City
4 neighborhood should get to enjoy the benefits that
5 trees provide and we're working to expand our tree
6 canopy with new plantings all over the city delivered
7 in a more efficient and equitable fashion. Thanks to
8 the concentrated planting strategy adopted through
9 our recently launched Neighborhood Tree Planting
program.

10 Now, new streets are planted on a data driven
11 basis of fairness and efficiency, prioritizing the
12 most heat-vulnerable neighborhoods first, as a matter
13 of environmental justice. Even in its early stages,
14 this new efficient approach is already delivering
15 results for New Yorkers. In our most recent
16 fall-winter planting season that just concluded, they
planted over 9,500 trees along our streets and in our
parks, the highest planting levels in over a decade.

17 With the support of the Mayor and many of your
18 offices, we engaged in a massive publicity campaign
19 to get the word out to New Yorkers willing to rise up
20 to the challenge and become part of our lifeguard
21 team for this coming summer. And as we offered

qualifying tests at indoor pools around the city, including our recreation centers as well as New York City Public School sites.

We are working to get these new recruits trained, certified and ready to protect New Yorkers, serving alongside our returning lifeguards, so that the upcoming beach and pool season can be even more successful than the one we enjoyed this past summer.

In Summer 2025, over 9 million people visited our public beaches and pools and we expanded the number of free summertime Learn to Swim classes, and we were able to bring back Senior Splash and lap swim programming to our outdoor pools for the first time since the COVID pandemic. This was all made possible through an incredibly focused campaign to recruit and retain lifeguards and expand training opportunities, which is an effort that will carry on, as we seek to build on that momentum.

As seen in the Fiscal Year 2026 Preliminary Mayor's Management Report released earlier this month, our MMR ratings for overall park condition and park cleanliness in the first four months of this current Fiscal Year increased by one percentage point

in each category compared to the same period in FY25, rising to 86 percent and 93 percent respectively.

Among the other factors, we believe this improvement can be credited to the expansion of our second shift maintenance staffing approach, which strategically targets 200 heavily used park locations during peak use evening hours and weekends. To be clear, this metric data, which helps inform our maintenance strategy around the city, is not self reported by our operational staff. These metrics are derived from thousands of inspections made through the year by our Parks Inspection Program or PIP. This is a detailed objective quality assurance program, independently administered by our operations and Management Planning division, conducted completely independently from our maintenance and operation staff, similar to what many in the retail business would call a Secret Shopper program so that we hold ourselves accountable and adjust our strategies in real time as problems arise.

The PMMR also reflects the growing interest in the recreational programming that we offer in parks around the city, as over half a million people attended our programs outside of recreation centers

in the first four months of FY26, an increase of 77 percent over the same period in FY25. The increase was largely due to the addition of nine more program sites and an increased number of operating days for our Kids in Motion program, which is our free drop-in program led by New York City Parks staff, offering active outdoor play in playgrounds to keep kids active and engaged on those warm summer days.

Because we are committed to accountability and transparency, I will also mention that the newest PMMR reflects a significant decrease in the number of street trees pruned in the first four months of FY26 compared to the same period in FY25. Unfortunately, we expected loss of services of an experienced block pruning contractor, due to the tragic passing of the company's owner in late June, forcing the agency to rebid these contracts.

The preventive care of our tree canopy is a hugely important priority for us, so we are working to advance these new block pruning contracts through the city's procurement process and bring those vendors on board as quickly as possible, so we can resume meeting our block pruning targets, as we've typically done over the years.

Even though it has felt at times like this winter would never end, we know that warmer days are approaching, and our parks, athletic fields, and playgrounds, are going to be busier than they've ever been.

As many of you know, thanks to once in a lifetime celebrations like the 2026 World Cup and Sail 250, the New York City metro area is expected to receive a truly massive influx of visitors and tourists this summer, with an estimated 2 million people coming into or passing through New York City as they cheer on their favorite teams and celebrate the 250th anniversary of the founding of our country. We are confident that our employees are up to the task, as we are poised to begin onboarding our seasonal employees, reactivate our water features, and getting our sports fields in shape as our busiest season approaches. There is no denying that this summer will present some very unique challenges but we're extremely excited that so many visitors will be able to come experience our world class greenspaces, alongside the millions of New Yorkers that enjoy our parks each and every day.

Turning to the specific topic for this hearing, the Fiscal Year 2027 Preliminary 10 Year Capital Plan for New York City Parks includes a total budget of \$12 billion, demonstrating this Administration's ongoing commitment to promoting equitable investment in a greener, healthier city. The FY '27 Preliminary Expense Operating Budget for New York City Parks is \$654 million, providing our agency with the resources we need to continue getting the job done, delivering core services and keeping our city parks clean and welcoming. To be completely clear, this proposed budget figure does represent a \$33.7 million decrease from FY26 adopted budget of \$687.6 million, which it is important to note, is due to the routine expiration of single year one shot funding items that are typically added at each budget adoption subject to negotiations between Council and the Administration. In our current FY26 adopted budget, this yearly funding includes Council's park equity initiative, discretionary expense funding, as well as additional staffing, supplies and equipment to support various efforts throughout our agency.

Our maintenance teams, Green Thumb Community Garden program, Urban Parks Rangers, Forest

1 Management Framework and Parks Enforcement Patrol are
2 all significant supported through this supplemental
3 funding which tremendous added value, and the Parkies
4 serving in those staffing lines are a hugely
5 important part of our team, so we very greatly
6 appreciate the Council's longstanding support and
7 advocacy for that dedicated funding.

8 Though we don't have time, enough time today to
9 exhaustively outline every operational aspect of
10 every effort and initiative being undertaken by the
11 agency to ensure the long term success of our park
12 system, I hope this overview has helped demonstrate
13 our commitment to growing and protecting green and
14 open space around the city and we look forward to
15 working with the Council in close partnership to make
16 sure our parks system can be the envy of cities
17 around the world.

18 To be clear, we cannot do this alone. We rely on
19 the support of our elected officials, our partners
20 and friends groups ranging from larger conservancies
21 to small neighborhood associations organizing
volunteer clean up events, and most importantly, the
individual New Yorkers and park visitors who use our
parks every day and who need to do their part by

1 treating these public spaces with respect and dignity
2 that they deserve, so all can enjoy this vital
3 resource that we have to share.

4 In closing, I want to thank my entire team for
5 their continued hard work and dedication to our
6 mission. I am honored and grateful to have been
7 granted the privilege of leading this agency and I
8 look forward to working with each of you to continue
9 improving our parks and open spaces for all New
10 Yorkers. We would be happy to answer any questions
11 that you have.

12 CHAIRPERSON HANKERSON: Commissioner, thank you.
13 We're going to - I also want to acknowledge my
14 colleague and neighbor in Queens, Council Member Lynn
15 Schulman who has joined us as well.

16 As we dive into the questions, uhm, you know
17 let's just jump right in there. So, during his
18 campaign, the Mayor supported allocating one percent
19 of the city's budget to parks. Unfortunately, this
20 campaign promise is yet to materialize. In fact, we
21 are now at an even lower level of parks funding
 compared to the total budget then before the Mayor
 took office. Has there been any discussion regarding

1 increasing the Department's budget to meet this
2 campaign promise with OMB or the Mayor?

3 TRICIA SHIMAMURA: Yeah, thank you so much for
4 your question and I want to just also say thank you
5 to the many advocates who I know are in the room and
6 then overflow rooms who have all kind of called out
7 for additional funding to parks to hit that one
8 percent. I just want to say that we are very excited
9 to be in kind of constant communication with this
10 Administration about, uh, the campaign promise that
11 he's made and also about the real benefits that parks
bring to all of New Yorkers.

12 So, this is uh, kind of an early part of our
13 budget process. We're really encouraged by the
14 conversations that we're having and frankly in
15 regular conversations with this Administration around
16 the benefit that we bring and around what additional
tasks we can do with more resources.

17 CHAIRPERSON HANKERSON: Uhm, from those
18 conversations, has there been any commitment?

19 TRICIA SHIMAMURA: I think that the Mayor has
20 said publicly that he is committed to seeing through
21 the one percent for parks. Although I will also
point out that I'm sure as you know that we're facing

1 a very serious budget crisis at this moment and the
2 Mayor has reiterated that uh, that we are interested
3 in creating a more transparent, honest budget that's
4 really reflective of truly anticipated revenue and
5 cost. So, you know we're certainly continuing to be
6 in conversation with this Administration again around
7 what that means for parks. Uhm, but I'm very
8 encouraged to have your support and to have advocate
9 support kind of continuously talking about the real
benefit that parks bring to New York.

10 CHAIRPERSON HANKERSON: If the decision was made
11 to allocate additional funding in the adopted budget,
uhm, how would you allocate the additional money?

12 TRICIA SHIMAMURA: Sure, that's a great question,
13 thank you. So, I think that the gap between what we
14 currently have budgeted and what advocates and others
15 have called for as one percent is around \$616
16 million. It's a very significant pot of money, so
17 certainly as the leader of an agency, I would welcome
18 additional resources at any time. I think that you
19 know we know many of the most successful programs
20 that we have are really data driven, metrics driven
and we as I highlighted in my testimony, we really do
21 have some rigorous metrics that we hold ourselves to

1 via through our PIP ratings, which really look at
2 every single park or through inspections overall,
3 like our MMR report that comes out and we see - we
4 saw an improvement just based on what we believe is
5 to be the impact of second shift. So, there are a
6 lot of kind of programs that we have out there that
7 are data driven that we always, you know, are always
8 happy to kind of point to towards successful
9 initiatives, successful kind of programs that parks
10 runs that we know are proven to have a real impact on
11 parks.

11 CHAIRPERSON HANKERSON: From those assessments,
12 can you name a few of those programs?

13 TRICIA SHIMAMURA: Yeah, yeah, so I mean
14 certainly we uh just to point to our MMR ratings
15 again. Our overall cleanliness and kind of use of
16 our parks is rated through our Parks Inspection
17 program but we also provide data in our MMR that
18 comes out. We discussed in just this MMR versus last
19 years that uhm that we saw an uptick in overall
20 cleanliness in our parks. We believe that that has
21 at least in part if not more than due to our
implementation of second shift. At a larger level,
we have right now second shift staff that come out on

1 weekends and Thursday, Friday, Saturday, Sunday I
2 believe. Although I'll look to our Acting First
3 Deputy Commissioner March Focht to give us more
4 information on this and with that program, we just -
5 we see our parkies kind of go out and be kind of in
6 our parks when a lot of people are park patrons are
7 using them in the afternoons. And we saw that with
8 that implementation expansion, we went from 100 sites
9 at first to now 200 park sites. We've seen kind of
10 tremendous success with this. Overall higher
11 ratings, overall cleaner bathrooms, trashes cleaned
12 out more frequently, and so, we have these kind of
13 examples. That's just one of example. That's just
14 one of knowing that this is a truly data driven
15 program that can deliver results.

16 CHAIRPERSON HANKERSON: Thank you. We're excited
17 to see that uhm there are no savings in the CSO Plan,
18 the Chief Savings Officer Plan but there are also no
19 restorations to the agency budget. Uh, the agency's
20 budget after the effects of the PEG program. We saw
21 hundreds of positions reduced and many programs
delayed or outright eliminated as cost savings
measures. This has undoubtedly had an impact on our
parks and the city's ability to care for our parks

1 and green spaces. While there is not a PEG program,
2 there is still an instruction from the agency to
3 institute savings across the board with
4 recommendations by the CSO. Can you please explain
5 the savings that you found as well as any impact on
6 services in your report?

7 TRICIA SHIMAMURA: Sure. So, uhm our uh I think
8 the EO 12 had instructed our agency to uhm - to
9 designate a Chief Savings Officer and then to kind of
10 look through and see uh, look for opportunities of
11 inefficiencies, look for opportunities of savings.
12 That report was to be submitted by March 20th, which
13 I think was just on Friday. Uhm, and the agency has
14 complied.

15 I want to reiterate though that - to reiterate
16 something that the Mayor has said and that is
17 certainly true within our agency that none of these
18 efficiencies and savings were to have any sort of
19 impact on the actual services to New Yorkers and we
20 know that Parks provides many services. So, while
21 this is still very kind of early in the conversation
and we have not had any sort of kind of formal uh,
kind of circle back with OMB so it's a little early
to talk about the details. I will just tell you that

any sort of savings that we were able to identify will have no impact on overall services to our parks or recreation centers or any other kind of impact to New Yorkers.

CHAIRPERSON HANKERSON: Just to be clear, so there hasn't been any conversation with OMB as of yet?

TRICIA SHIMAMURA: We just admitted it on Friday, so not yet.

CHAIRPERSON HANKERSON: Uh, you mentioned bathrooms so I just want to jump through really quick if it's okay.

TRICIA SHIMAMURA: Yeah.

CHAIRPERSON HANKERSON: What's the current cost to construct a bathroom? What conversation in the park?

TRICIA SHIMAMURA: Yeah, thank you so much for the question. So, if you don't mind, I would just like to just kind of set the stage a little bit here and uhm, and just say in a moment of pride. I'm very proud as leader of this agency and I know that parkies share this pride to be playing a role in providing New Yorkers a very critical public amenity.

1 Of the bathrooms, public restrooms that are in
2 our city, parks provides 70 percent of them, over 700
3 of them and you don't have to be a mother of two
4 small children like I am to know that this is
5 absolutely critical if you want to be in our parks,
6 enjoy our parks or playgrounds. If you want to take
7 on a basketball game or play or just sit down on a
8 park bench or actually enjoy one of our playgrounds.
9 All of these uh, these kind of desires to use our
10 parks and recreational kind of programs rely on the
11 idea that you need to have a public restroom nearby.
12 And so, we are very proud to be continuously
13 providing that service and that also means that these
14 are - that uh building and reconstructing public
15 restrooms uhm has often times come up in
16 conversations with communities because they do really
17 range.

18 To build it, so typically when you're
19 reconstructing a restroom, it can be as low as \$2.5
20 million or so and go up from there. When you're
21 doing a completely new restroom building, it can
 start around 3 and then go up from there, typically
 \$3 million to \$5 million is what we see for a new
 construction. Now, I'm looking here and there are so

1 many Council Members who have been sitting in their
2 seats for a little bit, so I'm sure that you're not
3 new to this idea that we often times have been saying
4 that now more often than not, we're probably
5 recommending that we are doing fully new construction
6 of restrooms in your districts and in your parks when
7 possible. Because really, we also know that it's not
8 just about restrooms when we - that you often times
9 hear us talk about like maybe restrooms plus an
10 additional staff space that we can then have a fixed
11 post staff in there. It does cost more but it
12 typically has a lot of benefits to be able to have
13 the option to have fixed post staff in your parks.
14 Maybe we're talking about reconstructing but
15 reconstructing will only barely give us the
16 accessibility that we know that this park or
17 neighborhood needs. And so, it would just make more
18 sense for us to construct a new facility that will
19 give us more accessibility, more stalls instead of
20 kind of reducing down, a limited number down from
21 there.

So, it's a little bit of a complicated answer.
I'm happy to talk to you more about it but typically,

1 depending on if you're reconstructing or doing
2 something new, uh, your cost can range.

3 CHAIRPERSON HANKERSON: I mean just as a follow
4 up to that, has the agency explored any ways to
5 decrease the cost of construction and design of
6 bathrooms in parks?

7 TRICIA SHIMAMURA: Absolutely and thank you for
8 the question. Uh, so there are two components that
9 often times we hear about when it comes to any sort
10 of capital project and I'll also look for Deputy
11 Commissioner of Capital Eric Boorstyn to come join me
12 if you have any other questions on it, if there's
13 anything that I'm misstating or any additional
14 details that you'd like to add but uhm, just a couple
15 years ago, the agency in recognition that it was
16 taking too long and too expensive to build these
17 restrooms, that we undertook a little bit of a pilot
18 to see if there was ways to speed this up and reduce
19 some of those costs.

20 And so, that's when you started to hear about the
21 Portland Loo, which was a pilot in order to put like
a single stall open air year round bathroom in every
single borough to see if that would bring down the
cost, if that would be successful.

We also tried prefabricated modular bathrooms, some of which have been very successful. We've received design awards. Did it very quickly but some of them, which have kind of brought up other problems that were not as quickly anticipated.

So, we - uh, the Portland Loo's just went through that whole kind of initiative to try out different pilots of different types of bathrooms. Just went through its first winter season. We've learned a lot of lessons in this, some good, some bad but certainly we're continuously looking at ways to kind of again, to deliver this incredibly important public amenity at a faster pace and for a cheaper price. And I'll just look to our Deputy Commissioner to see if there's anything you'd like to add.

ERIC BOORSTYN: Thank you Commissioner and thank you for your question Council and let's say to begin that the Commissioner got it all right and told a very complete answer to that question.

CHAIRPERSON HANKERSON: I'm sorry Commissioner, we have to swear you in, yeah. Deputy Commissioner, my apologies.

COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Please raise your right hand if you are able. Do you affirm to tell the truth,

the whole truth and nothing but the truth in your testimony before this Committee and to respond honestly to Council Member questions?

ERIC BOORSTYN: I do.

COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON HANKERSON: You may continue.

ERIC BOORSTYN: So again, uhm, the Commissioner told a very complete story and really did get everything right. I would just add to that. That first of all, we all know that construction in the city is expensive, no matter what you're building. Construction in parks more so because you're far from utilities. Sometimes you're far from the street in the delivery of materials and workers as the complexity.

We're also building, you know, the smallest public building imaginable. Larger buildings have greater efficiencies. Our buildings are built by union labor so you're talking about for union wages and operating governance and to build a 720 square foot building has a lot of inefficiencies that you don't encounter when you're building you know a more normal size building but to that end, we have a number of different design options that we're

utilizing. The Commissioner mentioned our standard prototypical Public Restroom Building, PRB. It has six fixtures. It's hand built, I should say on site once the foundations are in. These are masonry buildings, hand laid masonry but these are intended to last you know decades. These are not buildings that we expect to suffer from weather or abuse. They are designed to be where they are. The existing buildings that we're all familiar with, the 20 by 20's, they're much smaller. They have currently four fixtures in them but again as the Commissioner said, to make them fully handicapped accessible, we lose two of the four fixtures. So, in that case, you're getting a public restroom with two fixtures, one men, one women typically. The alternative, you have three each, so the capacity and the service is far greater and the cost is really not that different on the scale of things. Uhm, we also have a prefabricated option that we've rolled out twice. As the Commissioner mentioned, one win NAA New York Design Award, where most of the work is done offsite. That is the super structure. Below grade, same challenges, foundations, infrastructure, all the typical costs and potential risks that one encounters

there. But above grade, the building is predominantly fabricated offsite in three large modules. Delivered to the site, craned in; again, access is an issue there and that intends to not so much reduce cost but it reduces the amount of construction onsite that disrupts the use of the park for other uses.

CHAIRPERSON HANKERSON: Thank you. I am going to circle back to the bathroom piece or conversations. I want to acknowledge some of my other colleagues that have joined us. Uh, Council Member Gale Brewer, Council Member Sandy Nurse, Council Member Virginia Maloney. Alright, and uh Council Member Kayla Santosuosso who has joined us virtually as well.

Just to switch gears, really quickly, every year as part of the budget negotiations, the Council pushes for the same few budget items to be funded. However, the Administration has only set them for one year at a time. This leaves the jobs of working class New Yorkers up in the air every year. They don't know if they will have a job to come to next fiscal year. This is no way to live and it puts intense stress on these dedicated employees who work

to make our parks clean and enjoyable as much as possible.

Is it the commitment of this Administration to baseline these one shots once and for all? Particularly, the one shots associated with headcount?

TRICIA SHIMAMURA: Thank you so much for the question. Uhm, you know and I welcome the opportunity to talk more about these one shot positions, which count to around 277 staff members overall. I'm happy to talk a little bit more in detail around these positions but just at a very high level, I would just like to say that from what I understand, these oneshot funding opportunities really have come out of our part of the, essentially routine conversation and dialogue in between the Administration and our Council. I am incredibly grateful for these opportunities and can really speak to uh operationally how these positions have worked to complement and supplement the work that we do. They span from Green Thumb to our Forestry Management to our maintenance and operations. Of course PEP Rangers and stump removal. All of these kind of components are incredibly important to the bread and

CHAIRPERSON HANKERSON: Yeah, I know you listed some. Can you list them uh all with the headcount?

TRICIA SHIMAMURA: Yeah, let me slow - I'll slow it down for you and go through. So, there are six kind of one shot initiatives that have previously came through in our FY26 budget. The first one I'll talk about is the forestry management. This is not our street trees but really our natural areas management. That's 37 positions. Uhm, we have a year round headcount of 63, so this is a sizable supplement to that work. We are very proud of the fact that we maintain over 800,000 trees in our natural areas. There are actually 6 million trees in our natural areas, which is amazing. But 800,000 of those, we kind of maintain at a higher degree of touch and a higher degree of maintenance there and this would help us - this has continuously helped us do that. We are very excited about of course these natural areas as we've spoken about at previous

hearing because we understand that the maintenance of our existing canopy, the maintenance of our urban forest is really - it contributes to our overall shade.

CHAIRPERSON HANKERSON: Commissioner, I'm sorry. As much as I appreciate the information, if you can just list the -

TRICIA SHIMAMURA: Oh, absolutely. Yup, uh Rangers is 50 positions. Our stump removal is \$2 million. It's just OTPS. Green Thumb is 11 positions plus a little OTPS funding. We have maintenance park workers 73 positions. This is mostly CPW's and APSW's and some gardeners. Uh, and then 100 PEP Officers.

CHAIRPERSON HANDERSON: By chance did you list the Urban Park Rangers? Did I miss that?

TRICIA SHIMAMURA: The Park Rangers is 50.

CHAIRPERSON HANKERSON: 50, thank you. What's the breakdown of the Park Rangers by borough?

TRICIA SHIMAMURA: That's a great question. So, let me - let me just say so overall, we have our Park Rangers are budgeted for 94 inclusive of our 50 additional - inclusive of the 50 one shot positions. I'll look to our Deputy Commissioner Margaret Nelson

1 to give us a little bit more of a breakdown of how we
2 deploy them. Uhm, but a very high level just because
3 members may not be aware. Our Park Rangers are
4 essentially have the same civil service title as our
5 PEP officers, but really focus on that educational
6 programming.

7 So, they are the ones who you see typically
8 running out of our nature centers, doing nature
9 walks, doing educational programming in our public
10 schools, providing kind of that kind of essential
11 programming throughout our parks. They don't
12 typically - they don't typically stay out of one
13 center but are really kind of there. You'll see
14 rangers kind of throughout our park system at
15 different times of the year doing really incredible
16 educational programming.

17 I'll look to our Deputy Commissioner to talk a
18 little bit more about the deployment of those
19 Rangers.

20 CHAIRPERSON HANKERSON: I just want to mention
21 you know, just for the record as well, that one third
of our PEP Officers are funded by the city and if the
Council didn't fight for them, that funding wouldn't

be there. So, I just want to just you know, say that for the record as well.

TRICIA SHIMAMURA: And thank you for that. So, I'm actually and I'm happy to talk to you about PEP. So, our Rangers, we do look at as a little differently than our PEP officers. They have the same civil service title but whereas our PEP Officers, you will see typically enforcing our park rules, educating the public in terms of just kind of again those park rules. They try to hit as many parks and like spaces as possible. Our rangers are doing a little bit more of like deeper programming. So, they are doing it for Black history month. We are doing a lot of history, like programming around city's - Black leaders in the city and their impacts on parks. Rangers will do nature walks. They'll do a little bit more of that kind of deeper - they'll do shoreline kind of educational programming. So, a little different in terms of their overall scope.

I'll look to our Deputy Commissioner Margaret Nelson to talk a little bit more about how we deploy those rangers and I'm also happy to talk about PEP.

CHAIRPERSON HANKERSON: Thank you. Before you answer, I believe you have to be sworn in. Is that right?

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

MARGARET NELSON: I do.

COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you.

MARGARET NELSON: As the Commissioner said, first of all, we're incredibly grateful for the one shot funding for the Rangers. Our baseline Ranger number is only in the 40's. And so, when you think about adding 50 more Rangers, we really have been able to expand the breadth of our programming throughout the city and we did take a special look at making sure that we are providing programming at every single Council district, which is something we weren't able to do with our baseline staffing. So, I just want to point that out.

As the Commissioner said, you know we have 11 nature centers, which are open on the weekends and we

1 provide programming and open hours there. We also
2 provide programming in schools through our natural
3 classroom program, so we're going out into schools
4 doing programming there and also bringing those
5 school children into our parks. We do pop up
6 programming and we do scheduled programming. So,
7 it's really throughout the city and it's not
8 necessarily based on you know specific parks at a
9 specific time. So, happy to provide you more detail
10 and I would say that those Rangers are really spread
equitably across the five boroughs.

11 CHAIRPERSON HANKERSON: What does a typical day
for a Park Ranger look like?

12 MARGARET NELSON: So, a typical day for a Park
13 Ranger, you know they're going to spend some of their
14 time planning programming that is upcoming. So, they
15 do some reaching out to schools to see if schools are
16 interested in programming or following up on
17 inquiries that they've gotten. They do - do some
18 patrol in parks and they use that as an opportunity
19 if they see wildlife in a park, they might gather
20 people around and do some education. That's called
our popup programming. So, if they see a seal you
21 know in the river or they see a hawk in a tree,

1 they'll be doing pop up programming with the people
2 that are in the park. They will also do some patrol
3 around K9 conditions, so dogs off leash. They will
4 try to educate folks around that. Again, as the
5 Commissioner said, both our rangers and our PEP
6 Officers both have the same underlying urban park
7 ranger civil service title. They're both trained as
8 peace officers. They both have the ability to make
9 arrests if needed but again, with our rangers and our
10 PEP Officers really look for education first to
11 educate park workers before having to move to
12 enforcement if they do.

13 CHAIRPERSON HANKERSON: In the instance that they
14 have to make an arrest, uh, the person that they have
15 detained, will they be moved to a local precinct? Is
16 that correct?

17 MARGARET NELSON: Exactly.

18 CHAIRPERSON HANKERSON: Okay, uhm, would the
19 agency be supportive of the Council's push for the
20 Administration to baseline?

21 TRICIA SHIMAMURA: I think that is again, as the
22 leader of this agency, we'd always be happy to see
23 more certainty and more uhm and more funding in our
24 budget. Certainly, for our rangers and for our PEP

1 Officers in particular, we do this - those positions
2 take a lot of training and require a specific type of
3 recruitment. The training alone takes around 16
4 weeks to do and then recruitment can take any number
5 of weeks to do. So, I think operationally it is nice
6 for our other kind of baseline funded positions to
7 have that certainty in effect so that we can kind of
8 continue and just kind of get them trained and get
9 them out in the field as long as they'll stay with
10 us.

10 CHAIRPERSON HANKERSON: I thank you for your
11 support. Uhm, so before I turn it over to my
12 colleagues, I want to acknowledge Council Member
13 Mercedes Narcisse has joined us as well. Uh, and
14 Finance Chair Council Member Linda Lee. Uhm, I have
15 one last uh, maybe three questions.

15 In the Fiscal 2025 Adopted Budget there was a mix
16 up between the Administration and the Council on
17 funding for forestry and natural areas. This
18 resulted in the reduction of headcount and for
19 several people to find new employment either within
20 or outside of the agency. The Natural Resources
21 group is responsible for almost 1,000 acres of
 natural areas and performs tasks related to mulching,

TRICIA SHIMAMURA: Sure, uhm, so I - I think, again, while just to give a high level kind of overview and then I'll look to my team to kind of speak to a little bit with more detail. But again, these one shots, uhm, these one shot funding opportunities as I understand it are really - come out of negotiations directly between the Council and the Administration. We are incredibly grateful for these opportunities and frankly a lot of times, after a couple of years of seeing these one shots coming in, it gives us a lot of uh, it gives me a lot of kind of direction and data so that I may be able to demonstrate that, maybe something shouldn't be one shot and it should be baselined.

A good example of this is that we had gardeners that were uh, one shot - on one shot funding for several years and then uh, from what I understand the

Council and Administration kind of saw that this was something that was constantly discussed and ultimately became baselined.

So, I will say that it is pretty routine and pretty typical to see these one shots come up but they are in direct communication between the Council and the Administration on how and what would ever kind of finally comes up. And so, I'll look to you Matt to give us a little bit more detail.

MATT DRURY: Sure, thank you Commissioner. My name is Matt Drury, I'm the Chief of Citywide Legislative Affairs. Uhm, yeah, and I can kind of talk a little bit about the sort of tick tock that sort of led to the situation you described. I'll take a step back and note that the forest management framework uh, it's a partnership between our agency and the Natural Areas Conservancy and that was released in 2018. And what that sketched out is sort of a forward looking 25 year plan. Again, specifically looking at our forested natural areas. So, this is different and separate and apart from all of our efforts related to street trees or trees within landscape parks. So, it is very much focusing on those natural forests and uh, because obviously

1 natural forest health is where the vast majority of
2 our raw- you know in terms of the raw value of
3 individual trees that make up our canopy, our natural
4 forests are a huge, huge part of that.

5 So, starting in FY20, the agency received one
6 shot expense funding. I believe that was \$4.5
7 million. I believe there was then a pause during the
8 COVID related FY21 discussions. That funding was
9 resumed in FY22. In FY23 and FY24, we saw funding,
10 one shot funding of \$2.5 million. And then, and
11 again, and so, through these years, you can think of
12 sort of the forest management framework, staff and
13 that sort of planning and other analysis and other
14 work kind of getting underway, right?

15 In FY25 for you know again, we weren't directly
16 involved in these discussions so it's a little hard
17 to speak to but it does appear that both Council and
18 the Administration that in FY, it was not funded.
19 However, so there were -

20 CHAIRPERSON HANKERSON: I guess and not to cut
21 you off. What was the result of the loss of funding?
What was the impact of it?

MATT DRURY: Yeah, there you go. For sure. So,
there were 27 FMF focused staff that were employed at

the time of FY25 Adoption. 20 of those were able to stay on hand and shifted to just other grant funded parks opportunities and positions. So, 20 out of the 27 stayed onboard. Three were able to fill full-time vacancies that already existed and then four resigned and went on to other.

So, 23 out of the 27 stayed on with the agency and I believe to a large degree still do today.

CHAIRPERSON HANKERSON: What's the current budgeted and actual headcount in the forestry division?

MATT DRURY: In the forestry division; sorry, I don't mean to split hairs but so do you mean sort of the Natural Resource Group maybe? Like, that's sort of or do you mean forestry?

CHAIRPERSON HANKERSON: Forestry.

MATT DRURY: Uh -

TRICIA SHIMAMURA: So, we have uh, for forestry, we have 200 active staff who are dedicated to caring for our street and landscape park trees and that includes 58 foresters and 90 climber and pruners.

CHAIRPERSON HANKERSON: Is that enough to manage the city's natural areas?

1 TRICIA SHIMAMURA: So, our forestry staff here
2 actually take care of our street and it's just a
3 terminology thing but for our forestry staff, that's
4 just a team that's taking care of our street trees
5 and like park trees. Park trees in any given park.
6 That's that team. In terms of our natural areas,
7 natural area staff, that's our kind of - oh, I'm
8 sorry, there are 73 in our - uh who are taking care
9 of our natural areas space. That's like the kind of
10 wild more uhm, forgive me, I keep saying the word
11 natural but more like typical forest of what you
12 think of.

13 CHAIRPERSON HANKERSON: Is it enough?

14 TRICIA SHIMAMURA: I mean, we are happy to -
15 we're happy- I mean I think that you can look at our
16 MMR data for how we're doing with the resources that
17 we have. We are again, I'm more is always more in
18 the sense that we're always happy to receive more
19 resources but at the same time, I would also say that
20 Parks has a - we understand at a very intimate level
21 that we have mandates to uphold and essential
services to provide New Yorkers, be it in our
landscape parks or in our natural areas. And so,

we're going to uphold those mandates with any resources that we're given.

CHAIRPERSON HANKERSON: I'm having a slight challenge Commissioner. It's not with you but you did mention something that park workers and the work that parks does is essential.

TRICIA SHIMAMURA: Hmm, mmm.

CHAIRPERSON HANKERSON: Uhm, but unfortunately, the way that the current budget looks, the preliminary budget looks, it doesn't seem as if it is essential to the Administration as it stands. And so, uhm I want to just go back to a question I asked in the last hearing regarding the snow storm.

TRICIA SHIMAMURA: Yeah.

CHAIRPERSON HANKERSON: And regarding the staff that were required to work during the snow storm. Will the department be willing to use funds from accruals given that accruals from the current vacancy rate are projected to provide more than enough funding, to provide retroactive pay comparable to the pay provided by DSNY to those DPR staff who worked to shovel during the last snow storm?

TRICIA SHIMAMURA: I'm sorry, I think I just want to make sure I understand your question. So, those

1 staff who responded to the snow storm and happy to
2 give you kind of again, the large overview. When we-
3 when we have major snow events like the two that we
4 had in just - in February, our entire maintenance and
5 operation crew responds to those storms. Nothing
6 else kind of takes higher priority than ensuring that
7 we are doing our part to help New Yorkers get to
8 where they need to go.

9 So, that does and we have a kind of very
10 thoughtful, very thorough, extremely dense winter
11 weather response plan that really prioritizes
12 perimeter sidewalks, uhm, high traffic areas, major
13 transit hubs, kind of high part JOP's are up there at
14 the top. We work with our brothers and sisters at
15 DSNY to help clear bus stations and crosswalks and
16 really understand this to be a full city effort to
17 get out of a storm and recover as quickly as
18 possible.

19 Knowing that there are priorities to helping
20 people get around. That work, Parks works very
21 closely in hand and hand with our other sister
agencies, DSNY and NYSEM, DOT, NYPD, and FDNY to kind
of respond to the storm and during while those
parkies are responding, they are getting paid for

that work. So, they are there, so they are getting paid.

CHAIRPERSON HANKERSON: So, I don't think the question has to do with them being paid. We know they were paid but it doesn't seem that the pay was comparable to those in the Department of Sanitation and those that were hired per diem by the city. I personally feel that it's only fair to provide equal pay for equal work, especially since some park staff had to sleep in rec centers overnight. You know that is a - that's a huge ask and it speaks to the essential nature, I believe, of Park workers, Parkies in general. And so, I just want to - I would like to know if the agency would consider matching that pay to that of those that work the storm, that were DSNY and/or the per diem workers.

TRICIA SHIMAMURA: Yeah thank you. You know just one kind of caveat to that and I'd say that you know we're happy to - I'm always happy to uplift the work of parkies. We'd have to, I think, look closer and I don't know if I can speak to exactly how those DSNY or DOT staffers were compensated, like to do a comparison between them. Although we did provide overtime for when parkies were there.

1 The only caveat is that we, you know, talk a
2 little bit about that snow storm, which was so
3 intense. Uhm, you know, frankly only in rare
4 occasions did we request those park staff to stay
5 overnight. Uhm, we offered it though because we do
6 want to take care of our staff and oftentimes, we
7 know how important it is that the work they do, that
8 they would go through extraordinary lengths to show
9 up for work the next day. So, this was, oftentimes
10 we were doing - we were kind of helping them
11 accommodate and stay overnight in park houses and rec
12 centers and things like that because we knew that it
13 was going to be dangerous for them to kind of travel
14 back and forth and that was an offer to them. Not
15 necessarily a, uhm, you have to do this sort of
16 thing. But uhm, just that was a small caveat.

17 CHAIRPERSON HANKERSON: Out of curiosity, uh,
18 were meals provided to them for those who stayed
19 overnight?

20 TRICIA SHIMAMURA: You know, I would have to
21 check but in most cases, I, myself, was going around
22 to the centers and to checking on staff during the
23 entirety of the storm. Park staff were overall in
24 really good spirits. They were very happy about the

1 situation. Most of them had all- had gotten pizza or
2 gotten other kinds of uhm, like the managers had
3 gotten pizza for them and kind of helped support
4 them.

5 In some of the rec centers, they were watching
6 movies into the night and then like getting up the
7 next morning doing their, and getting back to work.
8 So, I think overall, we're happy to give you a little
9 bit more - look into that further but overall, we do
10 what we can to make sure that they're supported and
most of all safe.

11 CHAIRPERSON HANKERSON: I'd appreciate you
12 following back up with us. I don't want to take too
13 much time. I have a lot of colleagues who are here
14 who have questions. I want to acknowledge Council
15 Member Pierina Sanchez who has joined us as well.
16 Uh, for questions, we'll start in Harlem with Council
Member Yusef Salaam.

17 COUNCIL MEMBER SALAAM: Thank you Chair. Thank
18 you for your testimony as well.

19 TRICIA SHIMAMURA: Thank you.

20 COUNCIL MEMBER SALAAM: I want to start with
21 Central Parks maintenance decline. It was noted
there was a decrease of about \$18.87 million from

1 Fiscal Year '26 to '27. Let us know what services or
2 maintenance activities will be reduced and does this
3 decline affect park cleanliness, safety or
4 recreational programming?

5 TRICIA SHIMAMURA: Thanks for the question,
6 Council Member. I, to my knowledge, although I'll
7 look to my team to see. I don't believe that we
8 actually have a decline of \$18 million to central
9 park. Uhm, although we can double check that to
10 confirm. I am happy to actually talk about - there
11 is maybe, you may have seen, there is a line in our
12 budget that goes towards main- like funding that goes
13 directly towards CPC's maintenance and that is
14 around, I think it's \$14 million, although we can
15 confirm and I can talk a little bit about that
16 because it is a little bit of a strange thing to see
17 overall in our budget.

18 But essentially this came out of uh, this comes
19 out of our license agreement with the Central Park
20 Conservancy. The overall maintenance of Central Park
21 just given the kind of prominence, the landscape, the
kind of long time - the long scale vision of this
park is well into what I understand to be like \$100
million a year, if not more. And so, that sort of

1 kind of matching from the city came out of their
2 license agreement that the city struck with the
3 Central Park Conservancy many, many years ago. And
4 so, while the city does contribute I think, I think
5 it's \$14 million. \$16 million, \$16 million uhm that
6 is kind of matched many times over by the Central
7 Park Conservancy.

8 And to my knowledge that has not changed.
9 There's nothing in the next budget that I think is
10 going to impact that. I do want to point out that
11 out of the relationship also has come something I
12 think that spans beyond Central Park, which is very
13 important to me. CPC has and I'm sorry, I say CPC
14 but Central Park Conservancy has agreed to partner
15 with Parks to expand the horticulture practices and
16 kind of maintenance of that park and expand it to
17 other parks throughout the city.

18 And that's through a kind of year - an annual
19 kind of parks, like beyond like an annual kind of
20 parks, like beyond an annual kind of fellowship where
21 CPC puts their resources in other parks around the
city to help kind of maintain and other kind of
portions of different parks. And help teach our
staff and others kind of some of those practices.

1 We're happy to talk a little bit more about that and
2 I'd look to our Acting First Deputy Commissioner, if
3 he wants to speak more to that sort of program. But
4 in fact, our kind of relationship goes beyond just
5 Central Park and you should see actually, we had - we
6 were in uhm, your district in Marcus Garvey Park for
7 awhile and then we are now I think finishing up, we
8 finished up two years in what is it? Hybridge and
9 then are now moving to a different park entirely but
10 you see this kind of residency happen with CPC staff
and generally we see a lot of benefits from that.

11 COUNCIL MEMBER SALAAM: Thank you. The budget-
12 the program budget decreased by '26 \$75 million from
13 Fiscal Year '26 to '27. What capital projects are
14 being deferred or delayed and how will this impact
15 the East River Esplanade phase three and the Halfen
park pool with construction timelines?

16 TRICIA SHIMAMURA: Thank you again for the
17 question. So, I will look through- so, I'm happy to
18 talk through those two projects in particular.
19 Although we're happy to also get you more specific
details. But uhm, so sorry -

20 Okay, okay, so I'm not sure about any sort of -
21 about the budget reduction component to what that

number is referring to. Although we can look into it and get back to you, if there is. Our kind of ten year capital plan is reflective of \$12 billion of capital projects. I can talk to you a little bit specifically. We have 500 capital projects that are currently either in design, in procurement, in construction. And then we have 91 projects that are coming up in this next year. 91 projects that are kind of in the queue that have not yet started design.

Uhm, and so, the two projects in particular though, I'm not aware of any sort of like outright delays for East River Esplanade. It's one that's very close and near and dear to my heart. Those two, like we are kind of continuing. You should see actually construction happening right now on portions of the Esplanade, particularly in East Harlem where work is happening right now and I think we just broke- did groundbreaking with you just in the last year with the kind of Harlem component to it right at 135th Street with the Halfen project. We are moving right along with this and are eager to see that rec center back and reopened.

COUNCIL MEMBER SALAAM: Thank you Chair. I just have some more. Uhm, recreation membership growth versus funding. The recreation center membership increased 5.3 percent.

TRICIA SHIMAMURA: Hmm, mmm.

COUNCIL MEMBER SALAAM: 7,737 members, new members I would say in the first four months of Fiscal Year '26, driven by young adult growth. Does the Fiscal Year 2027 Budget include the increased funding to support expanding programming and staffing for this growing membership base.

TRICIA SHIMAMURA: Thank you for the question. I too am looking at membership and rec center visitation very closely. You know the truth is is that we have over a billion. \$1 billion going into recreation facilities over the next several years. We opened up Shirley Chisholm this year. This won't even be the end of the conversation around rec centers that we're opening. We'll be opening up Mary Cali Dalton, I hope by the end of this calendar year. We've got four more rec centers kind of in the queue, particularly in the Bronx, in Queens. Really exciting projects and typically when we do open up these new facilities, particularly what you saw with

Shirley, uhm we do receive additional funding to staff those facilities.

The budget that you have in front of you does not reflect any additional staffing at this point, although we are kind of constantly in conversation with OMB as we open up those new centers. I will say though and as proud as I am around this major investment and opening up of new rec centers, the first in a decade. Truly is that the rec center component is just one piece of a larger puzzle of how we serve New York City in terms of our recreational programming. Outside of our rec centers, we have playground associates. We have shape up classes. We have other kind of rec programming that helps get New Yorkers access to these incredible services even if you don't live near a rec center.

So, we're very excited and can provide you additional information around that type of network but really you should look at our rec centers as just one component and then see this larger kind of mosaic of services that we provide, even without a stationary building attached to it.

COUNCIL MEMBER SALAAM: Finally, DPR received \$1.6 million in state funding for lifeguard

recruitment bonuses to achieve 1,200 lifeguards. Is this efficient to meet the workforce needs for full pool and beach season? And what is the current lifeguard vacancy rate and how does this compare to Fiscal Year '25?

TRICIA SHIMAMURA: Thank you for the question, very much so. So, I just want to say in recognition of my predecessors, particularly Iris Rodriguez Rosa but also Sue Donahue, both of these Commissioners really saw what was a nationwide issue with lifeguarding and focused in- on changing the narrative in New York City. It was truly, anywhere in the country, you would see lifeguards coming in in short supply and particularly Iris, really took on the challenge of changing this around and working very closely with our union and with our lifeguards to both change how they were received within the agency but also deliver on some real kind of financial incentives to increase our numbers. So, now lifeguards are making \$22 an hour. That was an increase. They also receive a \$1,000 retention bonus and those two things mixed with also just a cultural shift and I wish I could spend an hour talking about this within our agency, has really resulted in

1 increasing numbers instead of the kind of
2 continuously decreasing amount. And I really want to
3 just again say thank you to Iris and Sue, who really
4 took this on.

5 And frankly we're going to continue that under my
6 leadership here. We've seen significant retention
7 with this, to the tune of around 70 to 80 percent of
8 lifeguards are now returning back. That's higher
9 than the national average and we had just shy of
1,100 last year's lifeguards. We had 1,082.

10 It's still too early to be able to tell you
11 exactly what we're going to have this year but I am
12 very hopeful and the numbers are looking good. We're
13 just in training right now, so it kind of depends on
14 who sticks out through training and ultimately we do
15 the last tests and we won't be able to know for sure
16 until frankly the end of June, start of July in terms
17 of our total numbers but you do feel a difference
18 here. I have to tell you particularly even at our
19 pools you saw, at our big olympic size pools, just a
20 couple years ago, we were only able to open up those
21 pools. It's like 15 percent. It was really tight.
Uhm, you know this year and this last summer, just in
this last past summer, you saw diving pools opening

up. You saw we were able to bring back adult swim. Senior splash, which was such a beloved program. And so, we're really hoping to see kind of that continued growth. And are very grateful frankly to my predecessors for their kind of - their focused effort here.

COUNCIL MEMBER SALAAM: Thank you Commissioner. Thank you Chair.

CHAIRPERSON HANKERSON: Absolutely. I also want to give kudos to the formal Commissioner Iris Rodriguez Rosa. She did amazing work, so I just want to - I know she's watching so-

TRICIA SHIMAMURA: Yeah, I know. She'll be testing, yes.

CHAIRPERSON HANKERSON: I want to - let's travel to Queens. Uh, to my neighbor Council Member Lynn Schulman.

COUNCIL MEMBER SCHULMAN: Thank you Chair and I want to Commissioner, welcome and uhm, I did this privately. I'll say it publicly. I think you're going to be a great Commissioner and I know you from a lot of other things plus you're the Manhattan right, Commissioner. So, you have a wealth of knowledge and all of that and you've been

particularly helpful to me recently, so anyway uhm, we look forward to your great work.

I have a few questions. One is about accessibility. So, I have actually funded accessible access to Forest Park and then I'm told that it's going to take years for anything to happen because you don't have enough engineers. So that's one.

Uhm, and this is - you know this is a fully funded project that we - you know that I did in my first year so, that's - so that's the first question.

TRICIA SHIMAMURA: Yup, thank you first and most importantly for your partnership and for your continued advocacy for our parks. I very much appreciate it. Uhm, second of all, thank you also for prioritizing accessibility in your parks. Uhm, I truly think at a very high level, we should be judged based on how we serve our most vulnerable and that means our accessibility. So, I appreciate the funding and the continued follow up here.

You know while I'm happy to give you a specific update as to where we stand on this. It is true that that these projects are capital projects and it doesn't really matter if we're talking about a bathroom but in this case, we're talking about

accessibility, accessible pathways into our parks. They do take quite a long time. And truly uhm, I can go into details around this but the truth of the matter is, is that we are looking at very closely at how we can shave down some of this time. Really what you see is when you start design, design may be and it's been pretty typical around 12-ish months.

COUNCIL MEMBER SCHULMAN: I haven't even seen a design yet. So, we're told that you know there's not enough personnel to do that.

TRICIA SHIMAMURA: Hmm, hmm, when you see those design, those design parks when it gets into design, uhm, but for any project or a project that's right before your project or where our uhm, after the design phase you really do see and what we're looking at very closely is a kind of prolonged time when we're trying to get through some regulations and kind of checks with our other agencies.

All good things, truly good things but things like and you may hear this word a lot, the swish process or something else like that. Those kind of - those types of checks within our other agencies are very important but also a time just can really lengthen projects significantly. We're looking at

1 this closely, there are some things that the agency
2 has done, actually a piece of legislation that
3 Council Member Krishnan had passed just a few years
4 ago around the whole capital process and ways to
5 actually shorten this. I read, I both read your
6 legislation and the report that came out, which was
7 very helpful and the agency has taken steps to
8 actually reduce some of this. We need to be doing
9 more. So, we will certainly get back to you on this
one.

10 COUNCIL MEMBER SCHULMAN: Because it's a park
11 that's accessed by everyone including the Chairs,
12 constituents and you know it's rather big, so.
13 Alright, that's one. The other is what is the new
14 process now for trees to get trees planted because a
15 lot of the public doesn't know about that or there's
issues and so -

16 TRICIA SHIMAMURA: Yeah, thank you for the
17 question. So, in recognizing that every single
18 community in New York City deserves trees. Every
19 single community needs to benefit from the overall
20 canopy. We, the agency, has shifted away from what
21 was a very long kind of adhoc list of 311's and
elected official requests, kind of where we were

1 jumping around to different areas based on the
2 requests that came in and then decided to shift to a
3 comprehensive tree planting plan. The good news is
4 with this plan that I can tell you that in nine
5 years, which is I know a long time but in nine years
6 time, I can confidently say to you that every single
7 corner of this city will have been reviewed, assessed
8 and planted for but not only are we planting but
9 we're also expanding tree pits for overall tree
10 health, we're removing stumps. We're filling empty
11 tree pits that can no longer sustain trees in them
12 and really touching every single corner. So,
13 typically it is from essentially in this - in these
14 nine years, we will be able to touch every single
15 corner of the city.

16 For specifically for your exact neighborhood or
17 if you have a specific location, we're happy to look
18 that up and tell you where we are in the queue
19 because you know -

20 COUNCIL MEMBER SCHULMAN: It's done through the
21 Parks Department now?

TRICIA SHIMAMURA: It's done through the Parks
Department, yes.

COUNCIL MEMBER SCHULMAN: And can you explain art work in the parks and you know that -

TRICIA SHIMAMURA: Yes.

COUNCIL MEMBER SCHULMAN: Because a lot of people don't realize and I figured that out, so -

TRICIA SHIMAMURA: I love art work in the parks frankly. Just to be very clear, we have a really great program where for 364 days you can work with our agency to put up art work in our parks and we know that this is not just a luxury. This is something that shows investment. It shows excitement. It can show a sense of place and pride of place as in the case of the one that you and I were just working with in Queens and so, we are very excited to work with artists of all types to really think through how they might be able to showcase their art in parks and I actually think there are some advocates here today who have run really successful sculptural programs, photography programs, who are showcasing their work in the parks. They should work with us. We're excited about the opportunities here and if you have a park space or a green street or some other space that you think could

be activated by art work, we would love to hear about it.

COUNCIL MEMBER SCHULMAN: But do you mind if I just finish up my - so, just so folks understand, it's for a year? Like there's - it's under the Charter? That's what I want people to know.

TRICIA SHIMAMURA: Yes, it is. So, we base our rules off of the Public Design Committee, which is also based on the Charter. If you do something, if you hold a piece of art work for over a year or at a year, then it requires additional kind of reviews. It is then seen as a permanent art work but we like to have - we are committed to having temporary art work that can have a revolving kind of audience and have other opportunities to bring in other artists, so in order not to trigger some other uhm, other kind of problems with adherence to the Charter and around kind of permanent art work, we do it for 364 days.

COUNCIL MEMBER SCHULMAN: Okay and then my last question is who has because we get a lot of constituent complaints about the sidewalks when they're lifted up by the tree roots. Like who has responsibility for that because we can't seem to get answers to that in general.

1 TRICIA SHIMAMURA: Well, first of all, I'm very
2 sorry because I understand how frustrating this is
3 for very human people focused agencies. So, I don't
4 want any of your constituents or anyone in the city
5 frankly to not feel like they're getting a direct
6 answer from parks and so, we are happy to follow up
7 directly with you and your constituents but it
8 typically is the property owners responsibility.
9 However, there are some situations, we do have a
10 program for single family homes where parks can help
11 take care of some of that work. We still want to
12 know about it so that we can monitor these things, so
13 it's probably worth a larger conversation but would
14 love to follow up directly with your team.

15 COUNCIL MEMBER SCHULMAN: Thank you for the
16 accommodation.

17 CHAIRPERSON HANKERSON: I just had a follow up to
18 the Council Members question regarding that nine year
19 plan. Uhm, so, given the budget, uh is the nine year
20 plan you know set to stay on track?

21 TRICIA SHIMAMURA: Yes it is. The nine year plan
 - so we receive baseline funding to continue with
 this comprehensive tree planting program. So, yes,
 it is funded.

CHAIRPERSON HANKERSON: Okay, okay, uhm, speaking of the great predecessors, the former Chair of this Committee, Council Member Shekar Krishnan.

COUNCIL MEMBER KRISHNAN: Thank you very much Chair but you are taking it to another level now with your leadership, so great to see how you're doing with this, with this budget hearing too and asking all the important questions.

Commissioner, first of all, good to see you. Matt, good to see you too and everyone from Parks, very nice to see you all. I just want to echo what's been said before too. I want to thank you very much for your leadership Commissioner, you've been great both with your passion for Parks in your prior work and highly in the agency right now too. Uhm, and I know that Commissioner Rodriguez Rosa who may be watching as well would be proud of all that you are doing to take her work to the next level.

Uhm, I just had a few questions to follow up on some of the things that we've talked about already. So, you know I have to say I am disappointed that the Mayor's Preliminary Budget does not fund parks at the level that we need it at. Essentially if you take out uh the one shots, as you testified to as well,

1 the budget, the Preliminary Budget Proposal is lower
2 than what it was last year and if you put it back,
3 it's about the same. So, it's basically at best,
4 it's the same. At worst, it's actually lower. Uhm
5 and we obviously need to be much further along. So,
6 one question I had for you was, uhm, you know what
7 gets impacted? We all agree and I know Mayor Mamdani
8 agrees too on the importance of you know increasing
9 our parks budget to one percent or more. So, but
10 we're not there. What gets impacted the most? Uhm,
11 and I think it's - you know I think we should have an
12 honest conversation about what that means. Of course
13 you're going to do all that you can with all that you
14 have but I do think if we're all in agreement of
15 where we need to get. What are the tradeoffs that
16 are being made right now when we are not getting
17 there with each successful budget?

18 TRICIA SHIMAMURA: Sure, thank you. Thank you of
19 course Council Member, first and foremost for your
20 leadership and for your continued advocacy. Really
21 appreciate it and your partnership. You know I will
just say this being my first time around that the
Preliminary Budget is just that. It's a preliminary
component to this and I understand that there are

1 many kind of conversations that are happening.
2 Certainly, we are having them with the Administration
3 as well but we're grateful for the Council's kind of
4 continued advocacy and the Council understanding on a
5 very granular level what's at stake here and I think
6 that's really what your question is about to. Uhm,
7 and so, to respond with a level as detailed at a
8 granular level in response to that, you know when you
9 look at those one shots and I think our Deputy
10 Commissioner for Public Programs had mentioned it
11 before but the ranger - I mean I think it's a fact
12 that the amount of funding that's going to our Ranger
13 program is almost 50 percent of like the Ranger
14 program and it's a fact that the uh, as the Chair
15 mentioned, that the PEP Program, it has around 250
16 baseline PEP officers but uh the one short is 100
17 additional officers so a significant component to our
18 - to that kind of overall unit completely.

16 So, I think that it's you know, we can kind of
17 see at a level and same thing with forestry
18 management even. Maybe not to that high degree but
19 significant supplemental support. So, I think that
20 you can look at those and understand that overall
21 it's 270-ish positions of our 5,000 kind of

workforce. They are significant components, supplemental components of these kind of work units.

COUNCIL MEMBER KRISHNAN: May I - it sounds clear to me, I think we all know, these are all the core functions of the Department that obviously when you have more funding, we need to be, you can more you know address these - better address these core issues but also do it more equitably too. And I do think that you know and I hope to see improvement in the Executive Budget that brings us closer to it. Even though it's a process and it will take time to get there, we've got to start somewhere and not be sliding backwards and I'm glad to hear the conversations that you all are having with OMB and City Hall to get there to.

Uhm, my next question is uhm, you know what - where do things stand with the hiring freeze that we've had for a long time at the Parks Department? And if it was - if it's going to be lifted, what were the conversations to get it to that place to have it lifted?

TRICIA SHIMAMURA: Yeah, thank you for the question. So, just to give a little bit of background. Uhm, over the last several years, as I

1 understand it, the agency has been instructed as many
2 agencies have to uh be kind of to not be allowed to
3 replace one for one the vacancies of people who
4 naturally leave our agency. Be it through retirement
5 or finding another job. What have you and so, we do
6 have a number of kind of vacancies here in our agency
7 that we're very excited. The possibility of bringing
8 on additional folks and filling those vacancies. I
9 want to just say that this is a really direct result
10 of this Administration's kind of desire to see a
11 honest, transparent, and uhm, and functional budget
12 that allows agencies to do the essential work that
13 they're able to do. We're very excited and kind of -
14 because this news, it will both be kind of freeing up
15 and rightsizing of those vacancies but also will be
16 allowing us to hire from outside of the agency, which
17 is great. Really exciting news and so, those details
18 are still kind of getting finalized with OMB. We're
19 kind of in discussions with them right now around
20 what, how many vacancies will be released and kind of
21 those lines but we are very excited. It's really
welcomed news to us as you know. It's been difficult
and while we are always happy to see somebody from
rec going to operations or somebody from PEP going

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1 So, positions, roles, functions of units has not
2 dramatically changed but certainly, how the
3 portfolios of individuals have shifted. So, it's - I
4 think it is fair to kind of look closely at ourselves
5 and at what lines we are accounting for to make sure
6 that those are actually truly the vacancies that
7 actually need to be, that need to be filled. Uhm
8 versus, you know versus just looking at numbers and
9 saying that we absolutely are demanded these numbers.
10 You know we're trying to be honest and work - working
11 with the understanding that ultimately we all have a
12 role to play in getting a balanced, fair, transparent
13 budget.

14 You know we're looking at this and trying with
15 the understanding that it's been several years.
16 These roles, these positions have shifted, have
17 evolved a bit. Like we still are very excited to
18 fill these vacancies but it's fair to be honest and
19 look at our, look at the Division of Labor here to
20 make sure that with OMB, that you know everybody is
21 on the same page with the jobs that absolutely need
to get filled and there are no new kind of roles in
different responsibilities that need to get filled.

COUNCIL MEMBER KRISHNAN: And I would just say you know I hope that in those conversations with OMB that OMB is also aware that it doesn't turn into a zero sum game of freeze but taking away with the other.

Uhm, my final question is, you know, every year, we're looking at these one shots that we're arguing over and putting back in. I strongly believe that these one shots should be baselined because it's both peoples jobs and as I've always said, a parks budget is a workers budget. It's workers' jobs on the line. I've heard it from them numerous times. There's always uncertainty coming this time of year.

Uhm, is it your belief as well that they should be baselined positions and how have the conversations been with OMB and City Hall to help us move to a world where we're not every year trying to fill positions that are about to expire?

TRICIA SHIMAMURA: Yeah, thank you. You know I want to say that our - the relationship and conversations and dialogue between City Hall, OMB, and the agency has been very, very promising. I want to just say it's been very understanding, very supportive. I truly believe that this Administration

1 really sees the benefit of parks and sees the
2 importance of the work that our staff do every single
3 day be it in a rec center or a park space, or in our
4 natural areas or anywhere in between and green space
5 or anything else in between. You know I think that
6 my understanding is that uh, is that the kind of one
7 shot funding is the mechanism that Council has in
8 order to advocate and get funding in. So, there's
9 no- there's never a world where we can get rid of one
10 shots all together. In fact, I would welcome as many
11 of them as you're able to negotiate. I think it
12 would of course always be wonderful.

13 Uhm but I think you know ultimately, as I said
14 before, the baseline funding is a different beast and
15 different benefit altogether. There's a level of
16 certainty with baseline funding and you said it
17 yourself with workers, it's always about caring for
18 our staff and understanding kind of operationally how
19 they function. And so, certainly, I think that you
20 know we can talk about how helpful it's been to see
21 an increase of our baseline for PEP over the years.
Even just ten years ago, we were not seeing 250
baselined in our PEP and as that's grown, it's just

been very helpful operationally to have those back in consistency.

COUNCIL MEMBER KRISHNAN: And I just close by saying, I appreciate that. I know we all should stay in perspective and I think you know to your point, you're absolutely correct. That one shots over time keep adding up. In the past, four years ago, we were able to baseline a number of those positions. The new one shots were additional ones. I hope that as we move forward, we can keep up an approach like that, so we're baselining, adding more baselining, adding more. So, thank you Chair, appreciate it.

CHAIRPERSON HANKERSON: I want to acknowledge Deputy Leader Chris Banks who has joined us and I would like to turn it over to Finance Chair Linda Lee.

COUNCIL MEMBER LEE: Thank you so much Chair.

Uhm, just really quickly. Hi Commissioner.

TRICIA SHIMAMURA: Hi.

COUNCIL MEMBER LEE: I just wanted to reiterate and make sure that going off of the one shot questions, so for FY27, it's \$33.7 million lower. And you're saying in your testimony that that typically is - is that due to the one shots?

TRICIA SHIMAMURA: Yeah, almost largely. I think it's around, the one shots consists of maybe around \$22 or \$23 million of that \$33 million. The other \$10 million that's like, that's not accounted for is like some other grant funding and another -

MATT DRURY: Yeah the Council's Discretionary Funding Initiatives. That amounts to about \$6 million as well. But of the \$33 that we noted in terms of the Delta, from Adopted, about \$22 million of that is what we're referring to as sort of the one shot bundle of funding.

COUNCIL MEMBER LEE: And in your conversations so far, I'm glad to hear that they've been promising, so what are some of the uhm one shots from the inside that hopefully we'll get put back in.

TRICIA SHIMAMURA: You know unfortunately I'm not able to speak - I don't want to put the cart before the horse or whatever it is.

COUNCIL MEMBER LEE: Well, what is it that you would like to see-

TRICIA SHIMAMURA: I think that you know all of those six of the six buckets or the six one shot initiatives that are being discussed here, each of them are absolutely critical. Uhm, and we've spoken

1 a lot about them again but I'd say operationally, the
2 PEP one shot, the ranger one shot, those are often
3 times with one shots, maybe a little more difficult
4 in that we take - it requires us at least 16 weeks to
5 train, weeks more to recruit and train. So, in order
6 to get these folks into the field, it does take
7 awhile, so it's - you know it is nice to have our
8 baseline funding for those positions because we, just
9 there's a little bit more certainty. But I want to
10 also say that the amount of support that we get for
11 our forestry, like maintenance team, which also
12 heavily supplements the stump removal, the Green
13 Thumb, these are also very important positions in the
14 supplementary uh, help that this one shots provide is
15 absolutely crucial.

14 COUNCIL MEMBER LEE: Okay and in terms of
15 headcount, I noticed that the headcount is relatively
16 flat. There's only a negative 10 headcount uhm from
17 FY26 to FY27. Uhm, and does that mean though with
18 the headcount and I guess this is sort of
19 piggybacking off uhm, Council Member Krishnan's
20 question, is how is that going to impact services
21 with the decrease in the one shots potentially and

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1 And so, I'm just trying to understand and then
2 there are some areas that have increased, like the
3 motor vehicle equipment and maintenance repairs,
4 which I think the cost of that have gone up but I'm
5 just trying to figure out where that decrease is
6 coming from and are some of those contractual
7 services including not headcount officially but you
8 know, folks working on tree removals or something. I
9 just wanted to get a better sense of what that was.

10 TRICIA SHIMAMURA: Yeah, thank you so much for
11 the question. So, I'm going to look to David Cerron
12 on our team to talk a little bit through any uhm,
13 some of those other contracting pieces but let me
14 just say on the forestry piece, because that one is
15 more of what I'm familiar with.

16 We do look at - look to supplement our work
17 heavily with contracting work when it comes to like
18 our street tree pruning and planting plants and the
19 overall kind of approach to this contracting work is
20 to try to make sure that we are diversifying the
21 scope and kind of type of contracts that we're
 awarding as much as possible. That's in order to
 like kind of not exhaust or like put too much of a
 strain on one kind of like on one size and one

1 portion of the industry but like we're trying to
2 double down on MWBE contracts and smaller contracts.
3 So, we really are trying to diversify that kind of
4 portfolio as much as we can.

5 Uhm, do you want to speak a little bit more to
6 the general contracting piece and you may need to get
7 sworn in.

8 DAVID CERRON: Absolutely.

9 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you Chair. Please
10 raise your right hand if you're able. Do you affirm
11 to tell the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but
12 the truth in your testimony before this Committee and
13 to respond honestly to Council Member questions?

14 DAVID CERRON: Yes.

15 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you.

16 DAVID CERRON: So, the biggest change is probably
17 if you look at our Zoo contract, it is somewhat
18 underfunded as it is every year and you'll see
19 another \$10 to \$15 million coming for contracting at
20 the end of the year in surplus needs and then that
21 will bring us up. And of course, we also drop some
22 of our contracts due to vendors.

23 COUNCIL MEMBER LEE: Okay, so timing of it is
24 part of it.

DAVID CERRON: The timing is part of it.

COUNCIL MEMBER LEE: In the Fiscal Year.

DAVID CERRON: It changes during the year.

COUNCIL MEMBER LEE: Okay, so when usually does that get recognized? Is it during the -

DAVID CERRON: That will be at adoption actually. You'll see a budget increase.

COUNCIL MEMBER LEE: At adoption. Okay. So, not during Exec?

DAVID CERRON: No, not during Exec.

COUNCIL MEMBER LEE: Good.

DAVID CERRON: During exec, you know there's a lot of nuances here. It's unusual at this time.

COUNCIL MEMBER LEE: Okay, interesting. Uhm, thank you and then uhm, really just quickly for - I know that Parks Budget is lean. We would like to see more obviously but in terms of the chief savings, are there areas that you've identified in terms of savings or you know without obviously sacrificing on services and are there any alternate revenue sources from grants or miscellaneous revenue?

TRICIA SHIMAMURA: Yeah, thank you for the question. So, we did work very - we worked very closely with our Chief Savings Officer whose Yatin

Cheng, she's the Chief of Budget within our agency.

It was really great to work with her and really great to look closely. It was an opportunity frankly for me to learn a little bit more about our budget and about how - and our initiatives.

As I mentioned before, the kind of initial report on opportunities for savings and just overall efficiencies was due to OMB just on Friday, so we have submitted that report. I can confirm at this point that the kind of opportunities and just and just overall efficiencies have no impact on services provided. But it is just an initial kind of our initial thoughts on how we might be more efficient with this.

I, you know would love, would be happy to go into more detail uhm you know perhaps by our Exec budget but I would love to like kind of talk to OMB first and kind of dig through a little bit more of our initial thoughts and get their feedback to kind of work all this through.

I love your second part of your question, which is about revenue generations and I think that certainly, you know we - it is an opportunity for me to say that Parks does generate revenue. Not maybe

1 to the degree that other agencies do but we do have -
2 we do have concessions kind of team that works
3 through this and so, uhm, we are kind of constantly
4 talking about both the revenue that we bring in but
5 also highlighting like we very much like that we had
6 the freedom and flexibility to be creative with our
7 concessions, be creative with how we generate revenue
8 to really bring in vendors and businesses and ideas
9 that really kind of compliment what's going on in the
10 city and one example of this that you're going to see
11 right here downtown is we're really excited about
12 kind of unveiling a deliverista hub right here at
13 City Hall where you'll see kind of a battery swapping
14 library system over there, helping serve our
15 deliveristas with some modest bike repairs. That's
16 actually going to be a concession of ours that we're
17 really excited about and filling very soon and while
18 you also see things like your you know regular
19 sandwiches and soft drinks and things like that, it's
20 also really kind of fun to think through our kind of
21 revenue generating concessions pieces, how we might
be creative about other services that we can provide
New Yorkers.

COUNCIL MEMBER LEE: Yeah, no, I love the creativity. When is that happening?

TRICIA SHIMAMURA: In April.

COUNCIL MEMBER LEE: In April, okay great.

TRICIA SHIMAMURA: Yes, very, very soon.

COUNCIL MEMBER LEE: Awesome. And then my final question, sorry Chair, is around tree stump removal. Speaking of one shots, uhm, because I know that the Council put in a very modest budget of \$2 million but how many tree stump removals have you been able to do with that funding and is that something that uhm, because I got to say in terms of the timeline of when they happen, I think a lot of the residents going back to Council Member Schulman's question about the sidewalks and you know just wondering what the timeline is for requests for those tree stump removals to happen and when they actually happen.

TRICIA SHIMAMURA: Okay, thank you. So, I think the - thank you for the question. So, it does vary from year to year. We are also doing tree stump removals through our kind of Block Tree Planting program, our Neighborhood Tree Planting program but typically with that amount of funding, we're able to

remove somewhere between 4- 5,000 tree stumps per year.

COUNCIL MEMBER LEE: Okay great, thank you Chair.

CHAIRPERSON HANKERSON: Thank you. I did have one follow up question and then I'll turn it over to Council Member Brewer. So, you mentioned that some of the roles require 16 week training. Is that for PEP Officers and Rangers? So, how do you deal with retention if 3 months out of the 12 months that you know these roles are I guess essentially affected to the one shots come up again. How do you deal with retention? That has to be difficult.

TRICIA SHIMAMURA: Yeah, that's a great question. You know in general, retention for PEP has been like a big priority of ours and an ongoing -

CHAIRPERSON HANKERSON: 16 weeks, that's four months.

TRICIA SHIMAMURA: Four months.

CHAIRPERSON HANKERSON: Wow, okay.

TRICIA SHIMAMURA: It's a great question. In general I'd say retention for PEP has been an ongoing conversation within our agency for some time and let me just start out by saying that I'm so incredibly grateful for this incredibly talented workforce.

1 They have extremely difficult jobs. You know and
2 they are trained peace keepers. They are there to
3 educate but truly, oftentimes as I am sure anyone
4 would know around PEP, their jobs are to enforce
5 rules. To tell people to make sure that they're not
6 allowed to park in parkland. That they need to get
7 their dogs on a leash and out of the flowerbeds.
8 That they need to adhere to our rules, not throw
9 garbage on the ground. Really follow the rules that
10 we have in place and that is extremely tough. So, I
11 think that you know it has been difficult in terms of
12 retention. We saw at some point a loss of around 25
13 percent per year, which was very, very concerning. I
14 do want to give a huge shoutout to our leadership,
15 particularly our Deputy Commissioner Margaret Nelson,
16 our Assistant Commissioner Asha Harris, whom I'm sure
17 many people have met with here because she's so good
18 and such a wonderful advocate for her unit. But we
19 have been through kind of a dedicated campaign to
20 really remove this notion of PEP as a stepping stone
21 and really remind folks that this can be a true
career but this is - this doesn't have to be a
stepping stone to NYPD or Corrections or any other
kind of unit that you can have a very satisfying

1 career in PEP. That's been accomplished through uhm,
2 kind of a very proactive campaign and really kind of
3 robust recruitment. That's more than just kind of
4 sitting at job fairs and having anybody who kind of
5 comes by to fill out an application. We're really
6 trying to explain to folks the benefits of this job
7 and what they are signing on for at the very, very
8 beginning and we've seen that that retention rate has
9 increased. We now see a much lower attrition rate
10 around 15 percent in comparison to the last two years
11 and that's in large part thanks to the efforts of the
12 agency.

13 CHAIRPERSON HANKERSON: So, you mentioned that
14 many of them you know go to PD or Corrections. Have
15 you considered offering pay parity to those agencies
16 uh, with the PEP Officers?

17 TRICIA SHIMAMURA: It's a good question. Again,
18 I don't - I'm unable to speak to the kind of uh, uh,
19 pay that these other agencies are providing to their
20 staff but we're happy to look into this and get back
21 to you more, further. You know we've also been
though I will say, trying to break this idea and this
narrative of this is like the natural way or this is
the same thing or you are essentially NYPD for Parks.

1 Because that's not true. We really rely on a good
2 partnership with the NYPD to deal with serious crime
3 in the entirety of the city, not just in parks but
4 everywhere. Uh, what our PEP officers are doing is
5 really different. They are peace keepers. They are
6 there to really provide education first. They are
7 there really to protect our patrons, all of them.
8 Care holistically for everybody who comes into our
9 parks. Also protect the parks themselves. It's a
10 kind of different thing and so we're you know while
11 we're happy to look at those kind of pay scales and
12 certainly, I don't have the information in front of
13 me. I can't speak to other agencies.

14 I will say that we're also trying to break this
15 notion of this being like the same thing but just in
16 parks. We really want our officers to feel pride in
17 being parks enforcement patrol and letting that stand
18 on its own without feeling the need to compare to
19 Corrections or NYPD.

20 CHAIRPERSON HANKERSON: Thank you. Council
21 Member Gale Brewer.

COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Alright, thank you. I
just want to thank the staff for something. One is,
there's a lot of hate messages on benches and rocks.

1
2 Mostly antisemitism and to the credit of your staff,
3 they call PD. You know the process. They take the
4 photo and then parks renews it. But it happens
5 weekly, so I just want to thank the staff for that.
6 Okay, so I have a long list.

7 Number one, water fountains, 63 percent don't
8 work. So, how are you dealing with water fountains
9 that don't work across the city?

10 Number two, great to have new bathrooms but what
11 about the bathrooms in my parks that are probably
12 preserved for landmarking and need to have the kind
13 of \$13- to \$5 million retention and renovation.
14 That's number 1,2, 3- trees. I hate that program.
15 So, my question would be we have a bill that's going
16 to be introduced to have a parallel program.

17 So, do you have a list of all the vacant tree
18 pits, stumps? Is that on your map? I think your map
19 is just new trees.

20 So, that program, we can't wait 9 years. I got
21 people calling me everyday and so, I'd like to know
if you have some suggestions of what it would cost to
have a parallel program? You can do this
neighborhood thing, whatever the hell it is but I
want to see something in between. How often are

1 parks cleaned? We have the FIFA people coming, the
2 sailing people coming, the visitors hopefully on a
3 grand scale. They'll hopefully be in the parks and
4 my experience is Sunday night and Sunday night is a
5 bad situation. So, I want to know, are parks cleaned
6 7 days a week or is it 5 days a week? I think it's 5
7 days a week.

8 We know that may not come till next year but the
9 jail program didn't work great in terms of getting
10 rid of the snow in the school yard. So, I just want
11 to know how that's going to take place next year.

12 The news stands at West 72nd Street, I guess
13 they're just like the one here. We'd like to see one
14 go with something. I think the flower man is
15 supposed to come. I don't know what happened to the
16 flower man. And then the other one is vacant. So,
17 again, revenue and finally ones in the Hudson wants
18 to know what happened to their I guess electrical
19 issue and also, we want the stage which they don't
20 have this year. They need it back.

21 TRICIA SHIMAMURA: Okay great. Okay, I'm going
to try and get - I think I got you on most of these.
Okay, okay, uh, water fountains. None should be on
right now because it's so early.

COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: I know but they didn't work last year.

TRICIA SHIMAMURA: We're happy to look into this. I think that I saw the list particularly because I was a Manhattan BC, so I saw- I think the list was mostly reflective of water fountains that were in Central Park. We work very closely with our -

COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Riverside also.

TRICIA SHIMAMURA: Oh, in Riverside but we work very closely with our conservancy partners and happily be kind of proactively looking at this but nobody should have water fountains right now. Everybody should be having water fountains in just a couple weeks from now because even if it's warming up, it's not time.

We'll be following up there but we hear you and we're very, we're typically pretty much on it and our entire team in terms of plumbers will be doing this work. Thousands of water fountains will be being turned on in just a couple weeks time.

When it comes to renovations and PRB's, yes, very aware of definitely really high ticket ones particularly in your district and you know this but it's just worth repeating that when we talk about

1 PRB's, there is your standard 20 by 20 and then
2 there's something like a dinosaur playground in
3 Riverside which is just kind of beyond in terms of
4 landmarks, in terms of the staff space. In terms of
5 the fact that it's retaining wall and it's got stairs
6 associated with it. It's built into a wall. All of
7 these complications are extremely frustrating, very
8 important, very unique but also mean that just a
9 higher ticket price and a higher kind of overall
10 price tag. Not that it should be impossible but
11 certainly has - we've been kind of in regular
12 conversation with again, the Riverside Park
13 Conservancy and others around ways that we can try to
14 address this in a faster way.

15 Uhm, when it comes to trees, uh and tree pit map,
16 I don't believe that we have this but I do think that
17 this is why in part we - this is again, I know you
18 don't care for the 9 year program, but it is our way
19 of being - our timeline right now to be able to
20 assess every single sidewalk.

21 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: But we have hundreds of
vacant trees, hundreds. That's not going to work.

TRICIA SHIMAMURA: Yeah uhm-

COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: 9 years, that's not going to work.

TRICIA SHIMAMURA: Yeah, I definitely hear -

COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: We're going to do legislation to try to come up with something else, just so you know. I hope my colleagues sign on.

TRICIA SHIMAMURA: Great, uhm, but we're happy to get back in terms of any of the other data around your district and trees. Parks are cleaned 7 days a week. Parks are cleaned 7 days a week and parks are cleaned at a minimum, we have staff and particularly in your district, we have staff because your parks are often opened and closed. We have staff who are opening them, doing an -

COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: I'm talking about the big parks, not the community parks, the big parks. Riverside is cleaned 7 days a week?

TRICIA SHIMAMURA: Yes, and I'll look - yes, yes. So, it's clean and on top of that, we have our second shift staff which are also in both Riverside Park and others that provide an additional layer of cleaning on top of park circling 7 days a week.

We do - JOP is built into our snow, winter weather -

COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: But they were not cleaned this year. That's a fact.

TRICIA SHIMAMURA: It's definitely secondary to perimeter sidewalks. So, first and foremost, we hit those perimeter sidewalks. First and foremost, we hit those major transit hubs and then we go to JOP's. Happy to look into this closer but that is definitely our kind of prioritization.

COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: The kids were not able to play in the yards.

TRICIA SHIMAMURA: Okay and then in terms of the revenue for 72nd Street, we're happy to look into this further but I think that that concession spot in general has been discussed and we're actively -

COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: They're vacant right now? You would think you would want some revenue for them.

TRICIA SHIMAMURA: Absolutely.

COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Okay and my drums on the Hudson. What about their stage?

TRICIA SHIMAMURA: So, I'm happy to look into this more.

COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: They've always had one. They didn't get it this year.

1 TRICIA SHIMAMURA: Yeah, this is a good question
2 for just - we do have limited access to Wagner Wagons
3 and this policy has been adjusted in the last year or
4 so. So, typically, uh because this is and just be
5 very clear, we start to look at how groups in
6 Manhattan were having access to Wagner Wagons versus
7 groups in Queens, versus groups in Brooklyn and
8 realizing that the rules were not the same based on
9 the borough, which is not great.

10 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: This group has had it for
11 years. It brings in Native Americans from all over
12 the country. So, I hope that it can be reconsidered
13 for this particular one.

14 TRICIA SHIMAMURA: We definitely have a policy in
15 place. I'm not sure if they're in adherence with
16 that but we're happy to talk to them. We're also
17 happy to direct them towards other alternatives if
18 for whatever reason it doesn't comply but we know
19 Drums on the Hudson really well. We've worked with
20 them, so.

21 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: They're calling me
 everyday.

 TRICIA SHIMAMURA: Okay, well we can certainly
 follow up with them.

COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Thank you.

TRICIA SHIMAMURA: Yeah.

CHAIRPERSON HANKERSON: Alright, we've been joined by Majority Whip Kamillah Hanks who does have one question and then we're going to Brooklyn to Council Member Sandy Nurse.

COUNCIL MEMBER HANKS: Thank you Chair because now we're going to Staten Island.

CHAIRPERSON HANKERSON: The borough of parks.

COUNCIL MEMBER HANKS: The borough of parks. Thank you so much and it's good to see you Commissioner. One quick question, so parks is responsible for planting trees in front of uhm, particularly in Staten Island in front of homeowners houses, residents. Uhm, often homeowners wake up and they see a tree planted and they're like wow this is great and then, the tree grows, concrete is broken and then possibly it is DOT's issue but then, so my question is, how are we going to work with residents of the City of New York when of course, you know trees are life? We love them but how are we going to mitigate some of the sidewalk damage and is there an avenue for residents to say hey, I don't want a tree. Thank you.

1 TRICIA SHIMAMURA: Thank you for the question and
2 it's good to see you. You know to be very honest
3 with you, this if often times where we can see some
4 conflicts arise because we see of course, it's our
5 responsibility to both increase the amount of tree
6 canopy but also, ensure that every single
7 neighborhood benefits from the - from what trees can
8 provide, particularly shade, particularly resiliency,
9 water kind of retention from storms.

10 COUNCIL MEMBER HANKS: And one more thing to add,
11 so Staten Island homes love their solar panels
12 because that is one way we can be environmentally you
13 know conscious and those trees can harm them from
14 doing that, so we just add that in.

15 TRICIA SHIMAMURA: Yeah, and you know as in any
16 part of New York City, it's pretty common to see
17 infrastructure butting up against other
18 infrastructure, be it solar panels or sewage
19 underneath the ground or electrical or things, or
20 streets and sidewalks. So, it is - you know I kind
21 of believe in just embracing the conflict there and
 understanding that all of these pieces of
 infrastructure have a role. They are all incredibly
 important, inclusive of trees and we have to find the

best way to kind of coexist with all of this infrastructure.

So, uhm, you know one thing is I would really love to make sure that your constituents know and can anticipate when a tree is getting planted. We should have no surprises to the extent possible. I don't want them to wake up one day and just realize that a tree is there. I would like them to know beforehand. We want to make sure that you know beforehand, that the Community Board knows beforehand that they can be excited about additional infrastructure coming in.

So, one is just trying to manage everybody's expectations and have them understand what we're trying to do and what we're trying to accomplish. The second is that, when those trees eventually grow and we hope that they do, uh and we are - we do have a mandate and are trying to plant in every plantable street in New York City. So, that does mean that you know we are looking to do it regardless of maybe an individual homeowner's desire not to see one. Our kind of mandate and goal here is to plant everywhere where we can. Ultimately with the idea of cooling down our entire city of like trying to take away some of that extra water, of trying to serve everybody as

the city as a whole. But I want to do so as considerate uh, like with the community in mind and being as considerate and as communicative as possible.

Uhm, and when eventually you see trees uprooting sidewalks or trees coming into conflict with other pieces of infrastructure. Then you know we are also there to help provide either support or guidance in the next steps that can be taken. So, there are some programs for - there are some programs for single family homes where parks can take on that responsibility to making those repairs but we're also happy if that's not the case. If there's a different - if there is a different situation where they're not eligible for that program, then we can provide additional guidance on the repairs that need to be - that need to happen as well.

MATT DRURY: And if I can just add, since you mentioned mitigation, that our forestry division has actually taken a close look at its planting strategies over the years. And as best practices have evolved, so wider tree pits, choosing species that will hopefully lead to less conflicts over time. Like our teams are constantly updating their

strategies and we've seen a lot of progress on that front.

COUNCIL MEMBER HANKS: Yeah, we don't want to plant trees that have roots that are so evasive and so you know we can plant - we can have a tree there but it doesn't have to be a maple tree that - whose roots is uprooting.

MATT DRURY: We want to maximize the benefits in terms of its canopy while minimizing the conflict, sure.

COUNCIL MEMBER HANKS: Thank you so much Chair.

CHAIRPERSON HANKERSON: Uh, we're going to Brooklyn, Council Member Sandy Nurse.

COUNCIL MEMBER NURSE: Am I the first Brooklyn? Maybe?

CHAIRPERSON HANKERSON: No.

COUNCIL MEMBER NURSE: Okay, fine. I just have one question. Uhm, we've always and because I spoke with you this weekend and I asked questions last, uh hearing and everyone has asked a ton of questions. I don't have anything else except for my district. Uhm, we've benefitted from a second shift at Highland Park the last two summers. Can you confirm if that's still on for this summer and I believe for Cityline

Park also we might have had additional support. So, I just want to get confirmation of those two.

TRICIA SHIMAMURA: Yeah, so, looking at our Acting First Deputy Commissioner who is uh, you're welcome to come up and answer but it sounds like uh, it sounds like the answer is yes. But before he gives you that confirmation and hopefully he can, what I just want to say is that you know with second shift, we're very excited to have enough staff to fill our 200 different parks, I believe. And, and so, we really do so using a sort of data driven approach. We want to make sure that the staff are put in parks where we see the most activity so that we can kind of address the most pressing needs but with that being said, I'm pretty sure that these two sites are included in that. Go ahead Commissioner.

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

MARIT LARSON: I do. Council Member, thank you for your question. Bottom line, yes. Uhm, both sites are - all of our second shift staff are

baselined versus one shot, which is a lot of conversation here.

COUNCIL MEMBER NURSE: Right.

MARIT LARSON: They're baselined and they're permanently located. So, they are year round. So, in both of the parks, you mentioned Cityline and Highland, they are not just seasonally, they are there year round.

COUNCIL MEMBER NURSE: Okay, that's great. Uhm, and then I do have one more question. Uhm, I don't know - are you familiar with what's happening at the Bushwick City Farm?

TRICIA SHIMAMURA: No, I'm sorry, please let me hear more.

COUNCIL MEMBER NURSE: And I'm just raising it here because there are some folks here who probably will testify about it later on. But the Bushwick City Farm just south of Broadway has been around for a very, very long time. Uhm, huge community asset, lots of food growing. They were also incredibly supportive during the influx of asylum seekers and supporting a lot of the folks in a temporary housing situation there. I believe recently DOB has come in and maybe issued some threats about evictions because

1 of like a shed or something that's been there for
2 years. So, really hoping that you all can have
3 conversations with DOB to resolve this so we can keep
4 this so we can keep this really beautiful community
5 asset here.

6 TRICIA SHIMAMURA: Sure so let me just say and of
7 course, I just said that I'm not too familiar with
8 this but we're happy to look into this more. In
9 general, our Green Thumb Gardens should have a very
10 close relationship with Parks staff. I love our
11 staff that does the green thumb work. Green thumbs
12 are very important. They provided a different way
13 for people to connect with the soil, the land, to
14 advocate for their communities and care for their
15 communities, as you just said to reflect the kind of
16 diversity that's in their community. So, it's a very
17 important kind of portfolio piece and we're happy to
18 look into this a little bit more and certainly, at
19 the very least, I want to make sure that the folks
20 who are a part of this Green Thumb Garden don't feel
21 that they have to wait for a public hearing or
something like that to get our attention on this.
They should be able to kind of work with us directly
all the time, so that they know that we're -

COUNCIL MEMBER NURSE: And to be clear and sorry, I don't have all the information in front of me but I'm not sure if it's specifically Green Thumb Garden or not but it is a garden space and it has been there for a very long time.

Even if it's not, uhm, it's a well established part community garden and I'm seeing the head shaking so I'm like, I get what you're about to say.

TRICIA SHIMAMURA: Yeah.

COUNCIL MEMBER NURSE: But even when we have uhm gardens that have emerged and have really taken root, you know I think parks has a role to play in helping to support those places stay established regardless of whatever the status is. Because especially when it's been there for a very long time and so integrated into the community.

MATT DRURY: Yeah, I'll just add, like to the notion, my understanding is that it's right, so i don't believe it's on like Parks jurisdiction but having said that, our Green Thumb team has hundred- there are hundreds of gardens that fit under the rubric that aren't on our -but they are either registered with us or we provide services or guidance, and so, I'm sure happy to look into this

and help wherever we can in terms of - you know because obviously it's a key community asset.

COUNCIL MEMBER NURSE: Okay, thank you very much. Thank you Chair.

CHAIRPERSON HANKERSON: No problem and I stand corrected. You were the first from Brooklyn to ask questions. Thank you from Brooklyn.

We're going back to the Borough of Parks Council Member Morano.

COUNCIL MEMBER MORANO: Thank you Chair. As the Chair pointed out, I do represent the Borough of Parks proudly. The issue of tree restitution is something that gets talked about a great deal when it comes to housing but a lot of folks aren't aware of the Parks Departments role when it comes to tree restitution, including the fact that they need to pay the city when there's park construction, either for park or addition of park.

I'm wondering if you could mention - a lot of people think that maybe we should just exempt the Parks Department from paying tree restitution but I'm wondering if you can talk about that concept generally and how much the Parks Department pays specifically when it comes to tree restitution.

TRICIA SHIMAMURA: Sure, thank you so much for the question and I'll look to our Assistant Commissioner for Forestry to come up and just give a little bit more details but let me just - so when we talk about tree restitution, we talk about like what happens when we have to remove - when anybody has to remove a living, healthy tree. And this happens sometimes for housing purposes. They want to build. This happens often times we may say you have to put in a new tree. If you're building more than I think 25 feet of space on like a city block, then it's expected to put in a new tree but also it can happen with our own projects. You'll see many projects being designed that will show you a new design. We try to avoid it at all costs because yes, even the Parks Department is beholden towards kind of that tree restitution piece. We, you know, if you are the Borough of Parks, we're the agency of trees.

COUNCIL MEMBER MORANO: Department of trees, sure.

TRICIA SHIMAMURA: And so, it's uhm, who else but the parks department would be there to try to defend and protect our existing tree canopy. Uh, to the fullest extent possible and there are some pretty

1 hefty fees and kind of costs associated with taking
2 out a healthy tree because as you heard from Council
3 Member, our last hearing on the subject, when it
4 comes to canopy, even though we're very happy about
5 planting new trees, it's those existing trees, the
6 maintenance of those existing trees. The maintenance
7 of the existing canopy. That's really what's going
8 to get us that shade. That's really what's going to
9 get us that canopy in our lifetimes is really that
10 existing kind of trees that we have in place.

11 So, I'll let our Assistant Commissioner Ben
12 Osborne talk a little bit more specifically about the
13 cost associated with it but it is a kind of portion
14 of our responsibilities that we take very seriously.

15 COUNCIL MEMBER MORANO: Mmm, mmm.

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

21 BEN OSBORNE: Yes, I do.

 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you.

 BEN OSBORNE: Good afternoon Council Member.
Thank you for the question. So, uhm, yes, as the

1 Commissioner said, you know Parks mandate includes
2 the preservation of existing trees wherever possible,
3 wherever appropriate and that is consistent with the
4 legislation that the Council passed in 2023 for the
5 city to increase the canopy cover across all
6 jurisdictions to 30 percent and you know as the
7 Commissioner mentioned, the vast majority of the
8 canopy increase that we have seen in recent years, 90
9 percent of that is from the growth of existing trees.
10 So, preserving existing trees wherever appropriate,
really is essential to meeting the city's goals.

11 Now, of course, we know that there are times when
12 trees need to be removed. Uhm, so and our policies
13 do allow for us to permit the removal of healthy
14 trees when there is an unavoidable conflict with the
15 construction project. Whether that's a residential
16 project. Whether that's park construction or another
agency, the same laws and rules apply to any entity
who may need to remove a tree.

17 Uhm, so just a little bit on terminology, when
18 we're talking about the removal of permitted trees,
19 uhm, we kind of speak about that as far as tree
20 replacement. Uhm, restitution tends to be used to
21

1 speak about fines for illegal activities, damage, or
2 destruction of trees.

3 The council did pass legislation in 2021 limiting
4 the value of permitted tree removals in residential
5 districts R1 through R3. So, for the development of
6 those smaller homes or any other work that takes
7 place in those lower density residential districts.
8 Uh, the replacement of those permanent removals is
9 capped at twice the caliber value of trees. So, I'm
10 happy to do a deeper dive at some point about how we
11 do those calculations but it's significantly lower in
12 those lower density residential districts.

13 COUNCIL MEMBER MORANO: Do you know how much
14 Parks pays?

15 BEN OSBORNE: Well, parks in terms of the parks
16 capital project, when we're removing trees on our own
17 property?

18 COUNCIL MEMBER MORANO: Right.

19 BEN OSBORNE: I don't have those dollar values in
20 front of me but just as far as the policy, uhm, so
21 the objective of the law and our own rules and
internal policies is to replace the trees. It's not
necessarily the dollars. So, if we're removing trees
in a park, we first start by planting trees right

back in that park. Any balance that cannot be met within that park would be moved typically from the project of that capital - the budget of that capital project to our tree planting project budget and we can get you those dollars.

COUNCIL MEMBER MORANO: That would be great. Thank you. I'm going to take advantage that the Chair stepped out for a second and ask you a couple more quick questions.

Uh, Staten Island- Commissioner, as you know, Staten Island has just one Deputy Chief of Operations, while every other borough has two. Given that your own testimony emphasizes equity and fairness, how do you justify - not you but how does one justify that imbalance and do you think it would be wise to bring Staten Island to parity with the rest of the city?

TRICIA SHIMAMURA: Yeah, thank you so much for the question. So, uh, and well done on the knowledge of the staffing with Staten Island. Very impressive. Uhm, so you know what I would say is that you know we are looking at it's not just looking at every single borough to just make sure that they had the exact amount but we really are looking at - we take a data

1 driven approach. We look at our PIP ratings, our
2 Parks Inspection report ratings to make sure that -
3 to see where we stand. To see where we're hurting in
4 terms of maintenance. I spoke to the Council Member
5 uh from Brooklyn just a couple weeks ago about
6 wanting to make sure that for her constituents that
7 live in Brooklyn, they should not have a vastly
8 different experience at their parks and the
9 cleanliness of their parks in Brooklyn than they do
in Queens.

10 For Staten Island, Staten Island has a really
11 good picture right now of overall incredible PIP
12 ratings. I can tell you when I was the Manhattan
13 Borough Commissioner, I used to hate going behind
14 Staten Island in terms of our reports because there
15 would always be a dip compared to what's happening in
16 Staten Island but you're also right, there are some
17 pieces to the maintenance and operations plan that we
18 are keenly aware of when it comes to making sure that
19 the team in Staten Island has what they need in order
20 to again carry out their responsibilities. We're
21 kind of in constant communication particularly with
this Administration and all our colleagues at OMB to
try to make sure that we're continuously advocating

1 for what Staten Island needs to continue to have high
2 ratings, high performing parks. Then also make sure
3 that the rest of the city is also getting the support
4 that they need. But we do use a data driven
5 approach. Staten Island's data is very strong. It
6 does currently - they do currently have one Deputy
7 Chief of Operations. You know we're always happy to
8 kind of look at this closer to make sure that - that
9 staffing does not impact kind of their overall -

10 COUNCIL MEMBER MORANO: So, the engine though,
11 Staten Island has the most park land per capita in
12 the city, right? And so, and we're proud of that,
13 that's why we're the Borough of the Parks. In
14 general, do you think we're receiving staffing and
15 maintenance resources proportional to that
16 responsibility or are we being asked to do more with
17 less?

18 TRICIA SHIMAMURA: Yeah, it's not, thank you for
19 the question and I appreciate the advocacy. It's
20 really not just the amount of park space per capita.
21 We really look at overall usage. We look at overall
kind of popular - like where we see most New Yorkers
gathering. We still get our PIP ratings, which again
are like our secret shopper program that is

1 completely neutral to see where are we performing
2 highest? Where are the most folks going? What -
3 like overall looking at that picture. Of course, how
4 much ground are our staff covering and how much are
5 we responsible for? Where are we seeing additional
6 support? So, and so, with - with all of that bigger
7 picture in mind, we make our staffing decisions.
8 Ultimately, I think that given Staten Island's
9 consistently high ratings, we're happy with that but
10 we also, trust me when I tell you that and I just
11 came from Fresh Kills just yesterday. I was spending
12 the day out there with my kids. I was just at South
13 Beach, just two weekends prior to there, walking
14 along the boardwalk, looking at the boardwalk there
15 to think about what can be done in the future. It is
16 - I certainly don't want anybody in Staten Island to
17 think that they are secondary to any other portion of
18 this portfolio that is parks. They are a very
19 important borough to me. The park land over there is
20 incredibly important to make sure that we upkeep to
21 the highest degree possible.

COUNCIL MEMBER MORANO: Thank you and the next
time you're on Staten Island, I hope you'll let me
know so I can show you some of my favorite parts.

TRICIA SHIMAMURA: You got to tell me some food places to go, I was looking around.

COUNCIL MEMBER MORANO: You just let me know the next time you are there and you will not be disappointed.

TRICIA SHIMAMURA: Okay.

COUNCIL MEMBER MORANO: Thank you Commissioner.

TRICIA SHIMAMURA: Yeah.

CHAIRPERSON HANKERSON: Alright, uhm, I know I stepped out for a second. I'm going to go back to Brooklyn, yes. Uh, Council Member Narcisse and Deputy Leader Banks. Uhm, for the sake of - we can give them an additional two minutes, each to their time clocks, so 7 minutes each.

COUNCIL MEMBER NARCISSE: Thank you Chair but Staten Island took 20 minutes, so I'm going to take 30 because we're the best part of the City of New York.

Uhm, Commissioner, again, congratulations. I appreciate you so much. I have to go to the best part of New York City but I have to stay here because there's Booklyn in the house, so we have to ask the question because I have the pleasure to represent one part of the New York City that have a lot of parks.

1 And thank you to all your leadership because I love
2 parks. Uhm, I don't know if you know, we fought very
3 hard to get that \$1 billion but we did not but God
4 knows we probably will get - it's probably before we
5 leave here.

6 Uhm, so, thank you for all the work you're doing.
7 I'm looking at uhm, the lifeguards. I wish I could
8 have some in my district. I'm helping to hire but I
9 don't have no place to give them. We don't have no
10 swimming pool, except the beach, so I hope we're
11 looking at to how we can get swimming pool equity
12 around New York City but the prior speaker worked
13 very hard for that and congratulations Shirley
14 Chisholm. I know my colleague Farah Louis, worked
15 very hard to get that and yes, go like this for her.
16 She worked very hard to get it and I'm looking
17 forward to have one before I go even. I will not cut
18 the ribbon, but I would like to see it happening.

19 Marine Park Playground, I know one of my
20 colleagues that's talking about it. Six years in the
21 making for the playground. The families are getting
to me every single day. Uhm, I hope we can do
something about it. So, for me, what the delay is so
bad. 6 years in the making, fully funded. That's

1 not acceptable and it's a playground for the
2 children. That became a safety issue. So, I'm going
3 to leave it to them. So, we have a few - because I
4 have some of my colleagues in the house that really
5 help me, NYC H2O, thank you and all the organizations
6 that are doing amazing things.

7 To follow up with the Chair question about Park
8 Department salaries. The average salary for a New
9 York City Parks gardener is \$55,000. The gardener at
10 Tompkins Square Park hasn't been filled in 2 years.
How many gardener positions need to be filled?

11 TRICIA SHIMAMURA: Thank you so much for your
12 questions and for your partnership and advocacy. It
13 was really good to see you at Shirley Chisholm, a
14 couple times I think and uh I also look forward to
15 talking to you about certainly about additional
16 funding for either pools or just also just access to
17 the water for your constituents. It is incredibly
18 important. We know that what parks is doing is
19 teaching lifesaving skills that completely change the
20 game, change outcomes for constituents and it is very
21 important work. So, I would love to continue to
partner with you on thinking through what that looks
like.

When it comes to Marine Park, I want to tell you that when I was in Fresh Kills yesterday but also took my kids to Marine Park. They loved it so much. We wanted to see for ourselves the playground project and I wanted to take a walk around there. So, I definitely hear you, it is far time to see this capital project move forward. We're happy to give you specific updates as to where we are but you know I'll just tell you often times, uhm and I admittedly don't know for certain if this is the case here but it's worth mentioning. When we look at - because Marine Park is so big and the scope of these projects does have a tendency to grow. It's good that it grows. Often times it's good to make sure that if we're going to do construction in your park that we we get to know once, we do it and then we get out of there because ultimately, it does take too long to see these projects go forward and we want your constituents to really feel a comprehensive difference in these spaces and then to continue to go on and service other parks throughout the area.

The kind of increase and scope, the increase of design. Often times what we see when it comes to stormwater retention and things like that, all very

1 important parts but have - we've seen kind of
2 expanded the timeline for these projects and I take
3 no pleasure in telling you and saying yes, it's
4 completely acceptable to have a 6 year project.
5 Certainly, I want your constituents to see faster
6 results than that.

7 What I'll tell you is that we are seriously
8 looking into ways that we can shorten this timeline.
9 We are happy to give you specific updates here but
10 looking to partner with our other agencies to try to
11 speed up these internal agency reviews. We want your
12 constituents to understand that these projects are
13 moving ahead. And so, any ways that we can try to
14 shave down what is already too long of a process.
15 Just know that we are deeply committed to looking at
16 and I know I've only been here for about 6 weeks time
17 but I do commit to you to coming back to you with any
18 sort of ways that we can find to try to shorten that
19 up while consistently kind of delivering in kind of
20 long term good projects that are going to serve your
21 community for decades to come.

And then when it comes to - I'm sorry you said
and then gardeners.

COUNCIL MEMBER NARCISSE: Yeah.

1 TRICIA SHIMAMURA: You know, happy to look to my
2 team to kind of talk through exactly the vacancies
3 here but we have had a little bit of a you know we've
4 noticed that uh the gardener, our gardener lines were
5 kind of difficult to fill just with the requirements
6 needed for getting gardeners.

7 And so, this was one specific title that we
8 actually try to now create a gardener training
9 program on to help build a little bit of a pipeline
10 to get folks more interested into coming into these
11 roles. Similar to what you may have heard around
12 climbers and pruners, another kind of forestry role,
13 was also another kind of piece where we try to build
14 out a little bit of a pipeline program. We're really
15 excited about, it's early, uhm, I think just less
16 than two years old but we're very excited about the
17 kind of results that we have from that.

18 So, we are I think very excited to see a new wave
19 of gardeners coming into our ranks. It's very
20 promising. We're very eager to see that happen and
21 we'll continue to be creative around ways that we can
kind of increase this workforce because the
requirements are pretty high. You can't
unfortunately - I thought actually naively enough

1 before I came to the agency that you - it would be
2 something where if you had enough experience doing
3 gardening in your backyard or if you were a little
4 bit of a green thumb person, you could do it but we
5 actually have pretty high standards when it comes to
6 actually being hired for this role and you need to
7 have kind of a lot of work experience out there.
8 That's been kind of the reason why it's been hard to
9 kind of get folks into this field.

10 But I'm really, I'm personally very encouraged by
11 this kind of new pipeline program that we have coming
12 out and we're seeing some promising results. So,
13 we're happy to talk about that, more to come and I
14 really thank you for your attention to it because the
15 more we can get New Yorkers and other folks to think
16 through like what a horticulture career could look
17 like. It helps me. It helps me attract more people
18 to forestry. It helps me attract more people to
19 gardening programs and other kind of resiliency and
20 natural areas.

21 COUNCIL MEMBER NARCISSE: I appreciate you. But
we have to because my time is coming up. We need
equity around it because compensation attract people.

When you give them, then you can retain them and people will come more.

Given the shortage of resources for natural areas, what concrete steps will Parks take to establish a reliable and sound protocol for entering into legal relationship with governmental parks steward? How will parks ensure an accessible, transparent and actionable pathway for NGOs to have formal status in fulfilling essential services in parks stewards world.

TRICIA SHIMAMURA: Yeah, thank you so much for the question. So, we are only able to do this work frankly with uh, with the help of not only the team that we have at parks and I'm very proud of but also, a kind of robust group of partnerships. Many of the folks who are in this room or who are listening in from home to this hearing, and our park partnerships come in all different types. They come in volunteer groups who are three people strong, who show up every Saturday to weed. Uh, to robust kind of conservancies and friends groups and alliances that have much more of a formal role.

We are in constant communication right now about ways to make sure that we are supportive and open

1
2 partners with them, be that through creating maybe
3 some sort of MOU that could better encompass them,
4 providing some more best practices. Kind of even for
5 being just the convener to allow for more of these
6 kind of dialogues to happen from across different
7 groups and different boroughs. Kind of all - all
8 options are on the table but we certainly hear the
9 desire from our park partners for more, easier ways
10 to kind of fast track and streamline formal
11 relationships and the answer is that parks is
12 definitely working on kind of talking through what
13 this could look like.

14 COUNCIL MEMBER NARCISSE: I appreciate you
15 because I have great colleagues and partners and
16 collaborators that help me in my parks in my
17 district.

18 There's something that I'm going to ask with the
19 last question. The waste in the parks. I know it's
20 a very minute thing for some but for my community,
21 it's persistent on a ver- everyday there's complaints
that are coming through about folks are bringing
their dogs and they're not cleaning up after their
dogs in the park.

Uhm, now I want to know what are you doing? What parks is doing to help us out, especially in our parks? If they're getting summonses? That's not a rule that I would like to go but what are we doing to educate folks and let them know, signage, something that have to be done because you don't want to lay down in a park, thinking you're bringing your kids and that's what we're getting in the park. And all over too, this is not only in the parks, all over. Now we have to reeducate our folks. So, we have to say if you have a dog, you have to clean after yourself.

TRICIA SHIMAMURA: You're absolutely right and frankly we again rate ourselves through our Parks Inspection program on the problems of dog waste as minute as they may be, we -our kind of internal rating system holds ourselves accountable to a very, very like kind of granular level. We rate ourselves on whether or not there is soap in bathroom dispensers, whether or not there is toilet paper, whether or not there is dog waste, graffiti, uh the grass is cut, there's broken steps. Any of those kind of features all if the kind of light pole is open. Uh and leading to the electric wires inside.

1 We get dinged for that. So, it's not minute. It
2 does impact people's experience. It does talk to the
3 level of care and investment in these parks and it is
4 something that we take very seriously. We can do
5 additional signage, we can talk through with you. We
6 can do some addition - we can think through, maybe
7 the area needs a dog park somewhere. We should think
8 about that. Maybe we should be flagging for our PEP
9 Officers who are education first, so they wouldn't be
10 doing a summons first but they would be there to try
to educate, warnings first, warning people.

11 So, let us follow up with you offline because
12 particularly if you have a given park or a given,
13 especially as the weather gets warming, we know it
14 gets more prevalent but it is an important aspect of
your park experience and we take it seriously.

15 COUNCIL MEMBER NARCISSE: My Chair is ready and I
16 got to go too but the dog park is so expensive. I
17 don't know, I'm going to try but uhm, the old
18 bathroom, the antique, the one that we can probably
19 put in auction, we need to look into them too. Thank
you.

20 TRICIA SHIMAMURA: Thank you.

21 COUNCIL MEMBER NARCISSE: Thank you Chair.

CHAIRPERSON HANKERSON: Uh, I'm going to keep it in Brooklyn with the Deputy Leader and then we're going to jump to Council Member -

COUNCIL MEMBER BANKS: Thank you, thank you Chair and thank you to my amazing partner Council Member Nurse. Particularly, Brownsville Recreation Center, I spoke to you last time about it on my way out of the room at the last hearing. I want to know the project status, the timeline. We're constantly getting calls from our seniors and our young folks and just everyone in the community, you know the BRC is a staple in Brownsville and East New York. Uh, we want to know uh, you know we know \$160 million was allocated to this particular center from the last Administration and with the Council. Can you provide an update, the kind of status of the project, whether there's- it's been completed and when the groundbreaking is expected.

And then also, I'll move onto my next question as well and you can answer. Capital delays and budget execution, large capital projects often face delays due to procurement, design and interagency coordination. Can you speak to uh, if this project has any challenges that it is currently facing? And

whether the FY 2027 uh Preliminary Capital plan includes a necessary funding and timeline to ensure that this project moves forward without further delay?

TRICIA SHIMAMURA: Sure, thank you so much Council Member for the question and for your continued advocacy for our recreation centers.

COUNCIL MEMBER BANKS: We need it.

TRICIA SHIMAMURA: We do have \$160 million that's allocated for this project. Right now, the project is still with our colleagues at DDC and frankly the amount of damage that's happening, that's happened at Brownsville, the amount of the scope that we're looking at covering, is still something that we're trying to reconcile with. Which is why I believe you haven't seen a design yet for the project-

COUNCIL MEMBER BANKS: Is there a timeframe? Can you give us some sense, an idea when we're going to see some progress because the residents constantly call and you got seniors calling your office and they're petitioning, you know this is a commitment that was made to them and uhm, they are in limbo now because if you do know the way - the situation at the center is in limbo and they can't utilize the

1 building and they're operating you know, half of it
2 is cut off from them. And even the young folks, and
3 we know in Brownsville in East New York, when we have
4 activities, these centers are lifesaving for our
5 community. So, we need- we need a lifeline and we
6 need to move forward with this.

7 TRICIA SHIMAMURA: Yeah.

8 MATT DRURY: Yeah, we can reach out to our
9 partners at DDC. We're going to be managing this
10 project to get a tighter timeline for you. I will
11 point out that the good news is that this is going to
12 be using the design build approach, which I have
13 heard Shirley Chisholm helped accelerate things. So,
14 what would be happening is that the design and
15 construction services are going to be sort of
16 retained at once and therefore- so there is a little
17 bit more work that's done on the front end in terms
18 of what they call front end planning to make sure
19 those bids go out appropriately but you see some real
20 savings. So, we hear you loud and clear that it's
21 obviously a you know a lifeline to all the local
residents there. A beloved, very important facility
and nobody wants to bring it back online more than
us.

COUNCIL MEMBER BANKS: Alright so, we're hoping we'll see some progress being made on that and I'm going to continue to bring it up whenever I can.

Now, going back, I know the last hearing we had, it was on the tree pruning, the tree services, tree pruning services, uh, when it comes to homeowner input on tree planting in the Council, in my district, do homeowners currently have any formal mechanism to provide input or opt out regarding the tree placement adjacent to their property?

TRICIA SHIMAMURA: Yeah, I appreciate the question and I mentioned a question that was answered earlier, unfortunately, no, there's no opt out kind of policy or opportunity with this program. We have a mandate really to look at every single plantable area in New York City and to put in trees -

COUNCIL MEMBER BANKS: We don't want to engage the community at all?

TRICIA SHIMAMURA: We definitely, you know that's the other piece that we - I don't want your constituents to feel that this is a prize to them but this is essential, absolutely critical infrastructure. The amount - what happens here with

our trees, not only retains, like helps retain water but also cools down -

COUNCIL MEMBER BANKS: We get that. We get the benefits with trees but there needs to be some level of input from local residents as to where trees are being placed. It's about the placement and we're just imposing on a community or residents. That's not fair to them.

TRICIA SHIMAMURA: Unfortunately though it's not actually a, you know just like a sewage line or an electrical line would be placed in. The decisions around where we place is not based on - on - it's not a surface kind of where people would like to see them, it's where we actually can. So, I definitely hear you. I serve on my own community board, I don't like any surprises at all. I want to make sure that your constituents - anticipate -

COUNCIL MEMBER BANKS: Well notification, notification and I think that will go a long way when helping uh you know ease this - you know the surprise for constituents.

TRICIA SHIMAMURA: So typically, we notify them, and I'm sorry, just because I know you have a limited time but typically your office is notified. Our

community board office is notified and we just came out with additional messaging that we put on individual residences, so that they know when trees are coming in. So, we definitely want everybody to be aware. I can't allow for kind of like placement of trees because so much of that decision is based on infrastructure that nobody can see.

COUNCIL MEMBER BANKS: Okay and I hear you on that. I just want to let you know in front of my residents there was no notification given. How I found out a tree was being placed - uh, uh, about 3, 4 in the morning, I heard the uh, I guess the vendor came and they drove the hole and then I woke up and I saw a bed and then a tree. It was placed a couple days or a couple weeks later.

Uhm, let me move on to tree roots - tree root damage and infrastructure coordination. In many parts of my district, tree roots are causing damage to sidewalks and the surrounding infrastructure. How is the parks coordinating with agencies such as DOT? And is there any adequate funding in the Preliminary Budget to proactively address these issues rather than relying on reactive repairs?

1 TRICIA SHIMAMURA: Yes, so thank you for the
2 question. So, we are I mean, a couple parts to this,
3 we are regularly in communication with our colleagues
4 at DOT, DEP, DSNY, uh, FDNY when needed. Uh, both uh
5 just in general when it comes to all of this
6 infrastructure. A clear example of that was in front
7 of my building, actually we had a tree go down that
8 we were talking to FDNY, NYPD, our forestry team on
9 to make sure that we can clear these things out.

10 When it comes to the kind of proactive repairs,
11 uh you know as we mentioned before, uh, how we're
12 learning and how we're thinking about tree planting
13 is evolving. So that we can make sure that we're
14 planting trees that don't have kind of these
15 tremendous large deep roots that are making these
16 kind of - these pop ups of the sidewalk and that sort
17 of piece.

18 We also have a program for eligible single family
19 homes that where Parks will come in and do those
20 repairs uh to help kind of ease that sidewalk tension
21 and kind of expand those tree beds.

 COUNCIL MEMBER BANKS: Okay, thank you, thank you
Chair and to the Commissioner, thank you. Looking
forward to continue to work with you. Thank you.

TRICIA SHIMAMURA: Great.

CHAIRPERSON HANKERSON: Alright, going to the boogie down Bronx's, Council Member Pierina Sanchez.

COUNCIL MEMBER SANCHEZ: Thank you. Thank you Chair. I just want to share that I've had to resist the urge to like cheer, bah, bah, bah.

Okay, alright, thank you Chair and congratulations in person Commissioner.

TRICIA SHIMAMURA: Thank you.

COUNCIL MEMBER SANCHEZ: I'm very happy to get to work with you in this capacity. And I also just want to start with a shoutout to the Bronx team, to my Commissioner over there and the recreation team, like we put on incredible events that my neighborhood would not otherwise be able to afford and I really appreciate that partnership.

So, my first question, I know this is a common complaint to Parks and your partners at DDC that were seeing the cost of capital projects at our parks reach levels that make it nearly impossible to deliver improvements with speed, right? Speed in our communities.

I personally in conversations with the capital team about Bronx Parks, can't fund any parts upgrades

1 in a single fiscal year without like heavy lobbying
2 to the Mayor, without heavy lobbying to the Speaker.
3 And then at the same time, I hear from staff in the
4 capital divisions, that targeted fixes are not
5 possible because projects have to be bundled into
6 holistic renovations, specifically AFTM guidelines,
7 which I then googled, have been cited.

8 From the user perspective, this approach doesn't
9 really make sense to me. Families don't experience
10 parks as capital projects. They just want to go and
11 not trip on the floor mats, which is the example that
12 I've been raising to the staff. Why can't we just
13 fix the floor mats? Why do we have to fix the whole
14 park? They are just tripping, just fix that part.
15 Everything else looks great.

16 So, the question is, why exactly does the Parks
17 Department need to offer larger scale full rebuild,
18 rather than allowing for smaller, faster, user
19 centered improvements? And what changes could be
20 considered to make capital and maintenance practices
21 deliver those kind of fixes more quickly and cost
effectively.

TRICIA SHIMAMURA: I really appreciate your
question and uhm, and thank you for the kind of

continued advocacy. It is true, so typically when we uh, particularly if we're talking about a safety surface and that sort of piece where you see a safety surface starting to buckle. We typically like to see instead of doing this kind of targeted repair, we want to see uh and want to deliver for the community. If this is going to be our time when we have a shutdown of this playground, we want to deliver as much new kind of improvements to this space as possible. We definitely don't want to do a piecemeal approach where we have to close it down for safety surface but then we don't use the opportunity to create more ADA accessibility or we don't use the opportunity to frankly redesign the space so that it's more age appropriate, where we have 3 to 5 area space and then a larger, kind of big kid space and then maybe expand it to swingsets and those kinds of pieces. It does mean bigger scope and bigger projects. Uhm, but typically it's been our kind of policy to try to - to try to do as much good in one go as possible but I hear your question too about then having to wait years for something that starts out as simple as safety surface.

1 So, what I'd say is that in the Bronx, we
2 actually have seen some success with maybe trying to
3 have our cake and eat it too essentially, where we do
4 kind of focus on raising the funds, getting together
5 a big capital project but not letting that be the
6 reason why your constituents don't see any sort of
7 improvement between that and you know five years from
8 now whenever it happens. So, what we can do in house
9 where we can think through creatively to show a
10 little bit more investment, I really call that low
11 hanging fruit and I think we need to double down and
do more of that.

12 So, what I'd say is that you know it is - we are
13 interested in trying to just be in there once, do one
14 disruption, do as much good as possible and get out
15 of there. It shouldn't be uhm, an excuse for your
16 constituents not to see any sort of increased
17 attention to a space. So, we're happy to work with
18 you. Jessie Aponte as you mentioned, is a great
19 Borough Commissioner who kind of focuses on this too
20 but in my capacity as possible, we should - we should
21 work together to try to find other opportunities to
show at least a little bit of increased care for
these spaces that are very important.

COUNCIL MEMBER SANCHEZ: Yeah, thank you so much Commissioner. I appreciate that and I appreciate the partnership. I just like double want to emphasize format. I got a big problem. I heard there was like a contractor issue. Get our money back. Please replace those floor mats on the new ones that are still rising up. Just a side bar.

Uhm, second question - oh wow, okay. Second question and then I'll just bundle in the third one. Uhm, how is it possible that \$50 million is enough to renovate or reconstruct 10 parks through the Community Parks initiative? Because every, almost every estimate that I have for an upgrade in District 14 is like \$11 million, \$20 million, \$50 million. That's question 2. Question 3 is around Bailey Playground and the example of that being a park across the street from a big housing, next to the highway, like certainly in an environmental justice highlighted park that hasn't seen an upgrade I want to say in decades. Uhm, I can't quite figure it out. Just want to understand how a park like Bailey Playground can be in the new need priority category for parks for years and years and years but not see upgrades and then the last question, sorry, thank you

Chair. Thank you Chair. So, that's question 2 and then the 3rd question is just any updates on swim education. Uh, as a dominican who can't swim, I am particularly interested in what the Parks Department is doing with the laws that the previous Council passed.

TRICIA SHIMAMURA: Yes, thank you so much. I really appreciate your question about CPI. It's just my favorite. I'm allowed to have favorites. It's my favorite funding initiative. Uhm, so just very broadly, the City Parks Initiative which we just very proudly announced, our kind of new parks that we're going to be undertaking major renovations on is uh, one of our premier kind of equity driven capital initiative- uh programs where we're typically as you know, a lot of the funding priorities that come to us, the capital projects come from Council Members taking it on with advocacy groups or a Borough President may be taking it on with an advocacy group but it can just be based on maybe popularity or like kind of where you're hearing the most voices, but that can often can lead to a little bit of an inequity around the parks that are also serving

1
2 populations of people but are not getting the
3 investment that they need.

4 So, that's when uh several years ago, we decided
5 to try a new approach that was based on parks that
6 have not been renovated in like 20 years plus, that
7 were also serving vulnerable, underserved,
8 underinvested in communities and what we could do
9 with a pot of money that could really inject some
10 major capital improvements there.

11 I will tell you that you're right, that the \$50
12 million is kind of like a starting number but it
13 actually is not encompassing all of what's happening
14 and your investments, even if they are \$1 million,
15 \$50,000 or \$500,000, \$300,000, that actually take -
16 we take that into account when we look at which
17 projects we're going to fund next for CPI because it
18 shows that there is a Council Member, a Borough
19 President, somebody who has got some skin in the game
20 who like, who knows that this is a renovation that's
21 really worth it.

22 I'm going to give you one example from Manhattan,
23 because I know this best but Council Member Salaam
24 funded St. Nicholas Park for \$2 million just maybe a
25 year ago. St. Nicholas Park is a massive park and it

1 was supposed to be just for a little tiny playground.
2 Then Borough President Mark Levine funded that
3 project another \$1 million.

4 So, technically, it could have been done right
5 there with the \$3 million. But then we saw that
6 there was an opportunity with CPI that this whole
7 area had not been invested in for over 20 years, 25
8 years. So, we decided to put additional CPI funding
9 into that project and then we uhm, to kind of
10 increase the overall scope of that project, start
11 dealing with erosion issues, start dealing with the
12 adjacent basketball courts, barbeque areas, picnic
13 tables, and on top of that, we were able to tap into
14 some baseline funding for public restroom buildings.
15 So, now, all of a sudden a project that started with
16 Council Member Salaam's \$2 million, that could be
17 your \$1 million, has now ballooned to \$14 million
18 that could actually deliver big changes for that one
19 park in that one area.

20 So, I'd say thank you for asking about it. It is
21 a tremendous initiative. Something that I'm very
proud of. Something that I think we should be doing
more of. Data driven equity lens sort of work that
looks at capital projects and what can happen with it

uhm and what I'd say is that we'll happily look at Bailey Playground. We'll happily keep this in mind. We want to work with you on thinking through additional projects and where they're needed but please don't forget to fund them, even with modest amounts of money because that does make an impact on us and how we think about kind of prioritizing projects.

And then when it comes to swim education, we are very proud of what we're doing. I'm happy to give you more numbers on this. I don't know how much time we have but if we are able to provide a little more time here, I'd tell you that we are increasingly partnering with New York City Public Schools, with other partners like Asphalt Green and others and then doing our own swim education to try to serve and teach the kids how to swim, as many as possible. I think that in kind of this concerted effort has been undergoing for just a couple years and we're just hitting, I think hopefully aiming for around 5,000 young people to learn how to swim in this next year. Although I'll look to our Deputy Commissioner Margaret Nelson to confirm that number for me. Uhm,

there is always more to do. That \$5,000 is not every single second grader. We would love to have more.

Even though you're not in second grade, I want you to know how to swim and others. So, you know we're constantly in conversation. I was just in the conversation with your Borough President, uh about, thinking about access to water, access to pools and trying to see, think through creative ways, partnering with the YMCA, partnering with others, looking at pools that are defunct, even if they're not parks to think through how do we kind of comprehensively think about access to water and access to swim plazas.

COUNCIL MEMBER SANCHEZ: Thank you Chair for the time. Matt Drury is the best by the way. Good to see you.

TRICIA SHIMAMURA: Yes, he is.

CHAIRPERSON HANKERSON: Alright, uhm, we're going to go to Southern Brooklyn, Council Member Susan Zhuang and following some questions from your neighbor Council Member Kayla Santosuosso.

COUNCIL MEMBER ZHUANG: Thank you. Very nice to see you in person, Commissioner.

TRICIA SHIMAMURA: Nice to see you too.

COUNCIL MEMBER ZHUANG: We're excited. After the meeting, you actually comfort my team uh, and we see the hope for Southern Brooklyn.

TRICIA SHIMAMURA: Thank you.

COUNCIL MEMBER ZHUANG: And then we have, I have some questions. First in my district, we have a lot of huge trees. During the storm, it's always damaged the house roof and sometimes in the storm, fell down and have the branch dropped on the cars, break the car windshields. We haven't seen any improvement in this type of situation?

TRICIA SHIMAMURA: Mmm, mmm, thank you for the question and it's good to see you in person too. I'm really looking forward to working with you and your team. You know, during storms when it comes to tree damage, it's you would think that it's these bigger trees are the only ones that are susceptible to storms, but the truth is, is that any type of tree, be it a small new tree or a large hopefully not but often times like 40, 50, 60 year old tree can also be down in a storm and truthfully as with - we were just talking about this infrastructure, trees are very important. This is living infrastructure. It is common to see this butt up with other types of

1 infrastructure like our streets where folks are
2 parked. I believe that when it comes to kind of
3 claims on this, any sort of claim for damage should
4 be directed to the comptroller's office to issue
5 those claims. I'm happy to work with you and your
6 office to make sure that constituents understand
7 this. The best uh but really the best kind of uh
8 approach and offense to this type of damage is
9 regular block pruning. That's the best thing that we
10 do, meaning that like on a 7 year basis, all of the
11 trees in your neighborhood need to be pruned. And
12 that means that we go through proactively before a
13 storm hits, cutting down extra branches, making sure
14 that there's no interruption with the other kind of
15 powerlines or things like that and that's the -
16 that's the kind of goal of the Parks Department is to
17 make sure that every block in every neighborhood is
18 pruned on a 7 year basis.

16 COUNCIL MEMBER ZHUANG: Thank you and I'm going
17 to - my team is going to follow up with you because
18 it's always the same block every single year, have
19 the same issue and we have been sending out emails
20 and letters to the previous Commissioner. We did not
21 get a response.

TRICIA SHIMAMURA: I'd be more than happy to make sure to look into this so please do. We're happy to follow up with you.

COUNCIL MEMBER ZHUANG: Thank you. And also my colleagues talk about the dog waste. I actually have a good idea for you. We need more PEP Officers. They can help to address this issue. And also they can help to generate the revenue for the city.

I just want to know how many PEP Officers you have right now? How many you think you need? And I rarely see any PEP Officer in my neighborhood and I believe, personally believe they are peace makers because they don't carry any weapon but they come to talk to the people in the community and they make sure everything goes smooth and the people, well and the kids actually see them. The bad behavior they have in the park actually, they behave themselves better.

TRICIA SHIMAMURA: Thank you. Thank you, thank you for your support of PEP. We appreciate it. We appreciate you talking about them being peace keepers. They are certified peace keepers. They do provide I believe a holistic sense of safety. It's eyes in the park. It's education. They are

1 incredibly important. To specifically answer your
2 question, we have 254 PEP Officers who are baselined
3 plus 100 through this one shot funding, which we've
4 discussed today.

5 So, that's 300, currently 300. We are funded for
6 354 PEP Officers. And in terms of how many we'd
7 like, again, I would welcome as many - more is more
8 in this case and I of course would welcome any number
9 of additional resources, as kind of the leader of
10 this agency and thinking through our resources. What
11 we do with what we have is to make sure that we're
12 using a data driven approach to deploying our PEP
13 Officers, making sure that we're going to where the
14 people are.

15 Now you actually have this data too and I'm happy
16 to follow up with your team to make sure that we're
17 following up because we just launched the vital parks
18 explorer, just in the last few years where you can
19 actually go based on Council District or by community
20 board district and look at how frequently PEP is in
21 your parks.

 So, we're happy to look at this with you to make
 sure that your constituents understand how frequently
 they are there but I also hear you that ultimately,

even if we have our PEP's Officers who are making visits there, it's a sense of safety and you want to have eyes in the park. You'd like to see - we do understand that PEP Officers do provide this kind of sense of uniformed presence in the park and we very much appreciate your kind of ongoing advocacy there.

COUNCIL MEMBER ZHUANG: But if we - if the park hire additional 200 PEP Officers, how much is it going to cost for the city?

TRICIA SHIMAMURA: Oh, well, I think 100- the one shot funding that was allocated to us last year, uh, was for 100 PEP Officers. And so, it's \$20 million for 200 officers, I think is the -

COUNCIL MEMBER ZHUANG: So, is that same amount going to happen this year or?

TRICIA SHIMAMURA: You know, ultimately the one shots are the product of the conversations between the Council and the Administration during the budget process. We really appreciate the advocacy that this Council, you and your colleagues have done in the past and we're, you know, happy to continue to do this work with whatever resources that we're given.

COUNCIL MEMBER ZHUANG: Okay, thank you.

TRICIA SHIMAMURA: Yeah, thank you.

CHAIRPERSON HANKERSON: Okay, so we have been going for about 3 hours. Commissioner, would you like to take a 5 minute break?

TRICIA SHIMAMURA: I could do this all day. Let's keep on going.

CHAIRPERSON HANKERSON: I want to be courteous. I want to be courteous.

TRICIA SHIMAMURA: You're very sweet.

CHAIRPERSON HANKERSON: Okay. Given that we're going to jump online, uhm, we're going to instead of Southern Brooklyn, we're going to go to Brownsville Brooklyn and then Southern Brooklyn. So, we're going to jump to Council Member Darlene Mealy, who has been online and then Council Member Virginia Maloney. Council Member, I think you have to unmute.

COUNCIL MEMBER MEALY: Good afternoon.

CHAIRPERSON HANKERSON: Good afternoon. There we go.

COUNCIL MEMBER MEALY: Thank you. I was just wanted - congratulations to our new Commissioner. I have not met you as of yet but I would love to know uhm, I had a quick question. We have - I was in office, came out of office, and now I'm back in office and I gave money for a comfort station at

1 Lincoln Terrace Park and I was wondering, could you
2 tell me uhm, what's the status of that and what is
3 the hold up? The community - I mean, I go there a
4 lot and it's sad how they say, when is this going to
5 be finished? You know Eastern Park - Buffalo Avenue
6 is almost like an 8 lane highway. So, for that
7 comfort station to be there, that would be a
8 tremendous help to this city and to my community.
9 So, could you please give me uh, uhm, at least a
status on this comfort station?

10 Thank you Chair for giving me this opportunity.

11 TRICIA SHIMAMURA: Hi Council Member. Thank you
12 so much for your question. It's really lovely to
13 meet you and I'm looking forward to meeting you in
14 your district in person. I would absolutely be happy
15 to walk through with you in any park, if it's Lincoln
16 Terrace Park or any other one. I'm looking forward
to working with you and thank you so much for your
question about funding.

17 So, I do not have at my fingertips here a current
18 status, however, there are two pieces. One, I'll be
19 sure to get back to you directly with where we stand
20 but you can also look online. We have what's called
21 a capital tracker as part of our Parks website. You

1 can just google capital tracker and typically for any
2 capital project that we have fully funded in our
3 queue. We have - I put together this kind of data
4 tool online where you can look up exactly where a
5 project is, if it's in design, procurement, if it's
6 in construction, anticipated timeline. I - you know,
7 certainly, I don't want to have to have any of your
8 constituents go through a website to try to learn
9 this but we are trying to just make sure that more
information about timeline is available.

10 COUNCIL MEMBER MEALY: Commissioner, I don't know
11 if you understand the severity of this. I gave about
12 \$2.5 million or \$3 million for this comfort station.
13 That was almost 18 years ago. If I did not get back
14 in office, I don't know where that money would have
15 went. When the community graced me with another
16 opportunity to serve then, the first thing was why we
do not have this comfort station.

17 So, the Department of Parks had the money, did
18 not do what they said they was going to do with the
19 money and now that I'm back in office, it's been 4
20 years and the first year I came in, I said, where is
21 my comfort station and they started working on it.
Now it's 4 years and still nothing. So, it's not

1 about looking it up, it's about seeing what is the
2 hold up and why you have the city money and we cannot
3 have a comfort station. And it needs to have some
4 kind of budgetary timeline on it because the
5 community deserves it. And if the Chair could give
6 me another opportunity to ask one more question, I
7 would love to but I would love to get authorization
8 first.

8 CHAIRPERSON HANKERSON: Sure, absolutely, yes
9 ma'am.

10 COUNCIL MEMBER MEALY: Thank you uhm, I
11 definitely need that question and we talk about
12 preservation, uhm, uh, horticulture in Lincoln
13 Terrace Park, I've done 2 press conferences inside
14 the parks. I did 1 in Harlem, 1 in Brooklyn. Could
15 you tell me - are your horticulture or your people
16 are still using Round Tree to clean our public parks?

16 MATT DRURY: Council Member, are you referring to
17 Roundup?

17 COUNCIL MEMBER MEALY: Oh, Roundup, I'm sorry.
18 Yes, Roundup.

19 MATT DRURY: Not a problem. I can confirm that
20 our - so uh, a person with local law, Parks
21

Department isn't generally able to use synthetic pesticides, which would include like phosphate.

COUNCIL MEMBER MEALY: That passed and I came back like 20 uh, 23 and you were still using it. I had a meeting with you and you were still using Roundup. So, I ask that you really look into that and stop using that for this whole city. New York cannot handle that and remember, our young people are going into these parks. Our dogs are eating some of the grass and that's a detriment to their health.

So, do you want to have a conversation later in regards to that?

TRICIA SHIMAMURA: Absolutely. You know we're happy - I will happily look into this more. I definitely understand the stakes here. I too have a 3 and a 6 year old who are in the parks, in our planting beds far too often, even when they're not supposed to be so we understand the importance of this. This is frankly why we have very, kind of what I think is crazy ways of killing rats and things like that because we are very careful about what type of poisons and pesticides and things like that, that we're using in our parks. So, we will happily get

back to you and confirm what's being used and what's not being used.

COUNCIL MEMBER MEALY: I thank you for that and you can check uhm, the Black institute. I did two press conferences and we keep looking into it and it's still - you're still using it. So, please could you talk to me. The environment deserves better. Thank you so much Chair.

CHAIRPERSON HANKERSON: Not a problem. Alright, I want to acknowledge Council Members Alexa Avilés, and Lincoln Restler who we've been joined by. At this time, we're going to go to Council Member Virginia Maloney.

COUNCIL MEMBER MALONEY: Thank you very much Chair and thank you Commissioner Shimamura. It's great to see you here and as a Manhattanite, congratulations on your role. I have to ask about District 4 Parks, which is one of the lowest ratios of parkland per resident in the city and my office has received a lot of inquiries regarding the ongoing closure and renovation of the Tutor City Playground and uhm, that's located on 42nd Street. I'm wondering if you could give me a clear update on the timeline for when it plans to reopen and the cause

for delays if any and what steps you're taking to improve communication with the community on this project.

TRICIA SHIMAMURA: Yeah, thank you so much Council Member for the question. So, we'll have to get back to you specifically about where we stand with the Tutor City Playground project but I am somewhat familiar with both this playground and the playground that's across the street. You have 2 kind of sister playgrounds, one on each side and I will say that I will recall from my time as Borough Commissioner that in understanding when and the timeline for Tutor City's Playground reconstruction, we really were thinking through, also making sure that your community has also access to the one across the street. It does not replace it by any means but like how we think about any time there is scaffolding in a park, anytime a playground has to get closed down. We take this really seriously and particularly when we're going into the spring and summer months, it's not something that we do lightly.

So, where we can either allow for partial access, where we can try to push this work to be only relegated to some portion or phasing of projects.

1 That's really going to be our approach whenever
2 possible. We'll get back to you specifically about
3 where we stand with Tutor City Playground but overall
4 just know that we understand the significance of
5 access particularly in your district but really
6 across the city and wherever we can, we're going to
7 limit that.

8 COUNCIL MEMBER MALONEY: Thank you for that
9 update and we will be following up. I also wanted to
10 ask about park concessions revenue, which the
11 preliminary budget shows has dropped by nearly \$9
12 million. I'm wondering if you can give more
13 information on the breakdown of the cause, specific
14 concession sites or contracts or any specific
15 locations that account for those losses and uh also
16 what steps the agency is taking to backfill lost
17 concession revenue?

18 TRICIA SHIMAMURA: Yeah, thank you for your
19 question. I really appreciate the attention to the
20 role that Parks plays. It may not be as much as our
21 agencies but we're really proud of our contributions
to the overall fiscal health of our city and ways
that we bring in revenue, particularly and I'll flag
our Assistant Commissioner of -I'm sorry, I forget

1 the actual title that you have. But uhm, who is also
2 here to uh - who can answer a little bit more on this
3 but overall, you know I'm not sure where the \$9
4 million kind of uh, oh, oh yeah, I'm not sure where I
5 see it like uh going down in kind of overall budget
6 here but we do contribute over \$50 million per year
7 to the general fund in terms of our concessions and
8 other kind of opportunities that we bring to parks.

9 I mentioned this earlier but you know we find in
10 general that the type of concessions that we bring
11 in. The type of businesses that we work with, really
12 does provide a benefit to our parks. So, people like
13 to have access to sandwiches and drinks and food
14 options. They like to take advantage of
15 opportunities either to rent a bike and go bike
16 riding through the park or in the case of Central
17 Park to rent a sailboat and sail through the sailboat
18 piece.

19 There's also, it's also an opportunity for us
20 because we don't have necessarily a kind of strict
21 targets to meet or high, extremely high targets to
meet. It gives us an opportunity to be creative with
our type of concessions that we look out for and a
good example is what you'll see in City Hall Park.

1 In just a couple weeks from now, we partnered with
2 the Workers Justice Project, those deliveristas to
3 create, to take over one of our what was a news stand
4 and then turn it into a bike, battery kind of library
5 system, where you can swap out those batteries, get
6 some tuning of your bike done. It is also a
7 concession of ours and we're really excited about how
8 that's going to compliment and provide essential
9 services to New Yorkers.

10 So, it's a really diverse portfolio. I'll look
11 to our Assistant Commissioner to see if there's
12 anything else he wants to add about this portfolio of
13 revenue concessions. Forgive me David forgetting
14 your exact title but uhm, we're really excited about
15 kind of the opportunities ahead and I'd say the last
16 piece is that we're deeply committed to making sure
17 that the type of opportunities that we have to do
18 business with parks and to do business with the city
19 are diverse and accessible to as many people as
20 possible.

21 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Please raise your right hand.
Thank you. Uh, do you affirm to tell the truth, the
whole truth and nothing but the truth in your

testimony before this Committee and to respond honestly to Council Member questions.

DAVID CERRON: Yes. Hi Council Member. Thank you for the question. I'm David Cerron, Assistant Commissioner for Business Development special events. Apologies for any confusion, you know the good news is, we are doing well this year. We're tracking ahead of the same time last year.

Our revenue target for OMB for this fiscal year is \$54 million. We do intend to meet that goal. As the Commissioner mentioned, you know we are always seeking to do more, looking for creative ways to make our parks engaging and fun and activate our open spaces. So, you know if you have ideas, if there's other suggestions that you'd like us to look into, we'd be thrilled.

COUNCIL MEMBER MALONEY: Thank you very much and thank you Chair.

CHAIRPERSON HANKERSON: Okay, uh, we are going to go over to is that Western Brooklyn? Yeah, okay, Council Member Lincoln Restler.

COUNCIL MEMBER RESTLER: Thank you so much Chair, appreciate your thoughtful leadership of this Committee and Commissioner, it's great to see you. I

1 want to thank you for being so generous with your
2 time earlier this month or last month in meeting with
3 me and my team and talking through I don't know 100
4 parks related issues in District 33. We could have
5 gone on for hours but uhm, you were incredibly
6 gracious and really appreciate your thoughtfulness
7 and eagerness to partner, which really comes through
8 in every appearance you have before the Council and
9 in every conversation I have had with you.

10 Uhm, I apologize that I'm late, so I may be
11 bothering you about something that's already come up
12 but as I think you heard me say before, I've been
13 deeply concerned about the reduction in part time
14 headcount in the Parks Department. You know in the
15 Adams Administration, we lost 1,600 part time
16 workers. It's had an enormous impact on the
17 conditions in our park and so, while the full time
18 headcount has been steady, the reduction in the part
19 time headcount uh, has been a major concern for me
20 and for members of my community as they look around
21 their parks every day.

19 Could you give some insight into what you're
20 planning for currently for headcount, for the part
21 time headcount for next year and uh, how we can be

helpful in supporting your efforts to ensure that parks is fully staffed?

TRICIA SHIMAMURA: Yeah, thank you so much Council Member, it's really lovely to work with you always. Uhm, and I really appreciate the focus here. So, in the short term and speaking of part time headcount, uhm I think through also what our seasonal headcount it going to be. We in general and we actually haven't covered this yet. In general, we jump from a 5,000 person agency to nearly 10,000 for our summer season and that includes all types of roles but the vast majority of those come in the form of maintenance and operation staff.

On top of that, we also do lifeguards this way, summer camp programs this way, additional kind of recreational folks that come on board. Everything else in between but really that's - we double frankly in size.

You know for the next - for this budget cycle, what we see is essentially uhm, the differences those one shot funding items is where uhm, is where you see that big differential between - it's essentially what would be the budget that was given to us in the last fiscal year that those one shot items reflect, 277

positions and they crawl across the spectrum from Green Thumb Park Rangers, PEP Officers, maintenance folks and others.

Uhm, so certainly, as was mentioned before, they are highly supplemental uhm, to these units. The Chair has recognized that PEP is essentially, the one shots essentially reflect one-third of our entire workforce there for something like rangers. I think it's almost 50 percent of that workforce. And so, we very much greatly appreciate the kind of one shot funding here and it is a major part of our overall operations.

COUNCIL MEMBER RESTLER: You know when we - for the analysis that's shared with us, when we look at the FY22 headcount for part time workers, which I think includes the seasonal workforce. It was counted at 44,060 workers.

As of FY26, our current fiscal year, it was down to 27,074. So, a major 1,600 plus person reduction and you know, I think that there are lots of different ways that parks can count this and look at this and to be fair, we saw a meaningful increase in the full time headcount during that same period. But the significant reduction in the part time headcount

is something that I'm really hoping we can fix together in this budget.

So, you know prelim is the beginning of this conversation. We've got 3 more months to go. I'm certainly eager to support the Chairs efforts to help us increase headcount at the Parks Department. I think it's one of the areas that we frankly just over the last 3 years got an enormous amount of pushback from Mayor Adams and his budget team and we shouldn't have.

And I'm hopeful that if the Council is willing to put up the resources and we're willing to fight for the Parks Department that we'll have a much more cooperative partner on the other side of City Hall. I know we do in our Parks Commissioner. Uhm, I heard some of my colleagues ask and Council Member Zhuang in particular about pruning and tree management. I'll just add, I know that this was a tough winter and a tough storm and I know that there were some declines in the first few months of this year as a result of a contractor passing away. You know the CEO of a contractor passing away but the timelines on pruning, the reductions in total pruning, the timelines I'm getting, hanging tree limbs removed

1 from the most urgent cases to the least urgent cases.
2 I think all of the timelines are really unacceptable
3 so I really hope that this is something that you can
4 look at with the team and help to speed up.

5 I just wanted to highlight a couple other items
6 in my last 19 seconds. One is, I'm just you know,
7 MET pool has been a real source of frustration.
8 Members of my community are having a protest this
9 Wednesday uhm about the conditions and the fact that
10 it's been closed so long. We had tried to get the
11 Parks Department to begin the capital project while
12 they were trying to identify interim repairs. I
13 don't think that happened and so, we're looking at an
14 extended closure there.

15 Uhm, would love to get an update on Parks
16 containerization of garbage. I know there was
17 funding in last year's budget for that. My office
18 has funded parks containerization of garbage at
19 Cadman Plaza, WNYC Transmitter, McCarren, McGolrick,
20 and other parks, which my community is thrilled
21 about. I think you guys are putting in the money, so
I don't need to cover anymore, which is great but
would love real updates on that.

And then lastly, and then I'll let you talk, is uhm, thrilled with their - well, briefly on two things. Thrilled that Deputy Commissioner Boorstyn and others have been really helpful in supporting the Karen Asphalt project, \$15 million parks project in Williamsburgh that we're thrilled about, really appreciative of parks partnership there. And then lastly, Anchorage Plaza in Dumbo. We just heard from David, you have a terrific lead on your concessions team and really appreciate all of his partnership. We're trying to figure out if there's some compromise between vendors and the pickleball vendor. You know the street vendors and the pickleball vendor to share that space. I know that you're looking into it. Is that something that we can follow up on as well?

TRICIA SHIMAMURA: Sure.

COUNCIL MEMBER RESTLER: I'm sorry for peppering you with so many questions.

TRICIA SHIMAMURA: No, it's great and thank you. I'm going to look for our Acting First Deputy Commissioner to come up just to talk about the containerization piece but I think that I can handle these other ones.

1 So, I think we owe you a follow up conversation
2 around Anchorage Plaza. It is tough because
3 ultimately even in the case where if we were to kind
4 of rethink this space, we still need to have kind of
5 parks appropriate uses on these spaces and when it
6 comes to vending and that sort of thing it just gets
7 tough but happy to follow up with you on that. I
8 know it's important to you.

9 COUNCIL MEMBER RESTLER: Thank you.

10 TRICIA SHIMAMURA: When it comes to pruning, yes,
11 you - I mean, you clearly you have read our PMMR and
12 like know that this is in part due to our contracting
13 piece. What I'll tell you is that there's a bigger
14 understanding that relying on the contractors that we
15 have, relying on this pool is the wrong - is the
16 wrong method.

17 COUNCIL MEMBER RESTLER: Here, here.

18 TRICIA SHIMAMURA: We need to diversify. We need
19 to think it through. We need to continue to pilot
20 things like in house planting, in house pruning, but
21 we need to diversify the size and scope of our
contracts. We want to keep cost down but also to get
this work done faster and to make sure that we're not
building an environment in an atmosphere out there

that's not sustainable and just dangerous in so many ways.

So, we definitely hear you on that. This is a frustrating piece to be in but we're on the right track. I plan on coming back to you in many future hearings with better numbers on pruning but ultimately, there's a bigger push here to make sure that we are consciously thinking about how we do contracting to build in uhm, to build in different size scope and add more diversity to this whole pool.

Uh, format pool, speaking of pools. In my first 6 weeks on this job, MET pool was a priority visit from mine. So, I can tell you that I, myself, have visited this site because I know how deeply important it is to the community. I too have heard them. I understand the rallies. You don't have to tell me how important it is to have access to pool service and I know that particularly this one serves many different communities and is truly a gem.

We are trying to work as quickly as possible to make sure that this gets reopened in time and frankly, while this pool is out, I was in there saying, we need to do more in this space, cosmetic but still more. Let's replace those glass panels.

1 Make it clear in there. Let's make sure that we're
2 uh, that every piece of exercise equipment on the
3 second floor, is actually working and functioning or
4 let's make sure that when this community comes back
5 in, they know that it was time well spent and so, we
6 are trying to do everything we can to push this
7 project alone, just like the Brownsville project.
8 Another rec center that Council - that another
9 Council Member had brought up. But in particular,
10 I'll tell you that I definitely hear the community's
11 concerns on this one. We're keeping it close. We're
12 trying to push this along. It is complicated just
13 because some of the filtration system is underneath,
14 is underground and it just means that there's - it's
15 such a tight space that it's very difficult to do
16 this work. Nevertheless, I don't want your community
17 or your constituents to think that - to hear radio
18 silence from us on this. They need to know that we
19 are there constantly. That I, myself was there,
20 looking at this project. That we are pushing this
21 alone. Even if it's not massive updates where they
 start seeing cranes in that space, I want them to
 understand that this is not a forgotten project.
 That we will not let this get lost in the shuffle.

That we're going to see this through, so uhm, please know that we'll be getting back to you with updates as soon as we have them.

COUNCIL MEMBER RESTLER: Thank you.

TRICIA SHIMAMURA: And when it comes to containerization, I'll let our Acting First Deputy Commissioner give you an update.

CHAIRPERSON HANKERSON: First Deputy, I'm sorry, if you can, if you can keep your responses to 60 seconds. I have to get to the other members, I'm sorry.

COUNCIL MEMBER RESTLER: Sorry, it's my fault. I asked too much.

MARK FOCHT: Council Member, good to see you. Thank you for your leadership on containerization. Uhm, we have now a new custom design enclosure for containerization. We are getting the first several thousand units delivered before June 30th. We are then going - we are already determining which sites will get them for FY27. The funding from OMB is baselined for this, so it will take us multiple years to roll it out but we are now very much in the implementation phase of trash enclosures, trash containerization.

COUNCIL MEMBER RESTLER: And do you have uh
timeline for full containerization of parks garbage?

MARK FOCHT: 4 years.

COUNCIL MEMBER RESTLER: 4 years across the city,
that's great. Uhm, thank you very much Chair. I
really appreciate it and thank you Commissioner.

CHAIRPERSON HANKERSON: Thank you. Alright, uh,
although we're jumping to the other side of the dais,
they are not far in geography, so we're going to
Council Member Alexa Avilés.

COUNCIL MEMBER AVILÉS: Thank you Chair and very
impressed that Queens knows the geography of
Brooklyn.

CHAIRPERSON HANKERSON: I don't know if it's
Queens or it's just me but it's all good.

COUNCIL MEMBER AVILÉS: Many, much kudos, most
kudos Chair. So, congratulations. Really delighted
to have you onboard. Uhm, I hope what you heard from
my Council colleagues today is uhm, serious support
for the Parks Department. A call for maximized
funding that obviously we believe in the one percent
of our budget should be dedicated to our Parks
Department and making sure that our funding is - we
can fund what we need.

1 Uhm, as you know Commissioner, I represent
2 District 38, which has the privilege of having 2
3 recreational centers with 2 pools. Uhm, and uh, you
4 know I think one of those, Sunset Park, has been
5 under construction for quite a long time. Uhm, and
6 I'm getting angry emails as the weather is getting
7 nicer about why this timeframe continues to push out
8 further and further.

9 But I will say, I'm deeply concerned about the
10 capital pipeline here. When I came in, CPI has been
11 a fantastic project to pick up. Many of the green
12 spaces in my district had never been invested in and
13 CPI is covering a few of them. Among them, D'Emic
14 Playground, we're invested in Pinata. We invested in
15 uhm, uh, 3 other playgrounds. So, right now we have
16 5 spaces including our major parks that have all
17 received multimillion dollars of funding with no
18 seemingly time to see that they're even breaking
19 ground. What is the problem with our capital
20 pipeline and not making sure projects are moving in a
21 reasonable timeframe?

 TRICIA SHIMAMURA: Thank you so much for the
 questions Council Member. It's really good to see
 you. So, I think I'm going to just talk about 2

1 pieces. First is Sunset Park. Uhm, I uh, I too have
2 visited this park and this recreation center. I hear
3 the community. Their eagerness to come back into
4 this space. Trust me when I tell you that we uhm,
5 that we are continuing to work here. That we're
6 eager to see this back open. Uhm, I was just asking
7 for more updates here. We'll happily give them to
8 your office but it is top of mind when it comes to
9 trying to reopen these spaces. We've had multiple
10 conversations in just my first 2 months here on the
11 job and a lot of them have been around Sunset Park,
12 so in particular. So we'll happily give you some
13 more updates but know that it is top of mind here and
14 we understand that this is a community that heavily
15 relies on it. It's a beautiful space. It's a
16 beautiful center. It's a beautiful community that
17 you represent over there and I'm really eager to
18 deliver for them.

16 Uhm, When it comes to - but your bigger question
17 around uh, the capital process, you know I'm happy to
18 talk a little bit about it but let me just get to the
19 point at the end here, is that this is a process that
20 is extremely long. We have made improvements,
21 particularly around procurement. Procurement has

gone down and you do see it faster but there is still certainly much more that can be done and then you have my commitment that we are looking at this very closely. I have already had I'm guessing at least 10 meetings with our Deputy Commissioner of Capital to try to understand this process step by step and see where we can shave down the time. I do not want to sit here for years to come and just tell you yes, it's years. It takes 5 to 7 years to build a project. We are deeply committed to trying to shave this down and make sure that your community can actually see some benefits.

Ultimately, you do see a pretty standard design timeline of 12 months but before you get to procurement, you do see a post design kind of process where we are trying to adhere, we have to by law adhere to a lot of different regulations around be it stormwater management or other, or other type of kind of adherence to rules with DOB and others. It's all good things but it takes time and oftentimes the back and forth between our agencies, is in my opinion, is unacceptable. So, we are working on this together. We've done some takes. DEP actually has a staff member who actually sits in our office to try to

1 increase that communication. We are in frequent
2 communication with our colleagues of other agencies
3 and I - I really sincerely hope to come back to you
4 to demonstrate ways that we both improve this,
5 because we have since 2023. We have made some modest
6 improvements but there is still more work to be done
7 and we're looking forward to continuing to think
8 through this with our other sister agencies to make
9 sure that this timeline can get shortened.

10 COUNCIL MEMBER AVILÉS: Great, thank you. We
11 look forward to certainly those conversations and
12 having you come to our district to walk through the
13 many, many projects that uhm are on the table. I
14 think I'd also like to just put forward, glad to hear
15 about the containerization. Certainly Sunset Park
16 uhm is a great uh park for containerization. It's
17 now welcomes illegal trash dumping and trash dumping
18 because it has no place to put trash at its entrance,
19 which is really a new thing. That's only happened in
20 the last couple of years and it's so offensive
21 actually to our community.

19 So, love to work with you more on these issues
20 and we need to get to 1 percent for parks. Thank
21 you.

TRICIA SHIMAMURA: Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON HANKERSON: Thank you Council Member. I just want to say to the public, thank you for your patience. The advocates are here. We're almost there, so thank you for your patience. Uh, alright, we are actually, we're in your district. Alright, Council Member Chris Marte.

COUNCIL MEMBER MARTE: Thank you Chair and thank you for the advocates for waiting for so long and thank you Commissioner for being here. Sorry that I was late, I had a hearing next door. But I want to thank the Administration in investing in Vladeck Park. It's a hidden park within a massive public housing development that's been overlooked for decades and so, to see that announcement last month brought joy to me, joy to the tenant association and many of the residents.

And so, it just really shows where this Administration, you know values are and their moral compass when it comes to investing in green spaces, so thank you so much for that.

My question is, you know, Parks Department has made a commitment for tree canopy all throughout the city. However, there's certain neighborhoods that

1 can't have tree canopy, like SoHo and Tribeca because
2 we have voltage streets. What methods are you
3 looking to make those streets greener? To try to at
4 least accomplish something in those neighborhoods if
5 we can accomplish tree canopies.

6 TRICIA SHIMAMURA: Yeah, thank you for the
7 question. If I can, I just want to spend just a
8 quick moment on Vladeck. You know this, Vladeck is
9 very near and dear to my heart. Vladeck, even to our
10 community board, was unknown as a park space for
11 years and that community board knows their stuff.
12 So, it was amazing to know that this park went under
13 the radar. Smack dab in the middle, very, very dense
14 NYCHA housing around everywhere. It has not been
15 touched in over 20 years. This is the beauty of CPI.
16 This is the beauty of projects like this. It's done
17 in partnership with our elected officials. When we
18 know that something needs to get done. When we know
19 that it is going to take a major influx of money.
20 We're very proud to be able to have a program like
21 this. So, thank you. I look forward to breaking
ground on that project.

When it comes to uh, neighborhood - parks in your
neighborhood and you mentioned them, that have like

an inability because of the underground infrastructure to grow trees. This is where then we look at other tools in our toolkit, particularly around the green streets and you have worked in one. You and I have both worked on one in particular. Uhm, you know we have a good partnership with DOT to think through some of these green streets and the areas where we can add more green infrastructure. We know what's at stake. It is not just a kind of luxury tree trimmings here. It is actually water retention. It like really does create a sense of community in these spaces. And so, where we can, we're happy to work in partnership with our elected officials, with the community members there to think through how do we improve these green streets and make the most of these spaces. It is always in partnership with our other agencies and I want to emphasize that because sometimes that gets frustrating to work with more people and more pieces of government but to the best of our abilities, what I can commit to you is that we are trying to ease this as much as possible, that we're trying to be the convener. That we're happy to work in partnership with DOT, with others to try to build out as much

1 kind of green infrastructure as possible and Parks is
2 really the human entity. That's really the
3 difference between us and I'd argue with other
4 agencies. With all due respect, my other agencies.
5 We start every single capital project with community
6 input. We really do think through what is going to
7 activate these spaces. Not just how - what are they
8 going to do and serve, but how are going to activate
9 it? How are we going to bring into the community?
10 So, wherever possible, that's going to be the lens
11 that we take to these spaces. One of high
12 collaboration and try to build spaces that the
13 community can actually use and appreciate.

14 COUNCIL MEMBER MARTE: Yeah, thank you for that
15 response and also, thank you for all your quick work
16 at Newman Triangle, it's - it looks night and day out
17 there and I think the community is - really loves it
18 honestly.

19 Uhm, is there a database to show not only all
20 green streets but parks that don't have a friends
21 group? And so, as elected officials, maybe we can
help organize our neighbors to start some sort of you
know coalition or group to be that partner on the
ground.

TRICIA SHIMAMURA: It's such a great question.

Uhm, you know so the green street piece, we have lists, but I don't think we have like a publicly accessible database. It is long and we are frankly actually in communication with DOT right now on refining that list, we can happily get back to you with either information that we have but thinking through how we make that more publicly available. When it comes to the friends groups, what I think that you have currently on the vital parks explorer, which is public, is looking at any sort of volunteer projects that have happened. So, it's not necessarily a friends group but it gives you a sense of like, where is there good things happening in these spaces? We can certainly think through that. We have partnerships for parks, which is of course our kind of arm of the agency that helps activate but I think it's a great kind of goal to set to make sure that we have active groups in every single park, green street and any other space that we have in our portfolio.

COUNCIL MEMBER MARTE: Awesome, thank you so much Commissioner. Thank you Chair.

CHAIRPERSON HANKERSON: No, thank you. Alrighty, uh, with that, okay, so I do have just a couple questions and then that is it. Uhm, has the Department considered putting housing on top of future recreation centers?

TRICIA SHIMAMURA: Thank you for the question. So, uh, two pieces. One is that just in general, park land needs to be used by law for park purposes. So, uhm, any sort of uh, like looking at any - this wouldn't happen I'm assuming but you know if you wanted to put a piece of housing on Central Park or something like that, it would mean like a true alienation would go into effect and you would have to go through several kind of steps uh, with passing legislation on the state and city level in order to make that happen.

However, on the flip side, while we are kind of mandated to protect the park land that we have and use it for parks appropriate purposes. We are also thinking through creative ways to expand park services and recreational services beyond park land and one example of that that has just recently come up is what's happening at 388 Hudson. This is a lot of land that will have completely 100 percent

1 affordable housing go up on it and on the first 3
2 floors, we're very excited to be partnering with HPD
3 for the first time ever in a new recreation center
4 that will put and located on those first 3 floors.
5 So, we're talking competition size swimming pool,
6 basketball tournaments that could happen in the new
7 basketball court, weight rooms, media center, dance
8 labs, areas for after school, the whole 9 yards that
9 could happen in partnership with HPD on a completely
10 affordable housing development. It's game changing
11 and is a really innovative way to think through kind
12 of like standing park services on nonpark land
13 spaces.

14 So, we're really excited to see that to continue
15 to go through and we're happy to think through other
16 opportunities like that.

17 CHAIRPERSON HANKERSON: Okay, I'd love to have
18 further conversation with you about that. I think I
19 may have an idea for a space in my district.

20 TRICIA SHIMAMURA: Great.

21 CHAIRPERSON HANKERSON: Okay, uh, a couple more
questions. Has the Department considered sorry -
okay. Has the Department considered completely
inhousing certain parts of their operations to

1 provide more New Yorkers with well paying jobs and
2 lowering the cost of contracts? Referring to uh
3 pruners and climbers for the most part.

4 TRICIA SHIMAMURA: Yeah, thank you. I think that
5 right now uhm, given the finite resources that we
6 have, the balance that we hit is one where we're very
7 excited to kind of work in concert with both the
8 contracts that we have, as well as our in-house
9 crews. Typically just for like pruning work, our
10 contractors do the work for the vast majority of
11 pruning on the 7 year cycle. We really want to keep
12 to that cycle because that is the best practices when
13 standard within the industry to prune all of our
14 trees within 7 years. However, our in-house team is
15 able to do like slightly more technical uh, highly
16 skilled kind of work that like requires a little bit
17 more kind of attention and detail and then can come
18 out of a priority list that's not this kind of
19 typical piece. So, it compliments uh that work in a
20 very good way.

21 Similar with our in-house tree planting, this is
something that we just started to undertake, just
since I think 2024. And we're seeing that that also
is able to complement the work of kind of our

1 contracted work. Actually, our in house tree
2 planting, I was just looking this up beforehand. It
3 is actually working in Queens right now, uhm, I
4 believe in and around your district, uh trying to
5 plant as much as we can there first and prioritizing
6 these neighborhoods. So, you know it is something
7 that it's a bit of a balancing act between the two.
8 Uhm, but certainly we're looking and monitoring very
9 closely the impact of having in-house crews and how
10 that has helped kind of further our work.

11 CHAIRPERSON HANKERSON: I appreciate that. What
12 is the current budgeted and actual headcount for
13 climbers and pruners and what is their average
14 salary?

15 TRICIA SHIMAMURA: Thank you. I think our - I'll
16 look this up. I believe our climbers and pruners are
17 around 90 - uh, we have 90 climbers and pruners. Uh,
18 and starting salary is - looking again, \$75,000 and
19 you may recall this but uhm, our climbers and pruners
20 are very specific, very dangerous, very intense
21 technical work and we're very proud of the fact that
we've had just the second cohort of kind of in-house
training that we've done to kind of build up those
ranks. I just congratulated 14 new graduates. We've

1 already started training another crew and they'll be
2 graduating in a year.

3 CHAIRPERSON HANKERSON: Is there an update on the
4 apprenticeship program?

5 TRICIA SHIMAMURA: Yes, that is the update. So,
6 we're in - so we've had 2 successful cohorts go
7 through, each adding around 14 or 15 people every
8 time. Uhm, this is a really intensive training. I
9 can't emphasize this enough. Getting up at 4 o'clock
10 in the morning, starting work, working in very cold,
11 very hot conditions. Trying to do heavy duty tree
12 work, as you heard from other Council Members in very
13 tight conditions, very tight spaces and trying to
14 work in New York City is an art and something that
15 needs to be really kind of a whole different type of
16 skill set and so, we're very proud of our success
17 thus far. We're looking forward to having another
18 3rd successful cohort in the next year.

19 CHAIRPERSON HANKERSON: Out of curiosity, uh, are
20 there any positions or areas where the Department
21 could effectively reduce its contract budget by
bringing those operations in house?

TRICIA SHIMAMURA: It's a good question and we'll
continue to monitor this. Like I said, the in-house

1 programs that we have both for tree pruning and for
2 planting are relatively new. So, we're still looking
3 at how that work is complemented or can double down
4 and work in concert with the contracts that we have.
5 So, certainly, we're continuing to monitor this and
6 look forward to kind of continuing to be cognizant of
7 what happens in-house versus with external.

8 CHAIRPERSON HANKERSON: As you all monitor that,
9 uh it more informal monitoring system or do you have
10 a formal way of assessing?

11 TRICIA SHIMAMURA: What I'd say is that certainly
12 we understand the significance of - there are a
13 couple major things that are coming up. One is that
14 this year, we plan on really seeing the Urban Forest
15 Plan, which talks about the significance of planting
16 trees and maintaining our canopy in order to get to
17 30 percent.

18 Two is that we understand the significance and
19 here we heard it all day today around making sure
20 that we're caring for our trees but also planting as
21 expeditiously as possible uhm to serve these
communities. So, it is something that we are kind of
internally discussing and happy to loop you into
those conversations too to talk about what lessons

1 we've learned thus far. It's only been a year or so
2 since these programs have started, so uhm, you know
3 the ability to understand that impact and what our
4 interhouse teams are doing versus contracts. It's
5 still something that I think needs a little bit of
6 time to actually fully understand but I, I am
7 certainly interested in holding ourselves accountable
8 because frankly, it makes a difference in terms of
9 how I advocate for funding and how I talk to our
10 Administration, which is very interested in making
11 sure that we're serving New Yorkers as expeditiously
12 with the best possible services possible. So, we
13 expect to hold ourselves accountable.

14 CHAIRPERSON HANKERSON: I appreciate that. I'd
15 like to have follow up conversations about this as
16 well.

17 TRICIA SHIMAMURA: Yeah.

18 CHAIRPERSON HANKERSON: Uhm, okay, I do have -
19 I'm sorry, I almost forgot about Council Member
20 Santosuosso. Uh, just a couple questions from the
21 Council Member. Have the requirements set by Intro.
800 and 978 passed in April 2025 been met by parks?
Uhm, yeah, that would be the publication of criteria

for prioritizing tree maintenance, pruning schedule, etc...

TRICIA SHIMAMURA: Great, so I'll look to our Assistant Commissioner Ben Osborne to give us an update on those specific pieces of legislation. At a high level, what I will say is that we are tracking those passages of those legislation and I believe that we are on track to meet those requirements. But I'll look to our Assistant Commissioner -

CHAIRPERSON HANKERSON: While he's doing that I'm just going to move on. How much does an inspection by a private contractor versus an in house forester cost the city?

TRICIA SHIMAMURA: Hmm.

CHAIRPERSON HANKERSON: And I'm sorry, how much does a 12-inch tree removal by a private contractor versus an in house crew cost the city? So, it's kind of -

TRICIA SHIMAMURA: Sure, so, what I'd say before our Assistant Commissioner comes up to talk about that for his piece, is that we again, we frankly monitor the cost of what it cost our city but are not probably able to speak to the kind of private industry and what the cost can range. What I would

say is that the average cost to remove a tree including the stump is \$3,028. That's our average cost for FY26 and then I'm happy to give additional cost if it's based on stump or pruning one tree or planting one tree. We can also provide this information to the Council Member to give her that entire breakdown but we you know typically, I think what the Council Member is getting at, is like the cost of like private industry versus public. You know, without even looking closely at that private data, I would probably say it would be likely to see that it cost more for the city to do it but there are good reasons for that. We use labor. We use union as labor. You know we are comprehensively looking at this work. We are doing it based on larger contracts. We are not only just planting or removing a tree but when we're thinking about this work, we said it before, it's not - now we're not doing this piecemeal. Now we're doing this comprehensively. We're going to expand tree beds to make sure that this doesn't happen in the future. We're going to plant a new tree. We're going to fill in other tree pits where it can't be - where our trees can't be done and when we leave, it's going to be done and we

won't have to deal with this anymore in that spot. We'll get to continue on and move on to another portion of the city, so what we're doing is more comprehensive. What we're doing is typically more expensive but I would argue that you know we're very proud of that - of that work and think that it's the best way to care for the entire city as a whole. But I'll turn to you- to Ben to give more about the legislation.

BEN OSBORNE: Sure and uh, before I respond to that Chair, I just want to make sure I'm responding to the correct piece of legislation. Was this the one that was ultimately passed as Local Law 59 of 2025 or is this a different bill?

CHAIRPERSON HANKERSON: This was Intro 800 and Intro 978, passed in April of 2025.

MATT DRURY: So, yeah, the second one would be the building clearance one.

BEN OSBORNE: Okay, so I'm happy to respond to that but first we need to get back to you on but in regards to -

CHAIRPERSON HANKERSON: And I'm sure if there is any follow up with the Council Member, we'll follow up.

1 BEN OSBORNE: Certainly, okay, in regards to the
2 law requiring prioritization for tree work, including
3 requests for building clearance, we are on track to
4 be compliant with that legislation, which goes into
5 effect in May. Uhm, we're building out the digital
6 tools right now to be able to record the results of
7 our inspections, similar to how we do with risk
8 assessment currently.

9 CHAIRPERSON HANKERSON: What percentage of park
10 bathrooms are open right now?

11 TRICIA SHIMAMURA: Great question. I'll happily
12 look to our Acting First Deputy Commissioner to give
13 his specific data. Uhm, but I think I would also
14 just flag because I think a couple articles just came
15 out, news articles came out about this recently. Uh,
16 typically the vast majority of our bathrooms are open
17 and functioning. If they are closed, we report on
18 that internally to ourselves to make sure that we
19 know if closure is happening due to a reconstruction
20 project or due to some sort of maintenance issue.

21 You know we do track this pretty granularly on a
monthly basis looking at when these bathrooms are
closed and the reasons why and making sure that we
are reporting this internally as well.

1 So, we take this seriously. It is not something
2 that we kind of just we'll say. We'll say openly
3 saying that all of them are open when the truth is
4 that, we know when some are closed due to some sort
5 of other kind of issue and are pretty closely
6 monitoring this but I'll look to our Acting First
7 Deputy Commissioner to give specific details.

8 CHAIRPERSON HANKERSON: Right before you answer
9 and I just want to keep my word, there was a
10 constituent who stopped me and it just came to mind,
11 St. Albans Park was renamed after former Council, the
12 late Council Member Archie Spigner, the bathrooms or
13 the conversations, there were no doors on the stalls.
14 Uhm, so just flagging that for you. I don't know who
15 it would go to but just want to flag that and keep my
16 word to the constituent.

17 MARK FOCHT: Thank you for that note Council
18 Member, that will be taken care of. On any day, our
19 average rate is 90 percent of our 700 public
20 restrooms are open. Again, they change from day to
21 day. They frankly change from hour to hour if we
 have vandalism or a medical emergency or a longer
 term closure but we're very proud that we again, as
 the Commissioner said, we track it on a very, very

fine basis and our average open rate is plus or minus 90 percent on every day, 7 days a week.

CHAIRPERSON HANKERSON: Thank you. Former Council Member Justin Brennan passed a local law that all agencies must coordinate with each other to perform any work prior to repaving of a road. Uh, to what extent does DOT coordinate with parks uh when repaving? Are there any issues around repaving and trees?

TRICIA SHIMAMURA: So, I'll look to our Acting First Deputy Commissioner to give a little bit of detail here. You know I think that the truth is that we're talking to our sister agencies every day if not every hour. Some coordination is happening. One in particular, which I think has to do specifically around paving, is maybe a state of good repair, which I'd like to take the opportunity to kind of discuss or have our Acting First Deputy Commissioner discuss. But when it comes to tree work, this is something that happens at a staff level regularly. Actually the former Council - the Council Member who was here before, uhm knows this pretty well but we you know often times parks won't plant a tree uh, in an area because we have kind of confirmation from another

1 agency that they are about ready to dig up that area
2 for another project or something like that. We do
3 this type of clearance and coordination regularly,
4 all the time.

5 When it comes to particular sidewalk pavings and
6 replacement and that sort of work, we actually have a
7 great working relationship with DOT, in particular.
8 Our Acting First Deputy Commissioner kind of leads a
9 lot of that work and so we're in close coordination
10 with them but I'll let you talk a little bit about
that.

11 MARK FOCHT: Yeah, I think for two things. First
12 of all for paving, we work very closely with DOT on
13 when they're repaving parks assets. That we have a
14 great working relationship with them. They've done
15 what we call multipurpose paved areas, large asphalt
16 areas. They've done parking lots. They've done park
17 roads for us. Obviously that's done at our request,
18 so very close working relationship and then we're
19 into the 8th year of a relationship with their
20 Sidewalk Replacement Program. Uh where we provide
the funding and the sites and they come in through
their contractors and their partnership with DDC to
replace concrete sidewalks adjacent to parks.

So, both of those are very powerful relationships, two agencies working very closely together and in both cases really because they're generally capitally funded, getting very good work done, very inexpensively and very quickly.

CHAIRPERSON HANKERSON: The next question, it's somewhat of a follow up I think to the last question that I asked, uhm, there has been an increase in hiring contractors and seasonal workers in the past, the last ten years. What barriers does your department face in hiring full time union eligible staff?

TRICIA SHIMAMURA: Yeah, thank you for the question. I think that again, uhm to be clear, my understanding is that we, like the work that our contractors do does not - is not the same work that our in house team does. They're kind of specific scopes of work, the contractor work particularly with trees has to do with your sort of uhm, regular kind of pruning type and that sort of work whereas our work that we have in house is really more specialized in terms of like the type of technique and the technical skill level needed to address those concerns. Uhm, this is something that's still

1 relatively new for us to try to have those in house
2 teams and making sure that we have kind of discreet
3 and specific portfolios of work that we're doing and
4 making sure that they are complementary to each
5 other. So, we're still looking at this but it is a
6 way the contracted work is a way for us to be able to
7 still meet those mandates, still meet those best
8 practices when it comes to tree health, when it comes
9 to taking care of our canopy uh and when it comes to
10 kind of doing - rolling out this planting. Uhm, the
11 amount of time, I know that there's often times been
12 critique of how long it's going to take us to do this
13 entire planting of the city and assessment of the
14 city but in 9 years time, to be able to do that in
15 that 9 year time, does mean having kind of the work
16 in complement with like the contractors that we're
17 working with.

18 So, it - that's how we're going to meet those
19 targets but I do, uh, you know I think that - I
20 appreciate the question because it does go towards
21 the idea of thinking through what our - what building
out our own ranks would look like and certainly again
going back to the larger question of parks staff
where we're happy to do - we know that we have

responsibilities and we have mandates to uphold and kind of goal post to hit.

We're very happy to do this work with the resources that we have. Where we're given more resources, we'd happily receive them. Uhm, but for the time being with what we have with the kind of goal in mind of serving New Yorkers, making sure that they all have plantable trees in the next 10 = uh, in the next 9 years, this is - this is -

CHAIRPERSON HANKERSON: I mean, would you say it's for you all, is it more ideal to have uh, certain responsibilities contracted out versus actually having in-house staff that would handle those - and it doesn't have to just do with tree pruning but just whatever work is contracted out. Those responsibilities.

TRICIA SHIMAMURA: Yeah, I think it really, it really depends on the type of work and to go away from trees, we also have things like technology contracts that we have that are doing some of this work. We have uhm, other you know a kind of wide range of work, so I think it really does depend on where we're thinking this through but uhm, I don't know if you uhm, since we have our Acting First

Deputy Commissioner here, if you want to talk about the IT side of things but -

CHAIRPERSON HANKERSON: I mean, we don't have to go into the IT side. Has there been a full assessment of the entire agency's contracts to see where certain work can be moved in house rather than contracting it out to uh, these different organizations, uh, these different companies?

MARK FOCHT: I can't say that there's been a full assessment but we talk project by project or type of work by type of work and I think as the Commissioner referenced earlier or very recently in her remarks, generally what we find is that bringing those resources in house, bringing that work in house, will be more expensive than - more costly to the city than outsourcing it or having a private contractor do it. Largely because one of the reasons is, if you bring the source in house, you have to buy all the equipment and when you're talking about tree work, you're talking about very expensive trucks. You have to buy a lot of equipment to outfit those staff members. Uhm, you have to have a building or a place for them to work out of. So, these are costs that

are all built into the costs that are passed on to the private contractor.

So, I can't say we've looked at every contract but I could say we've looked at specific types of work that are done by private contractors.

CHAIRPERSON HANKERSON: So, I guess to make it more specific or just to hone it in on uh, the pruning inspector and pruning work, what level of headcount would be required to bring in house the block pruning inspector and the uh, folks that do pruning work?

TRICIA SHIMAMURA: You know we'd have to look at this more but what I'd say is the inspector piece is just one component and oftentimes, I don't actually know. I'd look to our Assistant Commissioner to confirm this but like, inspectors, uh, when I have just recently experienced the inspector pieces during the storms, when we have 2,000, 311 calls saying a down tree is there. We will send, typically send our inspector out first to go assess what type of - like the severity of the work, the type of response needed, kind of where this is going to fall, the amount of manpower we need in order to respond to those pieces.

That's not necessarily the same thing for I think our block pruning program, which is just more of your routine maintenance of these trees on a 7 year basis and certainly we you know I think that like our entire forestry division is something that, that, that you know is frankly the work is only - is only achieved as our Acting First Deputy Commissioner said, through this complement of contracts and in house crews. So, I'll let you - our AC for forestry kind of talk more about the role of inspector specifically but just to kind of clarify uhm - I'm not sure if actually like the inspectors are needed for block pruning.

BEN OSBORNE: Sure, thanks Commissioner and thank you Council Member. So, yes-

CHAIRPERSON HANKERSON: Musical chairs.

BEN OSBORNE: Yeah, it's no problem. We do inspect each of our trees using consultants prior to performing block pruning and while those consultants do receive the same basic level of training that our in house inspectors, our foresters do in tree risk assessment, the work is far more routine.

Uhm, and so it's not uncommon for folks who have worked as consultant inspectors to eventually seek

1 employment with the Parks Department as they gain
2 experience. Uhm, but as the Commissioner said, that
3 the scopes of work of the block pruning, you know
4 contracted work, whether it's the uhm, inspection or
5 the work itself, uh, are complementary to that of the
6 work that our in-house crews do, which is more
7 varied, more diverse and ultimately like a kind of
8 deeper technical skill set that gets devolved over
9 time.

9 CHAIRPERSON HANKERSON: Thank you for that and
10 final question from the Council Member. Uhm, how
11 many years long is the capital project backlog?
12 How many additional landscape architects does the
13 Parks Department need to hire to eliminate the
14 backlog?

14 TRICIA SHIMAMURA: Yeah, we have uh, thank you
15 for the question. We have 500 projects currently
16 right now that are either in design, procurement or
17 construction. Uh, for this upcoming fiscal year, we
18 have 91 projects that are kind of lined up to go into
19 that process and I believe that out of those 90, 91,
20 there are going to be 24 of those that will - that
21 there's a likelihood that we will not be able to
begin them in this Fiscal year, so uhm, we probably

The question around specific landscape architects, it's a harder question to respond to because every project does not require a landscape architect. Some of those projects are PRB's, right with public restroom buildings or require other staff but uh, right now, 500 in the process, 91 slated to start in this next year - oh, 91 that are waiting to start. Of those 91, 24 are likely to wait until the next fiscal year to start.

Alright, I want to remind members of the public that this is a formal government proceeding and that decorum shall be observed at all times. As such, members of the public shall remain silent at all times. The witness table is reserved for people who

wish to testify. No video recording or photography is allowed from the witness table.

Further, members of the public may not present audio or video recording as testimony but may submit transcripts of such recordings to the Sergeant at Arms to the left and the right of the room uhm for inclusion in the hearing record. If you wish to speak at today's hearing, please fill out an appearance card with the Sergeant at Arms and wait to be recognized. When recognized, you will have 2 minutes to speak on today's hearing topic, The FY27 Parks Preliminary Budget.

With that, we're going to call our first panel. If I mispronounce your name, my apologies. Just please correct me at the mic. Uhm, Dejon Williams, President of Local 299, DC 37, Ralph Baselice, Vice President of Local 983, DC 37, Marshall Lee Wehmer, DC 37, Local 375, Reyna Wang. Okay, okay.

Okay, are you all staying? Oh, I appreciate that. I really, no, let me take a moment to say that. I really appreciate that. In several other Committees, we've seen agencies leave uh as soon as their testimony was completed, so thank you. Thank you for listening to the public and the advocates and

union. Thank you so much, really. Alright. No, okay, alright, we're going to get started. Uhm, start to your left.

DEJON WILLIAMS: Good afternoon all. My name is Dejon Williams. I'm Local President of 299. Excuse me, representing recreation workers in the Parks Department and today our concern is retention, which we all talked about a little earlier. Some years ago before COVID, we were slated to receive about 200 employees. Then COVID hit, those employees never really, it never transpired into jobs. We service different programs for Seniors through toddlers, Swim for Life, Kids in Motion, Puppeteers, Senior Fitness, Community Festivals, Movies under the Sun, Afterschool programs, summer camps, all throughout the city.

The shortage in backfilling is also an issue. When we have members who are promoted, those recreation center staff, they're not replaced due to the hiring freeze that have been on for some time now. Uhm, with 7 facilities closed at the moment, those staff have been maneuvered out. We have several facilities starting to be reopened. Uhm, and our concern is where are those staff going to come

1 from now that they're in other locations with the
2 brand new facilities that are opening. Those have
3 budgets for staffing but what are we going to do for
4 those other staff locations who you know those staff
5 people were spread out within boroughs?

6 Every summer, we get about 200 to 250 summer
7 hires and Kids in Motion summer camp, those are great
8 programs that we run. But again, sometimes those
9 numbers aren't all the way to the 200 and 250 due to
low salaries. Uhm, which started about \$20 an hour.

10 So, those are some of our concerns for staffing
11 areas - okay, those are our concerns for staffing
12 those areas and uhm, just making sure we have great
programs being run throughout the Parks Department.

13 CHAIRPERSON HANKERSON: I want to say thank you
14 to you and your members for the work that you do.

15 DEJON WILLIAMS: Thank you.

16 CHAIRPERSON HANKERSON: As someone who uh, was a
17 camp director, uhm, with an agency that had a license
18 agreement with Parks Department, uh, one of the most
19 difficult jobs in the world but is still under the
most rewarding as well.

20 DEJON WILLIAMS: Correct.
21

CHAIRPERSON HANKERSON: I do want to ask you one question.

DEJON WILLIAMS: Yes.

CHAIRPERSON HANKERSON: Because of the shortage, have your members at times had to work additional hours or cover shifts?

DEJON WILLIAMS: Yes, they are usually compensated comp time or over time, depending upon what the budgeting system is looking like for that borough. But yes, there are typically there are times where they do do overtime.

CHAIRPERSON HANKERSON: Thank you.

DEJON WILLIAMS: Thank you.

RALPH BASELICE: Good afternoon everyone. My name is Ralph Baselice, DC 37, Local 983. We represent a number of titles. I'm here today on behalf of the APSW's, the Associate Park Service Workers, the Urban Park Rangers, the Park Enforcement Officers, as well as the city's seasonal aid. So, I'll try and be quick. These titles, not just because they elected me to represent them, are the backbones of the Parks Department. The APSW's, all the things that management spoke about today, those 9,500 trees that were planted, there is 4 APSW's

1 assigned to them. They operate all the heavy duty
2 equipment within the Parks Department. They're
3 required to carry a commercial drivers license. They
4 remove all the garbage. They plant the trees. The
5 beach rakes, all of the beach operations. Those
6 beaches wouldn't be able to function in addition to
7 all the other property without the APSW's. Those
8 windle wagons that everybody loves, they operate
9 those as well. So, the 1 percent is not enough. We
10 want 2 percent but we'll start with 1 percent. Uhm,
11 and now we'll go over to the UPR's. As the
12 Commissioner stated, she did a great job of
13 identifying all of the titles. I am a park
14 enforcement officer by title.

15 We all take a UPR exam. We're required to pass a
16 16-week academy. We have to pass a pretty thorough
17 investigative background by the police department to
18 be special patrolmen in order to make arrests, issue
19 summonses. The beaches, in addition to everything
20 the park enforcement officers do to preserve and
21 protect, is free recreational space at the beaches,
when there aren't enough lifeguards, which happens
more often than not. They close a section of beach.
They put up red flags. It's the Park Enforcement

Officers job to make sure the public is educated not to go in there obviously and you know horrible things happen if you swim without lifeguards.

So, I'm just scratching across the surface. Uhm, and then we have the Urban Park Rangers who do the educational. Not to put them on the spot. There's one in the back there, Harry Aguilar(SP?). He can also testify. They basically do free educational programs all throughout New York City. Pop up programs, camping programs, educational about wildlife. Uh, trees so on and so forth.

Lastly, I'll be quick, the city's seasonal aides go to maintenance as well as security. They are also at the beaches and pools keeping them clean, keeping them safe. With PEP, they do a security of all the pools.

To sum everything up gentlemen, all these services are one of the few things that are left free in New York City. Parks is free. The rec center, and under, you're allowed to sign up for free, the beaches, the pools, they're free. The Ranger programs are free. The budget is already in place. This current mayoral administration spoke a lot about free stuff. Instead of reinventing the wheel, just

1 fund the stuff that's already there. Not because I
2 get more members out of it but these are free
3 services to New Yorkers that their care strapped
4 parents are being congestively priced out of. They
5 are paying for garbage cans. Our members and I could
6 speak for all of us, the rec centers as well, which
7 is staffed by the young members, these are free
8 services provided to New Yorkers. So, please give us
9 the one percent. Give us more and thank you and I
need a Red Bull.

10 CHAIRPERSON HANKERSON: I do have a follow up
11 question for you, if that's okay. What's the morale
like amongst your members?

12 RALPH BASELICE: Uhm, it's- you know it's
13 positive. It depends on the day. You know, ask me
14 on a hot day where it's 100 degrees at Rockaway
15 Beach. you know everything could always be better
16 but I could speak for our titles. I mean, uh, we
17 need to retain members more. The salaries obviously
18 need to go up. The APSW's, you know they're required
19 to carry CDL's, which is a major responsibility.
20 They see Amazon, they see UPS, they see Sanitation
21 making these crazy salaries. That comes up a lot.
The Park Ranger salary has gotten better over the

course of my 20 year career but things could always be better and it would help at retention and training all these individuals which costs money. So you would probably save money there if you know, if everything could be bumped up just a little bit.

CHAIRPERSON HANKERSON: Thank you.

RALPH BASELICE: You got it. Thank you guys.

REYNA WANG: Hi my name is Reyna. I am a Park Tree Planting Forester at New York City Parks. I'm here representing DC 37 as the President of Chapter 7 of Local 375. The full service technical guild. I wanted to speak a little bit about the staffing shortages we have in forestry. In the Tree Planting Team, it's an immense challenge. I mean ever since I started in 2023, we've had staffing shortages with a team of about 20 people survey every street and every park in New York City. Uhm, you know we had people regularly managing multiple million dollar contracts. I am currently stepping in to help another team manage a contract because of staffing shortages and I'd imagine this work will only become more intense with the Neighborhood Tree Planting program where we would be required to plant every available space every 9 years. You know a lot of people have up

1 concerns about the sidewalk. This is obviously a big
2 concern for members of the public. Uhm, and really
3 the only way we can get sidewalks repaired quickly
4 from tree damage is to expand staffing of the Trees
5 and Sidewalks team.

6 In particular, we need to be hiring construction
7 project managers for this role because this team has
8 one of the highest turnover rates because the
9 contract management is extremely complex and uhm, the
10 members of this team don't feel fairly compensated.
11 And I would say the biggest staffing shortages are
12 probably for true maintenance. You know but really
13 like to advocate for the continuation of the Climber,
14 Pruner, Apprenticeship program because that's the
15 only way we're able to guarantee an adequate stock of
16 staff to do essential tree maintenance work,
17 alongside the Borough Foresters to be able to keep
18 our city safe to be able to bike.

19 The Commissioner mentioned, our goal of this 30
20 percent canopy, which tree preservation is actually
21 one of the most important parts of and I think that's
underlooked. Uhm and you know currently non union
contractors are used to fill a lot of these gaps and
uhm, their quality of work and their speed of work is

typically not on par with Parks workers because our training is centralized.

So, yeah, I just wanted to point out some of these - the ways the staffing shortages are affecting our work day to day.

CHAIRPERSON HANKERSON: Thank you and would you say with the apprenticeship program that the individuals who have gone through the - well, completely the program, uhm, does it seem just from you know your conversations with your members, that they're likely to stay with the department, just from conversation. I know I'm asking you to kind of speculate but -

REYNA WANG: Yeah, the climber, pruners, I actually don't represent in my local. They have their own local but in the conversations with them, it seems to be a good job. Like, I think they you know would like more high pay of course, like a lot of other titles do but uhm, I mean, it's an incredible opportunity to get a very unique training, most are being paid during the training. And so, I think that's something that's really necessary for both the career development of people in New York City. We don't have a lot of opportunities to get

CHAIRPERSON HANKERSON: Understood, thank you.

This is true in who designs our green spaces, who maintains them and who effectively controls them. In parks forestry prior to contractors completed regular maintenance, pruning of all city street trees and parkland trees and how much of our maintenance work, as the Commissioner explained. It also includes stump removals and also forest pest management of contracts at which I oversee for Manhattan. However, the contractor and again do not have the same safety

standards, do not have the same training and they also do cost the city more on average. In house forestry is about two thirds the cost. Uhm, parks should be doing a lot of this work in house and we can, whether that be in house tree planting or like the City of Chicago is able to do in house block pruning of all of their city trees.

Uhm, we have one, reached the goals of the urban forest plan by achieving 30 percent canopy by 2035. We should be moving more of this work to in-house and not spending so much on these expensive contracts. This is also in line with making sure we meet that budget gap that the city is currently facing of \$5.4 billion. There is an opportunity for the city to be able to save money on forestry operations while expanding them by moving this contract funding to in house workforce development and permanent line funding of forestry, landscape architect, engineer staff in the Parks Department.

And just as a constituent services thing, if you want your constituents residences you know pruned, you want the reduced of flooding, the heat island effect inside your districts, uhm, increase the economic activity of storefronts since shade does do

that. Ensure every New Yorker can have a safe, equitable, enjoyable experience under the shade of your urban canopy. We have to fund public works for public orders.

CHAIRPERSON HANKERSON: Thank you. Alright, thank you all. I'm sorry. This is the Committee Council. I'm the member, I'm the one listening to you. Thank you.

Alright, our next panel is going to be Maximus Barton, Irena Goldstein, Adam Ganzer, and Heather Lubov. Sorry Adam, yeah, I'm like I know this doesn't seem right. Is this the testimony? Thank you. Thank you. Alright, you can begin. We'll start to the left, to my left.

IRENA GOLDSTEIN: Okay, good afternoon. My name is Irena Goldstein. Uhm, I was raised and currently live in City Council District 39. Uhm, so I grew up in New York City. uhm, I come here today as a New Yorker, a union member and a parks worker. I specifically work for uhm, the NRG, the Natural Resource Group uhm, that works to preserve and protect our uhm, forever wild lens, which are what we think of as like a traditional forest. Uhm, right now the Mayor is proposing to cut funds to parks.

1 This means that people who have dedicated their lives
2 to the environmental stewardship in their communities
3 will probably continue to receive cultural wages, \$24
4 an hour, try raising your family on that wage. This
5 means that workers will probably continue to have
6 long commutes because they do not earn enough to live
7 near the parks they maintain or there are not enough
8 parks jobs in their local communities.

9 Right now, I commute about an hour to work. Uhm,
10 and some of my fellow co-workers are commuting an
11 hour, an hour and 15. Uhm, and this means that the
12 city will probably not make people who have seasonal
13 positions funded through Play Fair, permanent staff,
14 allowing people to live with job precarity. Uhm,
15 from the federal to a local level, when governments
16 need to tighten their budget belts, politicians cut
17 funding to parks.

18 Uhm, I believe this is because of this labor - I
19 believe this is because park labor is invisible to
20 the public. People think working in our public green
21 spaces is cool, niche, and an enjoyable alternative
to an office job but these laborers use their bodies
to maintain park lands, which are placed to upboost
our mental health force to capture carbon. Much

needed third places and wetlands to mitigate the effects of flooding from storms charged by climate change and who are the gardeners, foresters and ecologists?

Uhm, they are just people with a lot of uhm, okay, sorry and then yeah, they're people who know the difference between - they can ID AN oak tree and maple, in the winter, in the summer, in the fall and have knowledge that they have developed over years.

Uhm, so yeah, please don't cut funding for our parks, for our planet, and for our workers. Yeah.

CHAIRPERSON HANKERSON: Thank you.

MAX BARTON: Max Barton, Laborers Local 1010, union rep, 2,500 members. We build New York City's infrastructure. New York City's parks and our city trees provide a critical canopy or a natural infrastructure that mitigates heat, reduces storm water runoff and improves our air quality. The city has set an ambitious goal to increase this canopy to 30 percent by 2035.

New Yorkers are struggling with affordability. The city is trying to address affordability, all while doing their best to respond to this budget deficit without cutting services. Especially in our

beloved parks, which offer free recreation and low cost or free programming for all New Yorkers to enjoy.

This Administration is looking for ways to improve government efficiency and approach support and being creative on how we achieve this. One way to do this that has been proven from time and time again to be efficient is project labor agreements. For decades, project labor agreements have provided consistent labor standards across all barriers ensuring that contractors complete efficiency and quality rather than the lowest possible labor cost. They also support workforce training, safety standards and predictable staffing for complex public works.

As reported by the New York City Mayor's Office of Contract Services, the City of New York and the Building Construction Trades Council of Greater New York have been parties to a various project labor agreement since 2009. These PLA's have been an important component of the city's complexion and delivery of public works by establishing consistent works rules across construction projects, reducing the administrative burden and cost on construction

agencies and providing opportunities for city residents and businesses.

The recent PLA's have also increased opportunities that add flexibility for minority and women owned business enterprises MWBE's, allowing the workforce to gain valuable experience on city projects and build their companies and provide good paying career opportunities for low income communities. The city has multiple active PLA's but absent from this inclusion in New York Parks is forestry work.

An oversight hearing held in September 2025, that focused on the Parks Department contracting practices and vendor accountability testimony provided by Cornell University School of Industrial Labor Relations, found promising results from these contractors operating on private labor agreements and in recent parks database is tree planting contractors performed by union firms demonstrated faster planting completion and higher short term survivability rates.

My time is over, so I'll end it right there.

HEATHER LUBOV: Good afternoon. I am Heather Lubov, Executive Director of City Parks Foundation, a nonprofit that delivers free programming, reaching

300,000 New Yorkers, enlivening our city's parks and creating social cohesion and community. Through Summer Stage, the Puppet Mobile, sports lessons, and environmental education, our free programs encourage people to use their parks. Through Partnerships for Parks, a public, private collaboration with NYC Parks, we support more than 420 grassroots volunteer groups and 28,000 volunteers who care for parks.

Through the New York City Green Fund, we raise and regrant \$2.5 million annually to support groups that are programming and maintaining parks. Central to our work is the Parks Equity Initiative, which we are asking the Council to expand after years of flat funding. This initiative pays for the staff who engage volunteers, provide technical assistance, distribute grants and build stewardship capacity, particularly in environmental justice communities. Every dollar invested through the initiative multiplies into more volunteer hours, community capacity and greener neighborhoods.

Expansion of funding will not only help us to continue supporting the groups that we work with, but will also help us implement the pilot work we started on the Urban Forest Plan to identify and train tree

stewardship groups, increase our tree canopy and support climate goals.

Ultimately though, our work really depends on a well resourced parks department, which is why the preliminary budget is so concerning. We're genuinely excited to work with an Administration that has an ambitious and aggressive agenda. But in its current form, the preliminary budget does not match that ambition. It proposes millions of dollars less than last year's adopted budget, eliminates staffing lines and fails to protect the 276 parks workers set to lose their jobs at the end of the fiscal year.

The department has been cut to the bone and staffing is inadequate in every possible way. For maintenance and forestry to permitting, from legal and capital planning to recreation, it becomes harder and harder to do our work when the agency can barely do its own. New Yorkers deserve a thriving public realm. Please add funding for the Play Fair Coalitions agenda and expand the Parks Equity Initiative. Thank you.

ADAM GANSER: Hi there. My name is Adam Ganser, I'm the Executive Director of New Yorkers for Parks. I want to thank everybody for sticking around. Thank

1 you very much. I have a long thing that I want to
2 read but I'm not going to read it. I just want to
3 talk about where the parks stand on a staffing
4 perspective.

5 The 276 positions that we're talking about, these
6 are one shot positions. The idea that half of the
7 ranger team or one-third of the PEP Enforcement
8 Patrol team, is funded with one shot deals. These
9 are colleagues of full time staff and they don't know
10 if they're going to have jobs at the end of the year.
11 These are Play Fair positions that we got many, many
12 years ago and yes, they have been restored year after
13 year but it's no way to run the agency and they were
14 never meant to be permanent.

15 The second thing is the hiring freeze. The
16 hiring freeze has been terrible. Yet to get rid of
17 the hiring freeze, the agency is being asked to
18 eliminate vacant positions. That's another
19 significant loss to the Parks Department. That's
20 just not negotiating that, those are baseline
21 positions that are just going to disappear. And in
22 many ways this Administration has been dealt a bad
23 hand. Yes, the headcount is the same as last year.
24 Yes, the budget is the same as last year but that

1 does not take into account the nearly 600 positions
2 that were lost from three years ago.

3 Whether it's parks workers, people that are
4 working managerial or Admin jobs within the agency,
5 forestry we've heard about, capital projects teams,
6 you've heard nothing but complaints from other
7 Council Members. We all want to work together but
8 unless this administration recognizes the previous
9 losses, they're not going to be able to advocate for
10 future gains. We need 1 percent for parks. We need
11 a plan to get there.

12 CHAIRPERSON HANKERSON: Thank you. We're going
13 to call our next panel. Uh, Caroline Harris,
14 Elizabeth O'Connor, Sophie Steubbaum, Steubbaum sorry,
15 Christina Taylor. Uh yes, thank you.

16 Alright we can begin.

17 CAROLINE HARRIS: Thank you very much. My name
18 is Caroline Harris. I am a Land Use Attorney from
19 Goldman Harris. I'm representing myself and other
20 seniors who live in my neighborhood.

21 I want to start by saying this has been an
amazing hearing and I have a huge compliment for the
Commissioner for in such a short time being
Commissioner being able to absorb the breads and

signifi- you know all the work that you have to do.
I know you've been with the agency a long time but
still, it's an extraordinary job that you're doing.
Thank you.

Having said that, I also strongly support the
increase in the budget for parks. Parks are the
primary resource for health and welfare for our
residents and the environment. In addition to its
other priorities, the department should prioritize
active recreation for adults, especially seniors in
smaller local parks. New York City has the second
highest rates of dementia in the country with the
Bronx, Brooklyn, Manhattan and Queens having the
highest rates of dementia in the country.

Not Staten Island, maybe because they have so
many parks, per person, per capita. Medical studies
show a remarkably high correlation between dementia
and a sedentary lifestyle. Sitting on a bench as
seniors have usually been relegated to, instead of
having active recreation, is also critical for bone
and heart health as well as preventing dementia.
It's not only a personal issue for many families,
mine experienced a senior with dementia. It is a
public health issue and it's also an issue of

immigration, finance, socioeconomic benefits and other health issues.

New York City's parks, local parks can be a key tool in endeavoring to stem the tide of and to prevent further dementia. For example, the proposed design of my local park in Manhattan includes a dog area to be - to the exclusion of an area for active recreation, seniors and adults. Yet both uses could easily and rationally be provided without substantial if any delay on procurement or parks recreation and final design. Commissioner said just today, we should be judged not by how we treat our most vulnerable. We should be judged by how we treat our most vulnerable. That includes not only the disabled, who were discussed by Council Member Schulman but it should also include seniors.

Parks can be a leader in a prevention of this growing senior health crisis by facilitating the active recreational use of local parks by seniors and adults of all ages. It would not require a huge financial investment, just thoughtful design. Restore Parks Department's funds, push for the 1 percent and don't forget grandma and grandpa or forsake your own long term health. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON HANKERSON: If you don't mind me asking, what's the park that you're referring to?

CAROLINE HARRIS: Rufford Park in Manhattan, Community Board 8.

CHAIRPERSON HANKERSON: Thank you.

CAROLINE HARRIS: Thank you.

SOPHIE STEUBAUM: Good afternoon Chair Hankerson. My name is Sophie Steubaum and I'm the New York Program and Operations Coordinator for Trust for Public Land. A national nonprofit that connects everyone to the outdoors and as a member of the Play Fair for Parks Coalition. Living in New York is exciting and it's hard. The city has a major affordability crisis and the struggle to live here isn't just about housing. It's also about quality of life. Families raising children in a small apartment wonder, where can our kids play without adding another line to the budget. The answer is in the city's nearly 2,000 parks. They represent one of those amazing tech free environments where you get to feel the earth, the sun, and the wind but parks also also need care, people to take care of them. The budget cuts \$33 million compared to last year's budget, 276 positions will be lost. We need to

1 restore those positions and move the Parks budget up
2 1 percent of the city's budget. That's what it takes
3 to make these parks thrive.

4 Another major opportunity for outdoor play spaces
5 is New York City school yards. We strongly support
6 Council Member Brewer's position that school yards
7 remain open after school hours and on weekends.
8 These spaces exist in every neighborhood, including
9 the ones with the fewest parks. Opening parks means
10 children have somewhere to run near their home, the
11 parents have somewhere to exhale, and neighbors can
12 sit in the shade of an activated and joyful place.

13 Mayor Mamdani, we see you. Many of your videos
14 are filmed outside. You clearly love these spaces.
15 Now it's time to fund them. And to the Council, we
16 urge you to include 33 million more than what's in
17 the budget, just to restore what was baselined last
18 year. Give the people of New York what they want,
19 what they need, invest in our parks. Thank you.

20 CHAIRPERSON HANKERSON: Thank you.

21 CHRISTINA TAYLOR: Good afternoon. I'm Christina
Taylor, I'm the Deputy Director for the Van Cortlandt
Park Alliance and I'm testifying on behalf of the
CPA's Board and Staff and as members of the Play Fair

1 for Parks Coalition. We thank you so much for
2 holding this important hearing. In the city battling
3 record in quality extreme heating and flooding,
4 declining quality of life, parks are not a luxury,
5 they are essential infrastructure. Yet for decades,
6 parks have been underfunded, understaffed and non
7 maintained. In the last 4 years alone, the Parks
8 Department has faced continued disinvestment, causing
9 our park system to tumble in national rating
rankings.

10 While most major cities dedicate 2 to 5 percent
11 of their budgets to parks. New York City has been
12 stuck at just .6 percent turning the nation in nearly
13 every park metric. We were extra disappointed to see
14 the Mayor's Preliminary Budget for NYC Parks at \$33
15 million less than last year's adopted budget. I wish
16 I could say we're surprised but unfortunately this
seems to be a continuing pattern.

17 While it's great that the hiring freeze will
18 finally be eliminated. It comes with a loss of
19 nearly 100 unfilled staffing lines. In addition, 600
20 lines were lost in the Adams Administration through
21 cuts and hiring freeze. While New York City Parks is

asked to do more and more each year. New York City Parks has lost 700 positions in the last five years.

The budget also fails to address the nearly 300 parks workers set to lose their jobs at the end of the fiscal year because they were not baselined. We had hoped the mayor would put an end to a budget dance but here we are dancing once again. These 300 positions need to be baselined. Year after year, NYC Park staff does more with less. The staff is already stretched too thin. They are tired and frustrated and so are we. The preliminary budget maintains a status quo of historic underfunding, leaving communities without the safe, accessible green spaces they deserve. The time is now. The Mayor and City Council need to work together to dedicate 1 percent of the city's budget to parks. There's no substitute for public dollars for parks. In reality, parks deserves and needs much more than one percent but let's start there.

Parks are essential, they should be funded and cared for accordingly. Thank you.

CHARPERSON HANKERSON: Thank you. Uhm, while you were speaking, I asked our Committee Counsel if there was an existing report. Uh, that compares New York

City to other big cities. Uhm, and I was informed that INAUDIBLE has that. Would you mind sharing that? Uhm, our team can get your-

CHRISTINA TAYLOR: Sure, yeah, it's called Park Score and I believe it comes out in May but I would be happy to follow up with more information, yeah, for sure.

CHAIRPERSON HANKERSON: Thank you.

CHRISTINA TAYLOR: No, thank you.

CHAIRPERSON HANKERSON: Uh, our next panel consists of Elsie Soto, Merritt Birnbaum, Tami Lin Moges, and Morgan Monaco. And again, I apologize if I've mispronounced your name.

Okay, you can begin. Good to see you again as well.

MORGAN MONACO: Nice to see you, Council Member. Good afternoon to Council Member Hankerson and Members of the Committee. I'm Morgan Monaco, I'm the President of the Prospect Alliance and proud member of the Play Fair for Parks Coalition. Prospect Park is Brooklyn's backyard, hosting over 10 million visitors annually but a backyard is only as good as its upkeep. Currently the city's budget is failing New Yorkers who rely on these spaces.

Mayor Mamdani's FY27 preliminary budget is \$33 million less than last year's. Instead of moving towards the 1 percent for parks we were promised, we are hollowing out our green infrastructure. Since 2023, we've lost 600 staffing lines, this budget would eliminate 100 more just to end a hiring freeze. Furthermore, 276 of our dedicated workers are in positions dependent on temporary one shot funding lines. These workers are the backbone of our parks. They must be baselined and they must be baselined now.

The lack of operational funding creates a maintenance gap that wastes taxpayer money. There are ample capital funds but not the requisite maintenance funds to care for what we build and therefore are rebuilding capital assets, rather than have them last through their useful lifespan. We ask for the additional 460 second shift workers to keep 400 high use parks and restrooms clean. Prospect park welcomes 10 million users each year, most visitors come to the park in the afternoon hours. They should be able to access a clean park just like morning visitors.

1 This underfunding is dangerous. In just 3 years,
2 Prospect Park has faced devastating flash floods and
3 a severe brush fire. We cannot build a resilient
4 city if we do not invest in the hardworking New
5 Yorkers who manage our forests and keep our parks
6 clean and safe. Let's make sure the Administration's
7 affordability agenda is accomplished by funding our
8 parks and providing New Yorkers the quality, green
9 spaces they deserve. I urge the Council to restore
10 these cuts, baseline our essential workers and
11 finally put NYC Parks on the path to 1 percent of the
12 city budget. Thank you so much.

12 CHAIRPERSON HANKERSON: Thank you. Uh, can you
13 speak to some of the pressures that such budget cuts
14 have impacted conservancies?

15 MORGAN MONACO: Yeah, so we are - yeah, so we're
16 proud uhm - I'm also a member of the Leadership
17 Committee of the Parks and Open Spaces partners, POS
18 Coalition and we are proud partners with NYC Parks.
19 We raise private dollars to help supplement city
20 services. Many of us do direct service in terms of
21 caring for our forest, our woodlands, do trash pickup
and some capital work.

1 This is essential. We don't do this in a vacuum.
2 We rely on the city and the city's budget to be able
3 to maintain our parks in partnership. So, when
4 there's a decrease in funding for NYC Parks, that is
5 a pressure on the private sector and we believe in
6 this Administration's commitment to all working New
7 Yorkers, regardless of whether there's a conservancy
8 or not and therefore are urging the Council to join
9 in our efforts to make sure that there's 1 percent
 for parks.

10 CHAIRPERSON HANKERSON: Thank you. Thank you.

11 TAMI LIN MOGES: Good afternoon. My name is Tami
12 Lin Moges. I am the Director of the Nature
13 Conservancies New York City program. The Nature
14 Conservancy is the world's largest conservation
15 organization. In New York City, we convene the 200
16 member Force for All NYC Coalition that works to
17 increase investment in the urban forest and to expand
18 tree canopy covered to 30 percent citywide by 2035
19 equitably. The Nature Conservancy is also a proud
20 member of the Play Fair Coalition.

21 I am here to urge the Mayor and City Council to
 finally dedicate 1 percent of the City Parks budget

to New York City Parks. Sorry, 1 percent of the city budget to New York City Parks.

Starting with \$150 million in capital and expense fundings for the New York City urban forest starting in 2027. These funds would restore and baseline critical New York City Parks workforce, expand forestry and natural areas staffing, anticipate implementation of the urban forest plan across city agencies.

With the city's first ever urban forest plan about to launch this spring. This is a defining moment. This ten year plan charts a path to reach 30 percent canopy citywide and foster the engagement across city agencies and community stakeholders. But it cannot be implemented without restoring expanding the very workforce that sustains the urban forest.

Despite managing over half of the tree canopy in New York City, New York City Parks has lost more than 600 staff positions since 2023 with another 100 on the chopping block this year as a condition of the hiring freeze. These cuts directly affect urban forest, tree health and livability of New York City. We commend the city's previous commitments to parks and urban forest including Mayor Mamdani's pledge to

doubling the parks budget. However, the preliminary budgets proposal cutting \$33 million from parks is not in line with that commitment and does not set up the urban forest plan for success.

This budget also fails to safeguard the 276 park workers set to lose their jobs at the end of this fiscal year. These parks positions must be switched from annual one shot City Council funding to baseline roles ensuring operational stability.

I will submit a longer written testimony but thank you so much to Chair Hankerson and members of this Committee for concerning the vital role of parks and urban forest to New Yorkers as we continue to work on the city budget.

CHAIRPERSON HANKERSON: You did that in under two minutes. Thank you.

MERRITT BIRNBAUM: Good afternoon Chair Hankerson and thank you for holding this hearing. I am Merritt Birnbaum, President and CEO of Riverside Park Conservancy and also a Co-Chair of the Parks and Open Space Partners and a proud member of the Play Fair Coalition.

I'd like to share a quote by the 19th Century Naturalist and Founder of the National Parks

1 Movement, John Mirror. Everybody needs beauty as
2 well as bread. Places to play in and pray in. Where
3 nature may heal and give strength to body and soul
4 alike. These words could not be more relevant today.
5 Access to nature is not a luxury. It is a basic need
6 and it should be available to everyone. We have an
7 opportunity right now to bring our park system back
8 to glory, to give New Yorkers beauty, wonder and that
9 most powerful of all tools, hope. But we will not
10 get there with the current level of funding. Not
even close.

11 To sustain a great park system, we have to invest
12 in the foundational resource that makes any system
13 work, people. We need more parkies and I want to be
14 very clear, our park staff are extraordinary. As the
15 agency testified today, every day they are doing more
16 with less. They are maintaining landscapes,
17 responding to emergencies, repairing infrastructure
and supporting millions of visitors, all while
stretched far too thin.

18 In Riverside, we see the dedication of NYC Park
19 staff and the consequences of this underinvestment.
20 The bathroom in our volunteer house is shuttered due
21 to plumbing issues and suddenly a local senior group

loses the place where they gather each week. A sinkhole just opened up near a dog run and the entire community of pet owners now has nowhere to go. The 150th Basketball Court are suffering from filthy deluge of runoff from the highway. There is not enough staff to powerwash it so the kids have no access to their local spot for sport and connection.

These may sound like small things but they are not. They are daily disruptions to the fabric of community life in our parks and New Yorkers notice. They feel it. And at the same time, they know what it would take to change this. You don't need to know the exact math to know that we need more maintenance staff to keep parks clean and safe, more trades people to fix what's broken, more forestry staff to care for our trees and the capacity to move long promised capital projects forward.

It's not about asking for something unrealistic, it is about aligning our investment with our values as a city. Because imagine what we could have, a park system where every New Yorker, regardless of neighborhood, can rely on clean, safe, vibrant green space. A system that reflects the pride, care and resilience of the city. The future is within our

reach but only if we choose to invest in it. We have the opportunity to break the cycle of doing more with less and invest and build something lasting, worthy of the people of New York. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON HANKERSON: Thank you. If I may, I ask uhm, can you tell me the locations? The sinkhole and the basketball court that you mentioned.

MERRITT BIRNBAUM: Yeah, the basketball court, our basketball courts at 158th Street under the highway and the dog run is at 87th Riverside and our volunteer house that I also mentioned where we've been hosting this group for the last couple of years, uhm, it's at 108th Street.

CHAIRPERSON HANKERSON: Thank you. If our team can follow up with Parks Department regarding some of those issues. Thank you.

ELSIE SOTO: Hi everyone. Good afternoon. Thank you for the opportunity to speak. My name is Elsie Soto. I am a Professional Public Health and I am also a family member of 2 people who are buried on Hart Island, which is the New York City Municipal Cemetery and an advocate for many families who are navigating a similar experience.

For us, visiting Hart Island is not optional. It is how we grieve. It is how we stay connected to the people we love. Right now, access remains limited in ways that make the grieving process even more difficult. Visitation is primarily on the weekends, which does not work for many families. People have varying work schedules, lack of child care and responsibilities that make weekend access unrealistic. I am asking that at least 2 week day visitations be added to the monthly calendar so family members have the opportunity to visit. There is also a growing concern that is deeply painful for families like myself.

It was brought to our attention that New York City Department of - I'm sorry, New York City Parks Department public tours on Hart Island are being advertised for about \$39.99 by touring companies and offer around three and a half hours on the island. If those proceeds were being used to expand family visitation, we would understand. However, that is not happening and families are still given significantly less time, sometimes under 1 hour visits. Yesterday, my visit was for 1 hour and 15

minutes. Still significantly less than public tours. This is unfair.

Access for loved ones should come first.

Transportation is another major barrier. A short shuttle service already exists but it currently runs between the Hart Island Ferry and the BX 29 stop at Fordham Street, which is only 3 blocks and only at the end of the visit.

Families traveling by train will still find their way to and from the Pelham Train Station relying on extremely limited bus service on City Island. There's only one bus, okay. The distance from the Pelham Train Station to the ferry is less than 3 miles, about a 10 to 15 minute drive. Yet for families using public transportation, it can take over 30 to 40 minutes due to transfers, weakened service and wait times.

Now if we look at someone who is traveling from Staten Island, they literally have to take a bus to a boat, to a train, to another bus, to another boat and it sounds like a joke but it's reality for a lot of New Yorkers.

Uhm, and I am proposing that we take this existing shuttle service and just expand it to pick

up visitors directly from Pelham Train Station and bring them straight to the Hart Island Ferry. This is a simple change that would make a meaningful difference in access and reliability. Hart Island is the resting place of over 1 million New Yorkers.

The families and loved ones connected to this island deserve dignity, fairness and equitable footing to mourn our loved ones. Thank you for your time.

CHAIRPERSON HANKERSON: Thank you. Thank you for that. Uhm, I'd just say - I would just say on a more immediate note, if you can find someone from Parks Department that's here, you mentioned something about tours being advertised for \$39.99. That doesn't sound - it didn't sound too uh, I can't even think of the word right now but if you can just talk to someone from Parks Department about that, so that they can look into that immediately. It doesn't sound right.

ELSIE SOTO: Yeah, I believe it was removed. However, to know that it's been in existence for over a year, and none of that funding has transpired to expanding family visitation or even transportation to the island seems unfair to me.

CHAIRPERSON HANKERSON: Thank you. Thank you for your testimonials. Thank you all. Alright, we're going to go straight into our next panel. Pardon me if I mispronounce your name. Uhm, Asenhat Gomez, Oded Holzinger, Kaitlin Krause, Helen Chirgos. Thank you. You may begin.

ASENHAT GOMEZ: Good afternoon Chair Hankerson and everyone here. My name is Asenhat Gomez and I am a Senior Director of Programs for El Puente. El Puente is also a member of the Forest for All and the Play Fair Coalition.

We are a 43 year old community human rights organization that promotes leadership for peace and justice in North Brooklyn and Puerto Rico. We represent a historic environmental justice community. We have poor air quality driven largely by pollution, remains one of the largest threats to public health. Approximately 6 percent of our residents report having asthma. Linked to our community having the 8th highest concentration of fine particles otherwise known as PM 2.5 in New York City. One of the most dangerous air pollutants.

As a result, respiratory related hospitalizations in our neighborhoods are twice the rate of the entire borough of Brooklyn and New York City overall.

Access to healthy open green space is essential to mitigating the severe public health outcomes. Yet, the lack of sufficient parks and green infrastructure in our community only worsens air quality and compounds environmental risk. For our community, parks and public spaces are not optional, they are essential. We need quality parks where residents can gather, heal and thrive. If the COVID pandemic taught us anything, it's how vital parks are.

They become lifelines, safe, accessible spaces for the most vulnerable New Yorkers and other public spaces are close.

We urge the Council and the Administration to work together to deliver on Mayor Mamdani's commitment to double the NYC Parks budget and to ensure full funding for the staff and programs, critical to the maintenance, protection and tree planting efforts that will help the city reach its 30 percent tree canopy goal.

1 NYC Parks is responsible for half of the city
2 street canopy, yet the staffing programs that sustain
3 this urban forest continue to face cuts. This is
4 unsustainable and not equitable for all New Yorkers.
5 We need sustained equitable investment in our parks,
6 not just to maintain them but to ensure environmental
7 justice, public health, and climate resilience for
8 all New Yorkers.

9 Thank you so much for the opportunity.

10 CHAIRPERSON HANKERSON: Thank you so much.

11 ODED HOLZINGER: Good afternoon Chair. Thank you
12 for the opportunity to speak. My name is Oded
13 Holzinger and I'm the Executive Director of the
14 Natural Areas Conservancy. We're a nonprofit that
15 works together with New York City Parks to steward
16 more than 12,000 acres of forest, wetlands and
17 grasslands desert landscapes that really allow our
18 fellow New Yorkers to have the experience of being in
19 true wilderness.

20 Uhm, those landscapes also contain more than 5
21 million of the city's 7 million trees and are really
essential to achieving our 30 percent canopy goal.
We are joined today with our partners from the Play
Fair and Forest for All New York City Coalitions and

1 urging increased and sustained funding for New York
2 City parks in financial year 2027 budget.

3 Uhm, I want to also thank you for your earlier
4 question to the Commissioner regarding the one shot
5 funding and specifically its impacts on the Natural
6 Resources group. We're very concerned to see that
7 this preliminary budget does not include the
8 remainder of FY26 one shot funding. That funding
9 supported critical force management staff. We risk
10 further reductions in the Natural Resources group,
11 which is already under-resourced and responsible for
12 these 12,000, more than 12,000 acres. And you know,
13 I don't need to repeat it. It's been talked about
14 here again and again, but actually I should repeat it
15 because it's really critical to understand the impact
16 of this reliance on the one shot funding and also for
17 us as advocates to be trapped in you know this need
18 to beg for this one shot fundings, that's just not
19 the proper system.

20 So, if I remember the numbers currently that the
21 Commissioner mentioned earlier, 37 employees were
hired through this one shot funding on top of the 63.
THat's 30 percent of the workforce that are sitting
there with this uncertainty.

1 So, we're asking today for a baseline of \$60
2 million to provide stable support for this work and
3 this is based on data, based on the release of our -
4 since the release of our forest management framework
5 in 2018. We see that this inconsistent funding led
6 to staff losses and a sharp decline in acres
7 receiving care. Only 569 acres in the financial year
8 2025 were receiving care and at the same time for
9 2024, Ecological Assessment Fund, signs of decline in
more than 90 percent of forest plots.

10 Uhm, and again, this is while we were just
11 releasing the Urban Forest Plan and calling for the
12 expansion up to 30 percent canopy. So, I want to
13 remind everyone that our natural areas are not a
14 luxury. They are essential green infrastructure for
climate resilience, public health and biodiversity.
Thank you.

15 CHAIRPERSON HANKERSON: Thank you.

16 HELEN CHIRGOS: Hi, I want to offer a
17 perspective. I am one of the natural area employees
18 on Play Fair Funding in the Natural Resources Group.
19 I want to reiterate, it is not a sufficient solution
20 to budget shortages.
21

CHAIRPERSON HANKERSON: I'm sorry, can you just state your name?

HELEN CHIRGOS: My name is Helen Chirgos.

CHAIRPERSON HANKERSON: Helen, okay.

HELEN CHIRGOS: I'm full time and indefinitely a seasonal employee. It doesn't make any sense. I don't receive the same benefits of those on permanent lines until 18 months of full time unbroken seasonal employment. I don't have federally recognized holidays off, paid holidays off. I can't apply internally to annually posted positions at parks that are open to baselined full time employees and I haven't bothered to buy into the pension because I assume it's more likely than not that funding will lapse in the four years that I will need to work here to receive those benefits.

Uhm, I'm new to the workforce and with a lot of luck, I actually turned down other job offers to work here. I'm proud I'm from New York City. I'm now a public servant for the city and I contribute to the city that I'm from but our salaries as parkies across the board don't compete with the private sector.

When I say this, my experience to spell out that for these reasons, parks is and will lose skilled

1 staff, experience high turnover, lose institutional
2 knowledge and dedicated public servants. This also
3 harms the baselined workforce by putting more strain
4 on the remaining staff who are already stretched
5 thin. It takes so much time to rehire and retrain,
6 instead of build long term capacity and expertise.
7 It is so inefficient and it's not a good position to
8 be in as an employee. It's not fair at all.

9 Uhm, fortunately it doesn't have to be this way.
10 These Play Fair staff need to be added to the
11 baseline and the budget. Thanks.

12 CHAIRPERSON HANKERSON: Thank you. Would you
13 mind providing us with the written version of your
14 testimony?

15 HELEN CHIRGOS: Sure, how do I do that?

16 CHAIRPERSON HANKERSON: The Sergeant at Arms when
17 you leave, they'll uh, get your email or something
18 like that.

19 HELEN CHIRGOS: Sure, thank you.

20 CHAIRPERSON HANKERSON: We would like that.
21 Thank you so much.

HELEN CHIRGOS: Thanks.

CHAIRPERSON HANKERSON: Thank you. Okay, I'm going to call our next panel. Rosamond, is Rosamond here? No, okay.

Alia Soomro, Bena Chisholm(SP?), Leslie Gomez Rivera. Thank you. Okay, Marissa Lachica, Iyeshima Harris. Alright, you may begin.

ALIA SOOMRO: Good afternoon. My name is Alia Soomro and I am the Deputy Director for New York City Policy at the New York League of Conservation Voters. Thank you Chair Hankerson, Commissioner Shimamura and all the staff here and advocates here today for the opportunity to testify. I have submitted longer written comments.

As Cofounders of the Play Fair for Parks Coalition, we advocate for a city budget that gives New York City Parks the fair funding they deserve. NYLCV is also a member of the Forest for All New York City Coalition which is committed to protecting, maintaining and expanding the city's urban forest to equitably achieve 30 percent tree canopy coverage by 2035 from the current 23 percent.

If we want to maintain our city's park system, invest in our city's workforce, increase our tree canopy and prepare our open spaces for climate

change, first and foremost, NYLCV urges our elected officials to increase funding for our city's park system.

Mayor Mamdani's FY27 Preliminary Budget for New York City Parks is \$33 million less than the FY26 Adopted Budget and does not provide critical restorations after 4 years of cuts. However, we think the Admin and the City Council has the opportunity to rebuild an agency that's been crippled by decades of disinvestment. This includes but is definitely not limited to safeguarding the 276 parks workers set to lose their jobs at the end of the fiscal year, since they are dependent on the annual one shot City Council funding.

These positions must be baselined to ensure stability and consistent service. Additionally, we urge the city to increase staffing for second shift workers as well as forestry staff, capital project staff, and PEP officers. Now, despite the benefits of parks and tree canopy, due historic disinvestment and structural racism such as residential redlining, our trees, parks and green spaces and access to the city's waterfront are not equitably distributed.

As a member of the Forest for All Coalition, we strongly support allocating \$1 million to MOCEJ to publicize and begin implementing Local Law 148 of 2023, which will be the city's first ever urban forest plan to ensure our city's tree canopy is not only properly maintained but is equitably expanding.

Uhm and just wrapping up, NYLCV also supports the city exploring new revenue generating ways that our park system can maintain the funding that they deserve and we look forward to working with you, the Admin and other parks advocates to get the funding that New York City's Parks workers deserve. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON HANKERSON: Thank you so much.

BENA CHISHOLM: Good afternoon Chairperson Hankerson and Members of the Committee of Parks and Recreation. I thank you for this opportunity to testify today. My name is Bena Chisholm and I am a Community Garden Coordinator for Blaine Community Garden on the upper Manhattan for 16 years.

I'm here to express my support for organizations like Green Gorilla, we're hostess Council of Gardeners and for programs like Green Thumb that

provides critical support to community gardens across New York City.

These resources help gardeners like me maintain spaces, serve as a hub for food access, education, and community connection. At the same time, I believe the city can do more to support the community gardens and address challenges that we face on ground.

For several years, my garden had been dealing with serious rat infestation, caused to a part of an abandoned lot. This land has become a site for illegal dumping, drug activity, uh rodents nesting and creating ongoing safety concerns that directly impact our garden and surrounding our communities. The infestation have become so severe that I have literally had to - had my foot caught in a rat hole throughout the garden. Because of these conditions, I had to eliminate the community activity, public access due to the safety and the liability concerns.

Okay, this undermines the various purposes of community gardens as safe, welcoming spaces for the neighbors. I strongly encourage the city to increase funding for our get stuff clean. Others and sanitation, rodent control efforts so that gardens

facing these conditions can receive a timely and affected support.

Community gardens contribute so much - too much health and safety resistance to our neighbors. We strongly support the city and we ensure that we maintain safe, accessible space for all New Yorkers.

Thank you for this time and consideration. I am grateful for this opportunity. Thank you very much.

CHAIRPERSON HANKERSON: Thank you Ms. Chisholm. Just a couple questions for you. Uhm, do you know by chance the lot that's across or adjacent to you actually, uhm, do you know if it's private owned land or if it's a city owned lot?

BENA CHISHOLM: The last time I spoke with a Health Inspector, they informed me that it went back to foreclosure and went back to foreclosure and went back to the bank.

CHAIRPERSON HANKERSON: Okay.

BENA CHISHOLM: So-

CHAIRPERSON HANKERSON: Do you have a location or a location of the garden?

BENA CHISHOLM: Uh, yes, it's uh our location is 1651 Madison Avenue in Manhattan, zip code is 10029.

I believe the address for that abandoned lot was either 1655 or 1651.

CHAIRPERSON HANKERSON: We'll find it.

BENA CHISHOLM: Okay.

CHAIRPERSON HANKERSON: Thank you.

LESLIE GOMEZ RIVERA: Hi, good afternoon Chairman Hankerson. I know it's been a really long day and you're really tired but I appreciate your time being here. My name is Leslie Gomez Rivera. I'm the Policy Associate at Green Gorillas. We are a nonprofit organization that supports community gardeners like Bena and we also keep education in food and environmental justice across New York City.

I'm also speaking on behalf of the Green Gorillas Council of Gardeners. We are a coalition of over 300 community gardeners and we work across New York City to advance stronger investment and protections for our gardens.

New York City hosts over 550 community gardens that have been here for decades and we are an essential asset to every neighborhood. Community gardens serve their neighborhood in a multitude of ways, like providing food access, environmental

education, climate resilience, and we also provide safe green spaces for our communities.

Today, I want to take this opportunity to ask you for these 5 policy actions. Uhm, Green Thumb is continuously being cut in the budget and so, we would like to ask you to previously restore the \$2.6 million that Green Thumb had. Green Thumb is an essential program that aids most of our gardens with materials, seeds, tools, uhm, things like that.

Second, we also count on the Council to introduce stronger legislation to permanently protect our community gardens. As you may know uhm, gardens are located on city owned land and so they are subject to redevelopment and rezoning.

Third, we also count on the Council to increase funding for the Parks Equity initiative and in addition allocate \$300,000 to create a pilot program that allows garden groups to directly access funding through a simplified application process.

Fourth, we also ask that you continue to invest in a greener New York City. A greener New York City supports youth employment programs, community infrastructure and environmental education in our gardens.

Finally, we ask the Council to strengthen the Get Stuff Clean Initiative as Bena mentioned. This addresses rodent -

CHAIRPERSON HANKERSON: I'm sorry, I missed the last one.

LESLIE GOMEZ RIVERA: Yeah, the Get Stuff Clean Initiative, like Bena mentioned, this is a program that would help address rodent infestations, illegal dumping and increasingly affects our community gardens.

By investing in our community gardens today, the city is investing in healthier neighborhoods, stronger communities and a more resilient New York for generations to come. Thank you for your time and consideration.

CHAIRPERSON HANKERSON: Thank you. Would you mind also emailing your statement as well. I don't think I have it.

LESLIE GOMEZ RIVERA: I have all of our uhm-

CHAIRPERSON HANKERSON: Oh, you do?

LESLIE GOMEZ RIVERA: Yes.

CHAIRPERSON HANKERSON: Perfect, thank you.

LESLIE GOMEZ RIVERA: Thank you.

MARISSA LACHICA: Hello and thank you to Chair Hankerson and the members of the Committee on Parks and Recreation for the opportunity to submit this testimony. My name is Marissa Lachica, I am the Youth Program Coordinator at Green Gorillas. A nonprofit organization like Leslie said, that supports community gardeners and youth engaged in food and environmental justice across New York City.

In my role, I oversee two youth programs serving 15 youth interns during the year and 30 in the summer.

Through this work, I see first hand how important it is to create meaningful job opportunities for young people. One of my interns, Phato Matta, joined the program in 2023, shy but very eager to learn. Over time, I watched her confidence grow through leadership opportunities and public speaking practice. She is now a 3rd year returning intern and a mentor to our summer youth supporting the next generation of leaders.

Through our programs, youth build leadership skills, develop responsibility, and inform strong community connections. That is why I strongly support continued investment in a greener New York

1 City. This funding allows organizations like Green
2 Gorillas to provide green jobs, hands on learning and
3 advocacy opportunities in community gardens. It also
4 strengthens inner generational relationships and
5 ensures that gardening knowledge continues to be
6 passed down while youth bring these skills back to
7 their own communities. I also urge the Council to
8 fund community based organizations to ensure
9 resources are distributed equitably. For over 50
10 years, Green Gorillas has been a vital resource for
11 community gardens. Continued investment allows us to
12 expand our opportunities for youth to gain skills and
13 grow into leaders.

14 Another intern, Sophia joined last year with
15 little knowledge of food justice or community
16 gardening. Today, she is a program leader
17 confidently advocating for her community and local
18 gardens.

19 In closing, I urge the Council to continue
20 investing in a greener New York City, to increase
21 funding for community based organizations like Green
Gorillas. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON HANKERSON: Thank you so much.

1 IYESHIMA HARRIS: Good day. Oops! Good day.
2
3 Thank you Chairperson Hankerson and Members of the
4 Community for the opportunity to testify today. My
5 name is Iyeshima Harris and I'm the Executive
6 Director for Green Gorillas and like my colleague
7 mentioned, it's a nonprofit organization that's been
8 established since 1973, creating a ruckus and
9 therefore causing a foundation to greet them.

10 So, we're also here to champion that city agency
11 to ensure that its funding is being restored. But
12 before I jump into what I'm asking the Council for, I
13 just want to share a little bit about my background.
14 When I migrated to the - well, when I integrated to
15 the US at the age of 12 from Jamaica, community
16 gardens where I found my belonging. In those spaces,
17 I found people who shared my culture, food, and
18 stories. I was once mentored there. I grew up there
19 and ultimately those guidance shaped my career and
20 purpose.

21 My journey at the age of 14 started with Green
Gorilla as one of the tillers and to be the Executive
Director right now, shows how community Garden has
strengthened and reinstalled and reinforced the
vision of what a community is.

For over 60 years, I have witnessed how community gardens serve as critical infrastructure for food access, climate resilience, public health and cultural connection. And yet, these same spaces remain underfunded and underprotected.

Across the city, gardeners are navigating aging infrastructure, rodents infestation, illegal dumping, and consistent threat of mans security. These are not isolated issues. They are systematic and they require coordinated city response. If we want gardens to continue serving our communities. We must invest in them accordingly. We're asking the city to restore funding to Green Thumb, to ensure baselined support for community gardens, advance legislation to permanently protect community gardens on city owned land from development and allocate \$300,000 through Parks Equity Initiative for direct community gardens support.

Community gardens have long filled critical gaps in our neighborhoods but they cannot do it alone. If we're really serious about equity, public health and climate resilience, then we must be serious about investing in the spaces and people who have been doing this work for decades. I stand here today

1 because community gardeners- because of community
2 gardens. I ask that you invest in them so that they
3 preserve our essential lifeline. Thank you.

4 CHAIRPERSON HANKERSON: Thank you so much and
5 thank you all for your testimony and uh providing
6 good trouble. Ms. Chisholm, if you could provide us
7 with your contact so we can follow up with you about
8 the block, that would be great, you can put it with
the Sergeant at Arms. Thank you.

9 We're going to call our next panel, Ms. Austin,
10 Diana McKenzie, Rosa Chang, Jade Banham, Spike Appel,
11 or Appel.

12 Just out of curiosity, is anyone else signed up
13 to testify in the audience? Okay, alright, alright.
14 You'll be here, I'm not going anywhere. Okay, so we
will - we can start, yes.

15 MS. AUSTIN: Thank you Chair Hankerson for this
16 opportunity to speak. I'm going to be very brief
17 because I know that my message is going to be
18 redundant. My name is Ixchel Austin. I am a
19 lifelong gardener. I'm from upstate New York and in
the city, I am group leader of Grant Shade Garden.
20 I'm also a member of Green Gorillas, the Council of
Gardeners and I'll just mention that we know the
21

city's preliminary budget allocates only 0.6 of the total funding needed to support the Department of Parks and Recreation and continues to fall short. The city has limited ability to provide technical assistance, supplies and staffing for over 550 community gardens.

In my garden in particular, I'm going to have a little different approach to the trees. I actually need 8 London plain trees pruned in my garden, so that I can grow food because right now, we're on a mental. We can only have hostas and ferns and shade plants growing there and I would like to extend the ability to grow food to my gardeners who live in NYCHA housing.

Uhm, so we call on the city to restore the previously allocated \$2.6 million in funding for Green Thumb and create stronger legislation to protect our gardens from rezoning and redevelopment of city owned land. Yeah, I just need the London plain trees pruned so that we can reasonably open up the canopy even though I know the city has tried to increase our canopy. Our canopy is very dense.

CHAIRPERSON HANKERSON: What's the location in regard?

MS. AUSTIN: It's at 550 West 125th Street adjacent to the George Bruce Library.

CHAIRPERSON HANKERSON: Okay, if you uh, before you leave you can provide the Sergeant at Arms with your contact information.

MS. AUSTIN: Sure.

SPIKE APPEL: Thank you so much for your time, Council Member. I'm sorry the Commissioner just had to walk out. My name is Spike Appel, Lower East Side born and raised, now resident of Bushwick raising 2 children. I'm here to speak about Bushwick City Farm which is once again under threat of closure where I volunteered for the past 15 years.

The Commissioner spoke earlier that we were - there were lines of communication, which we could use that we didn't need to come to testify at a hearing when Council Member Sandy Nurse spoke about the garden. However, my wife spoke to this Committee in 2017 with our first son and we were asking the city to preserve our green space and our sanctuary space, which sits on a privately held lot.

We provide hundreds of meals weekly free of charge as well as providing primarily neighborhood children a place of respite, learning and community.

Where sanctuary space that provided support to thousands of migrants during the migrant crisis when the city opened the shelter across the street.

My son is 9 now and the neighborhood children, who helped us build the garden have grown up and some have children of their own who enjoy the garden their parents built. We're still asking the same thing, for the city to step in and preserve this critical neighborhood resource. This is a multigenerational project that many depend on. We're currently locked out of our primary entrance as of Wednesday.

We ask again, as an urgent matter that the Council make real and immediate commitments in this budget to preserve the garden and push for the process that Councilman Chi Ossé, Borough President Reynoso, members of Parks Department, Green Thumb, Department of Finance have all been a part of and have been taking their time. There was a well attended emergency rally this past Saturday of garden volunteers and supporters. If there aren't clear commitments soon, I worry the community will become increasingly agitated. We volunteered 15 years of service to the space in the community. We haven't asked for any support for our day to day operations.

We independently fund-raise for everything and use the space to help build new gardens in NYCHA housing. Help us in trying these efforts for the next generation to carry the efforts forward.

If we don't get immediate support on this, the community will have to step up and defend this space as we have for a decade.

CHAIRPERSON HANKERSON: Just uh, thank you for your testimony. Uhm, is the space within Council Member Nurses district or council Member Ossés district?

SPIKE APPEL: Council Member Ossés district.

CHAIRPERSON HANKERSON: Council Member Ossé's district. It's right on the border of Bushwick and Bed Stuy, so there's a lot of overlap.

CHAIRPERSON HANKERSON: Thank you. If you can provide your contact as well before you leave. Thank you. Yes, you're next.

DIANA MCKENZIE: Hi, I am Diana McKenzie. I'm here because I live on the Eastern Parkway between Washington and Underhill, directly across the street from Mount Prospect Park and I've lived there for 30 years since I was 5. Uhm, and I - actually, there's a lot that plays into what this meeting has been

1 about since the reason there's a skatepark has to do
2 with one shot funding and private investors. Uhm,
3 but that doesn't really matter. One of the things I
4 did when the skatepark started was actually go to
5 other skateparks in the city and talk to people.
6 Skaters are already fun to talk to. They mostly talk
7 about skating but it was clear they are really
8 passionate about certain spaces.

9 Uhm, which I think that's one thing people in our
10 community who aren't skaters can understand because
11 they are very passionate about Mount Prospect Park
12 and for years, there's been problems with uh grass
13 loss and cover loss that haven't really been
14 addressed, which is understandable. It's not
15 Prospect Park and that doesn't get enough funding in
16 the first place.

17 But I feel that the solutions they came up with
18 for that doesn't really take into account how much
19 the park is used. Uhm and how fond of it people are
20 as it is. Uhm, and I think it would be worth, it was
21 really hard to have a discussion about anything under
the last Administration and I think it would be worth
having more discussion about because I don't think -
I think some of the barriers that are up have more to

do with how difficult that was then, not being able to come to an accord. That's all, thank you.

Oh, uh, also please increase the city parks funding. It is one of the things - most New Yorkers use uhm and it's - I mean, we all know it's important. We wouldn't be here if it wasn't important.

CHAIRPERSON HANKERSON: Thank you. Diana, if I may ask, do you know whose district the department falls under?

DIANA MCKENZIE: Crystal Hudson.

CHAIRPERSON HANKERSON: Crystal Hudson, okay. Thank you.

ROSA CHANG: Hello. Thank you very much for the opportunity to speak today Chair Hankerson. We are so excited to have you spend some time with our Gotham Park Youth Ambassadors coming up and I wanted to say congratulations to you and to Chair - sorry Commissioner Shimamura but she's left. Uhm, who I have actually known since her Community Board 1, my Community Board 1 days. So, I have full confidence that she's going to do her utmost to uplift all of our communities in her role as Commissioner.

1 My name is Rosa Chang and I am Co-Founder of
2 Gotham Park. A grassroots 501 C3 created in 2021 to
3 open, operate and maintain a new community led public
4 space in a neighborhood that has historically been
5 underinvested and overlooked right outside of City
6 Hall, just right behind you actually. Uhm, community
7 are the roots of this grassroots endeavor with over
8 47,000 people living within a half mile radius of the
9 park. We are incredibly diverse. 20 percent of our
10 families live below the federal poverty level, 20
11 percent are seniors, 64 percent are BIPOC. We have
12 12,000 students literally across the street.

13 Parks and public space are where we teach our
14 children how to be good citizens. How to share, how
15 to see and learn how adults treat each other,
16 hopefully with an open heart and consideration. We
17 need more of it and we need to prioritize the care of
18 what we have, so that these spaces are here to build
19 the community and the next generation that we are
20 proud of. Gotham Park advocated for and now manages
21 4 acres of open space. We worked our butts off to
get this space open and we continue to work our butts
off to take care of it. We program it, we plant it,
we pick up the liter and we work with our neighbors

to collaborate on resiliency and education projects, health initiatives, programming and the expansion of the space for our community.

We are asking for your financial support to uplift community led public space initiatives like ours. Help us survive and thrive. Show your support with funding for orgs like ours and for Parks Department so that we can uplift all parts throughout the city and all the people who benefit from access to our public spaces.

Parks are not a luxury, they are a basic civil necessity and they are the learning ground where we try and we fail and we pick ourselves up and we learn resiliency. We advocated so hard for Gotham Park and we are making it work but only 1 percent of our operational funds is public.

Please fund pathways to help us and grassroots projects like ours until we are able to stand on our own and bring up the next generation of legacy public space projects. People need parks and parks need people to fund them. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON HANKERSON: Thank you. Thank you so much.

Okay, we're going to call our next panel. Alma Ortiz? Reyes- Reyes Ortiz, my apologies. Marilyn Vogt-Downey, Modhaga Toungh, Iraida DeJesus, Savona Bailey-McClain.

ALMA REYES: Thank you. Good afternoon Chair Hankerson and Members of the Parks Committee. My name is Alma Reyes and I am representing Queens Community House. I am testifying today as a member of the Play Fair for Parks Coalition. I'm here to urge you to increase funding to our city parks. We need to restore the 1 percent of the New York City budget for parks. The preliminary budget for New York City Parks maintains the status quo of under investment and is even \$33 million less than last year's budget.

After 4 years of cuts to the budget, our parks are suffering from staffing losses, a decrease in maintenance, and delayed capital projects. As a resident of Queens since 1992, a long time user of Flushing near Corona Park, I hold a deep perfection for this space. This park serves [INAUDIBLE] people for Queens residents. The park is where children play after school. Elders would to stay healthy, vendors are leaving, and communities gather to

1 celebrate, exercise and breathe. For many, this park
2 is the only free, unsafe outdoor space available to
3 them. Yet, its condition does not reflect how
4 essential this park is. For over a year, Queens
5 Community College has been hosting monthly park
6 cleanups of Flushings Meadow Corona Park. While
7 volunteer stewardship is essential for the wellbeing
8 of parks, volunteers will never accomplish as much as
9 Park Maintenance of Staff.

10 Through our cleanups, we can live with community
11 members who raise concerns about the maintenance,
12 clean units, sorry, clean units, lighting, there's
13 access and safety of the park. This, another
14 inconvenience, affects people who feel welcome,
15 whether seniors can grow safely - sorry and where
16 their families have a lot of children to play.

17 When a part of this is underfunded, the necessity
18 by the community is clear, our needs are not
19 prioritized. Increasing the past budget is not
20 optional. It is urgent, as a matter of our public
21 health, equity and dignity. Thank you.

MARILYN VOGT-DOWNEY: I'm Marilyn Vogt-Downey and
I am a retired high school teacher and I've lived in
Eastern Parkway in Brooklyn for over 50 years. And

1 across the street is a park called Mount Prospect
2 Park and then you're speaking as a member of friends
3 at Mount Prospect Park. We also have a block
4 association so that they are conscious of what's
5 going on in our neighborhood.

6 And in January of 2024, we learned from that
7 there had been [INAUDIBLE] to put in the park, to put
8 over our park 40,000 square feet of concrete to
9 create a skateboard park. We were never consulted.
10 We did not support it and we started putting up a
11 fight against it pretty quickly. We had petitions
12 that were signed by thousands of people that we
13 finally got Crystal Hudson to have a hearing on this
14 in the neighborhood and they've packed- by all the
15 city representatives, Crystal, the Parks Commissioner
16 uh I would say another name but it would make me
17 angry but I'm not going to go through the whole list.
18 But what they said is, well this is not a residential
19 neighborhood. I want to say that Mount Prospect Park
20 is directly across the street from uh, if we go from
21 Plaza Street to Washington Avenue, there are at least
20 highrise buildings, I mean apartment buildings
from 6th floor to 15 floors and there are thousands
of people living there, so it is a residential

neighborhood. But then they're going to put there is what they told us at our meeting, a destination skateboard for the East coast to be- and thousands of people all the time - to make noise over this concrete in our park.

And I'm here - is my time up already? Yeah, I'm here to say, we want you to stop the park. It is a park, it is a community park for all the purposes the community park serves, please don't - please do not vote for this project. We're also told to say the city should help planning and construction of this project until there is an investigation and violations of the city and policy. They have now reduced it to 20,000 square feet from 40,000 but it's still going to ruin our park. Thank you.

IRAIDA DEJESUS: Good afternoon. Thank you to Chair Hankerson and Members of the Committee of Park and Recreation for the opportunity to testify today. My name is Iraida DeJesus and I am an Engagement Coordinator of Jardin de la Familia for the past 6 years located in the Bronx.

Our Green Thumb Garden of Jardin de la Familia has a rich history of community involvement and has been a vital green space because of the addresses of

our community, full security as well as environmental justice in our neighborhood. I am here today speaking on behalf of Jardin de la Familia and only your city gardens. The preliminary physical year of '27 budget allocates only 0.6 percent of the total city budget to the Department of Parks and Recreation. This has severely impacted the green thumb that has significant reductions in its budget since the Adams Administration. This has hindered its capacity to provide technical system, necessary supplies, and inadequate staffing does impair its ability to support community garden. Therefore, we call on the city to invest in. Restore \$2.6 million for Green Thumb.

Call on the Mayor to allocate the 1 percent of the total city budget to the Department of Park and Recreation. I, [INAUDIBLE] since a young age with parents in Puerto Rico. Community gardens provide community assets for me and other members of my community. We serve gardens for future generations. I urge the Council to introduce a stronger legislation to protect all gardens located on city owned land. Thank you very much and for your time and consideration.

1 Hello, great afternoon. My name is Savona
2 Bailey-McClain and I am the Executive Director and
3 Chief Curator of the West Harlem Art Fund. My
4 organization presents public art in West Harlem and
5 across the City of New York and we have been doing
6 that for 28 years. Why I'm saddened to hear that the
7 parks operation may be reduced by \$33 million
8 potentially losing 100 jobs. I want to see some
9 reforms in the agency before they get any more money.
10 I'm in a neighborhood of color, where we struggle to
11 get good programming, which I do provide in the area
12 of art with very little funding and I've been doing
13 this for a long time.

14 In the last two years, going on three years, I've
15 actually presented one of the largest outdoor
16 sculpture park exhibitions in the City of New York.
17 We've actually created a public art district spanning
18 67 acres. Commissioner Shimamura knows me. So, what
19 did we discover? We discovered climate change. We
20 discovered that land management, public and art goes
21 together. We're dealing with flooding, soil erosion,
 soil compaction. We have seen conditions that are so
 severe, we actually had to use a jack hammer to break

the surface to install a piece of art. So, yes, we need to have more money but we need more training.

We have used a lot of young people to work with us and help us, teaching them about composting, teaching them about gardening but they can't get a job with the Parks Department. Because if you look at the Parks Department and I did the numbers, 44 percent of people are colored and they stay in maintenance jobs. You talked about tree pruning and tree climbing. There are a lot of able bodied young men who can do tree climbing and pruning, yet they can't get a job. Now, we tried to supplement that but we can't, why? Because trees New York has an exclusive contract with the City Parks Department where we can't get them the certification to be citizen tree pruners. That needs to change because that's the first step towards getting a real job.

We are also trying to get them with sanitation for composting certification. There are all these road blocks. When you look at the tree pruners, the tree climbers, the gardeners, they don't look like people of color.

When you look at the contractors that everyone has been talking about, I checked, the majority of

1 them do not live nor do their business reside in the
2 five boroughs of the City of New York. They're in
3 West Chester, Long Island, Connecticut, New Jersey.
4 So, how do we have a livable wage? Now even though
5 I'm an Executive Director, guess what I struggle
6 every day to make it. Why? Because the resources
7 are not there for art. I was here since 11:30, look
8 at what time they brought me here to this table,
9 which shows the disrespect that arts get in this city
10 and I have reached out to your office. I don't see
11 any other Council person here to listen to us. To
12 hear what we got to say. There needs to be an
13 adjustment when it comes to this budget to make it
14 work for us. It's not so much about getting more
15 money. How do we make it work? And I'm sick and
16 tired of seeing it not work.

15 So, that's what I want to share with you today
16 and I did it within my time. Thank you so much.
17 Enjoy your day. Thank you.

17 CHAIRPERSON HANKERSON: We're going to call our
18 next panel. Uh, Chauncy Young, John Surico,
19 Franchesca, I'm sorry Princesca uh, I'm sorry, I
20 can't read the last name. It's my apologies. Sonia
21 Ferraro. Thank you all for your patience. Two

more, okay. Did you all fill out a testimony slip?
I know you, I have your name. Okay, okay, the
remaining folks, you can come on up to the dais.
We'll just - we'll do it that way and we'll have you
fill out a slip afterward. Our apologies.

Is there anyone else that wishes to testify that
hasn't testified as of yet? Okay. Alright.

JOHN SURICO: Great. Good afternoon. I'm John
Surico, the Senior Fellow for Climate Opportunity at
the Center for an Urban Future. An independent
organization focused on creating a stronger and more
inclusive economy in New York.

I'm also a proud super steward with the Parks
Department so happy to hear all the trees talk.
Thank you to Chair Hankerson. I mean for getting us
to 5 o'clock and members of the Committee for the
opportunity to testify today. The urban parks and
open spaces are essential to achieving the city's
vision of affordable, livable New York but today the
system is struggling under the rate of 4 consecutive
years of budget cuts and lacks the maintenance
funding and staffing needed to sustain the vibrant
equitable park system that New Yorkers need and
deserve.

Case and point, recreation, the city's athletic facilities and recreational programs, its pools, tennis courts, rec centers, fitness classes, sports leagues and more play an integral role in offering free and low cost options for New Yorkers to play, move and connect. And that matters today more than ever as over percent of residents are grappling with chronic disease and loneliness. But decades of underinvestment mean we're only scratching the surface of its potential. A recent report at CUFF found that recreation services once accounted to nearly one-third of the park's operating budget. Today, it's about 5.3 percent.

Full time rec staff has fallen from almost 2,000 people in 1964 to 659 today. New York allocates among the lowest amount per capita on recreation of any major US city and many poor recreation assets need urgent repairs or close entirely with more than \$400 million in known capital needs for major facilities alone.

New York City Parks continues to do what it can with limited resources but the gap between needs and capacity keeps widening. Going forward, the city should restore and expand critical staffing across

1 parks operations, capital projects, fire street
2 maintenance, while investing in rec centers and
3 program staff to get parks clean, safe and fully
4 functional again.

5 For instance, the investments can help address
6 New York City's affordability challenges by expanding
7 the park system summer day camp. The best anywhere
8 in the city from roughly 500 participants today to
9 5,000. To achieve this, the City Council should
10 reverse the proposed cuts and expand city funding and
11 create new dedicated recurring revenue streams uhm,
12 to put the system on a stronger more sustainable
13 footing and I'll just close by saying in January of
14 2024, the center outlined 20 specific ideas to do
15 exactly that. Uhm, and we're about to release 2
16 more. The first on harvesting real estate revenue to
17 pay for parks, and the next on expanding
18 opportunities for public, private partnerships.
19 Thanks so much for letting me come today and testify.

20 CHAIRPERSON HANKERSON: Thank you.

21 PATRICIA CARO: Hi, my name is Patricia Caro. I
live in Assembly District 28. I'm here to speak for
additional funding for the parks, especially for its
natural areas.

1 I'm a retired professor of geography who for the
2 last couple of years has been a steward, a volunteer
3 steward in Forest Park where my fellow stewards and I
4 spend many hours mostly removing invasive species
5 that either strangle the trees or drape all over the
6 trees and deprive them of sunlight and heat as well
7 as nutrients.

8 Many people have spoken about the functional
9 benefits of trees and forests and parks but I would
10 like to specifically address the dollar benefits to
11 our city. Uhm, according to the Arbor Day
12 Foundation, every dollar invested in trees and parks
13 - street and park trees in New York City returns
14 \$5.60. About half of that benefit comes from the
15 reduced need for electricity, for energy, electricity
16 and gas are almost one-fifth each for air quality
17 improvement and increased property values. And
18 one-sixth from stormwater management.

19 Stormwater management is really important now in
20 the era of increasing climate change. New York City
21 mostly feels that uhm, with altered precipitation,
where we have droughts and then followed by very
heavy downpours and as you know where stormwater goes
into the sewer system and very often cannot be safely

delivered to uhm, water treatment plants and floods communities.

The annual benefit of a single tree varies by species and size but roughly the range is from about \$100 per tree to \$400 per tree. So, the average tree in New York, an average tree is about \$200, a medium size tree \$250.

In any case, as a volunteer steward, I know that keeping the trees mature, getting them from maturity is an impossible task but more funding is needed to do that and given the current cutting of the regulations, I think falls more important for local areas to pick up that gap. Uhm, and the [INAUDIBLE] New York City, the big area is great and it's not only the fact that they create beauty that is accessible to people of all stripes who even relax and smile when they're there. Thank you for your time.

CHAIRPERSON HANKERSON: Thank you.

BIANA VARGA: Uhm, good afternoon Chairperson Hankerson. I'm incredibly impressed by how engaged you've been all day. I know you probably haven't had lunch either unless you snuck out and grabbed some food. It's an honor to be here today. Uhm, my name

1 is Biana Varga. I'm from Shahana Hanif's district in
2 Brooklyn, District 39. I was super grateful when she
3 stopped by the first volunteer day that uhm, we had
4 for a pocket park my neighbors and I are creating.

5 I'm here because I believe in the magic of trees
6 and more than 80 percent of the city's trees are
7 cared for by the Parks Department. Trees shade our
8 sidewalks, they keep harmful particles out of our
9 lungs, they act as umbrellas during heavy rains and
10 allow the soil to absorb more water to prevent
11 flooding. They've even been shown to improve mental
12 health and reduce crime.

13 The leadership of New York City understands the
14 important role that trees play in creating a climate
15 resilient and livable city, which is why they
16 invested in the millions trees NYC project and the
17 Parks Department has committed to planting 18,000
18 trees per year going forward.

19 However, not all trees are equally beneficial. A
20 mature trees canopy can shade an entire playground,
21 making its surfaces safe for children in the heat of
summer.

A newly planted tree simply can't do that. A
young tree is a promise. A mature tree is

1 infrastructure. This is why it's imperative that we
2 invest not just in planting trees but in the people
3 who steward them towards maturity. We are currently
4 in the middle of trees count, the city's decennial
5 tree census. Last summer, over 2,500 volunteers,
6 including me, surveyed more than 46,000 trees and
7 will continue that work this spring.

8 In order to be able to act on the tree health
9 data that we are collecting, allow our trees to grow
10 and keep our urban forest thriving for the benefit of
11 all New Yorkers. The Parks Department needs to be
12 well staffed and well funded. This is not the time
13 to cut the funding for this invaluable agency. I
14 urge the City Council to invest in parks and the
15 future of New York by joining cities across the
16 country and allocating 1 percent of our budget to
17 parks. Thank you so much for your time and
18 attention.

19 CHAIRPERSON HANKERSON: Thank you so much.

20 SONIA FERRARO: Uhm, congratulations Chairman
21 Hankerson and thank you for uhm, oh my God. Okay,
okay thank you Chairman Hankerson. You are my
district Councilman and also the District Councilman
for my community garden. My name is Sonia Ferraro.

I've been a community gardener for over 40 years and I'm a Green Thumb Gardener for 12 of those 40 years. I am the Founder and Leader of Paradise Community Garden and located in Jamaica Queens.

Paradise has a rich history of community involvement and has been a vital green space in our community. As a member of Green Gorillas, Council of Gardeners, I want to express my support for the policy initiatives that have been uplifted today.

In addition, I'd like to amplify the needs of the community gardens. In particular, the much needed infrastructure upgrades and repairs are vital to ensure that gardens are also safe for the seniors who steward them. Many community gardens across New York City remain inaccessible to people with disabilities, limiting who can fully participate in and benefit from these vital green spaces.

To ensure equity and inclusion, gardens should be equipped with ADA compliant infrastructure, including accessible driveways and street cut outs, as well as safe navigable pathways throughout the garden. Gardeners like myself need designated handicap parking on the street close to the garden.

Therefore, additional funding to agencies like Green

1
2 Thumb and organizations like Green Gorillas is very
3 important. Community gardeners have felt first hand
4 the effects of the reduced funding. I urge each
5 Council Member to visit community gardens in their
6 district to hear our needs and walk alongside each
7 gardener to better understand the needs of community
8 gardens. Thank you once again for the opportunity to
9 share with you my 40 years of experience.

10 CHAIRPERSON HANKERSON: Thank you Ms. Ferraro and
11 thank you for the work that you've done in our
12 district and also participating on our participatory
13 budgeting uh in the last few years as well.

14 SONIA FERRARO: Yes.

15 CHAIRPERSON HANKERSON: I just, I do want to say
16 this. Okay, someone - she left. Uhm, we don't
17 choose how people sit on the dais. We don't, you
18 know, it's not a set order. Uhm, or else a person
19 from my district would have went first. So, thank
20 you all so much uhm for staying and advocating. We
21 took notes. We'll be following up with folks. Thank
you so much. It's been a long day.

SONIA FERRARO: Yes, it has.

CHAIRPERSON HANKERSON: But we truly, truly
appreciate your -

SONIA FERRARO: Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON HANKERSON: We have a virtual room. Well, that's not for you over there. Uh, now we'll hear testimony from Drew Stillman, Drew Stillman Homan. Uhm, Fatamata Troy, Sophia Zong, Walter Mugden and Kasha Posdor.

For the folks on Zoom, we can begin. Thank you. Okay.

SERGEANT AT ARMS: You may begin on Zoom.

DREW STILLMAN: Hello?

CHAIRPERSON HANKERSON: Can you hear us?

DREW STILLMAN: Yes, I can hear you.

CHAIRPERSON HANKERSON: Can you see us as well?

DREW STILLMAN: Yes, I can.

CHAIRPERSON HANKERSON: I promise you, I look better in person.

DREW STILLMAN: Uhm, hello everyone. My name is Drew Stillman. I'm calling from the Northshore of Staten Island. I as well work as one of those uhm seasonal one shot employees that work with Natural resource Group in New York City Parks. I also just wanted to clarify and reiterate that though we do have 70 people who are in our group that work with

us, that is not the number of field technicians and boots that are on the ground.

I just want to make that clear. That there's only - there's less than 30 of us that manage the entire city and all the over 20,000 acres of natural areas. And not just forested areas, we also manage wetlands, shorelines, beaches and fresh and saltwater marshes. So, there is a lot of area that needs to be covered. So, all of our positions are seasonal as you've heard.

Uhm, it takes a lot of technical learning and a lot of institutional knowledge, the end of these positions and to actually execute them efficiently and effectively within their national landscape throughout our cities. So, it really is important to have staff that can be there consistently for a long term as opposed to just a seasonal basis. We need people who can see winter, spring, summer, fall and all of the seasons and all of the intricacies in between, so that they can properly manage these landscapes effectively and efficiently.

So, while we do have our executive, our administrative and our other support staff at our energy teams, that also - that does not necessarily

include, that does not reflect appropriately the people who are actually taking care and managing those spaces. So, as you can imagine, it's very difficult for about 25 people to manage over 20,000 acres of natural areas and land management.

So, increasing the capacity sizes, as well as baselining the positions that are going to be here -

SERGEANT AT ARMS: Thank you. Your time expired.

DREW STILLMAN: Ah damn, thank you.

CHAIRPERSON HANKERSON: Thank you Drew. I'm sorry, I can't extend the time on the virtual but I did hear your testimony. Thank you so much.

DREW STILLMAN: Thank you so much. I appreciate your time.

FATAMATA TROY: Hello, can you hear me?

SERGEANT AT ARMS: Yes.

FATAMATA TROY: Okay, thank you. Good afternoon. Thank you to Chairman Hankerson and the Members of the Committee on Parks and Recreation for the opportunity to testify. My name is Fatamata Troy and today I am representing Green Gorillas as a youth intern, part of the Youth Empowerment Pipeline program. Green Gorillas is a nonprofit organization that specializes in engaging with community

1 gardeners, advocating for them all across NYC to
2 promote food and environmental justice. For my time
3 as an intern, I've learned valuable skills and
4 lessons from community gardens. I have been able to
5 see first hand how community gardeners support their
6 community, maintain sustainable practices, as well as
7 working with limited resources to transform vacant
8 areas into beautiful green spaces.

9 From my 3 years of experience, I want to
10 highlight some recommendations and improvements that
11 I've witnessed that should be made to help community
12 gardeners continue their work.

13 First, an increase in funding to gardeners that
14 need access to utility resources including running
15 water, electricity, and gardening tools. This will
16 ensure that green spaces are receiving the
17 opportunities they need to create a fully functional
18 environment. And Second, an increase in funding to
19 youth gardening programs. Like a greener NYC, which
20 reflect organizations like Green Gorillas funding to
21 create job opportunities for the youth like me to aid
community gardens.

Youth programs are vital to community gardens
because it exposes the younger generation to building

essential green spaces, passing the torch on to the next generation of gardeners. Youth action is the future of community action.

So, in conclusion, I urge the city to prioritize youth internships and accessibility to tools for all gardens across NYC to ultimately create vibrant community spaces. Thank you for your time.

CHAIRPERSON HANKERSON: Thank you so much for your testimony. Uh, next we'll have Sophia Zang.

SERGEANT AT ARMS: You may begin.

CHAIRPERSON HANKERSON: Sophia?

SOPHIA ZANG: Hello?

CHAIRPERSON HANKERSON: Yes, we can hear you.

SOPHIA ZANG: Okay. Thank you to the Chairman Ty Hankerson and members of the Committee on Parks and Recreation for the opportunity to submit this testimony. My name is Sophia Zang and I am a secondary youth empowerment program intern.

Through my work, I volunteered community gardens across all five boroughs of New York City supporting gardeners with planting maintenance, composting and general upkeep. While I am not based in a single garden, I have worked alongside many community gardeners and have a rich history of community

involvement and serve as brighter green spaces in their neighborhoods.

Through my experience, I have seen first hand how important community gardens are, not just for growing food but for building community, providing safe, green spaces and supporting environmental education. However, the recently released preliminary budget allocates less than 1 percent of the total city budget to the Department of Parks and Recreation. This limited funding places programs like Green Thumb at risk. I urge the Council to restore the previously allocated \$3.6 million and funding for Green Thumb, which supports hundreds of gardens citywide.

Community gardens must be recognized as essential public assets and protected from development. I strongly support introducing legislation to permanently protect our New York City community gardens on city owned land from rezoning and development. These spaces are critical to the health and resilience of our neighborhoods.

Additionally, I ask the Council to allocate \$300,000 through the Parks Equity Initiative for direct funding to gardens and invest in community

1 based organizations like Green Gorillas that
2 distribute resources equitably. Programs like the
3 greener, newer city are also vital. They create
4 green jobs for youth like myself and provide
5 opportunities for environmental education and
6 advocacy. Thank you.

7 CHAIRPERSON HANKERSON: Thank you so much. Next,
8 we'll have Walter Mugdan.

9 SERGEANT AT ARMS: You may begin.

10 WALTER MUGDAN: Hi, can you hear me alright?

11 CHAIRPERSON HANKERSON: Yes.

12 WALTER MUGDAN: Thank you. I'm Walter Mugdan,
13 I'm President of the Udells Cove Preservation
14 Committee founded in 1696. Our mission is the
15 conversation and restoration of the lost undeveloped
16 natural areas, in the Udells Cove Watershed in
17 Northeastern Queens. Much of the area has already
18 been protected by the Udells Cove Park Preserve, a
19 New York city forever wild area with trails winding
20 through woods and along the shoreline.

21 We ask that the FY27 budget provide a significant
increase towards the objective stated by Mayor
Mamdani during his campaign, that the Parks budget
grow to the 1 percent of the overall city budget and

1
2 in particular we urge increased appropriations for
3 the Department's Natural Resources group, which has
4 broad responsibilities for natural areas throughout
5 the city like ours but is seriously understaffed and
6 challenged by having many employees who are not on
7 permanent budget lines.

8 The Parks Department manages 14 percent of the
9 city's land area but receives only one half of one
10 percent of the city budget. Now, parks are vital to
11 the quality of life of all New Yorkers and in
12 particular, those who have the least economic means
13 to enjoy the benefits of nature and outdoor
14 recreation.

15 This includes everything from small, best pocket
16 parts to large public spaces like Central Park, ball
17 fields and playgrounds to community gardens and
18 nature preserves, such as Udells Cove Park. City
19 parks and particularly our natural areas, provide
20 critical benefits to combat global warming and
21 climate change and minimize funding.

My organization has raised and spent over
\$350,000 in the past 20 years to combat invasive
species, increase tree canopy and carry out other
park restoration and improvement projects. We're

committed to continue our work but to do so we need the department to be adequately funded as well. We need knowledgeable staff for whom to receive guidance on the projects we pursue. We need our permit applications to be timely processed. We need support for our volunteer cleanup events and improvement projects and we need an adequately funded department to do the many kinds of things that are beyond the capacity of organizations such as ours and -

SERGEANT AT ARMS: Thank you. Your time has expired sir.

WALTER MUGDAN: Thank you very much.

CHAIRPERSON HANKERSON: Thank you Walter. Uhm, and finally, we'll have Kasha Posdor.

SERGEANT AT ARMS: You may begin.

KASHA POSDOR: Hi, can you hear me?

CHAIRPERSON HANKERSON: Yes.

KASHA POSDOR: Great, thank you. My name is Kasha Posdor, I'm a Parks worker, a DC 37 Member and a resident of City Council District 35. Thank you for receiving my testimony today. I ask this Council to baseline the Play Fair Urban Park Rangers and all parks Play Fair workers. I worked as an urban park ranger in the Bronx for about 4 years. For the first

2 years, I was in a Play Fair funded line. I did the same job as a civil service ranger but I did not have the same benefits or rights.

I was not paid for holidays for 18 months. Could not sign up for the pension and faced delays in signing up for health insurance. I also could not apply for full time parks jobs because I was not considered a full time parks employee.

In my 4 years with the rangers, I noticed that each April, workplace morale and productivity would suffer as Play Fair staff began to apply for other jobs. Massive amounts of institutional knowledge are being lost each year this way. Many of the best, greatest and hardest working rangers would leave city service because they could not count on a job to be there in July. It is a stressful experience - it is stressful to experience that for one fiscal cycle and it's demoralizing to experience it for many years.

It's not just an injustice to these workers. The public suffers when program managers can't plan for a season because they don't know what their staffing will look like. The instability of playfair funding has had a direct impact on the urban park rangers ability to plan and book educational and recreational

1 programming, resulting in fewer canoeing, hiking,
2 history, fishing, birdwatching and camping programs
3 for the public. I know that what I say here today is
4 echoed by many of my colleagues working in
5 stewardship, trail maintenance, forestry and other
6 areas of parks. If the Parks Department is going to
7 deliver on its promises, then the Mayor and the City
8 Council need to deliver on their promise for a well
funded Parks Department.

9 I ask once again, that all of this Committee
10 baseline the Play Fair positions to help achieve
11 these goals. Thank you so much for your time.

12 CHAIRPERSON HANKERSON: Thank you Kasha. Thank
you for your service to our city.

13 The FY27 Preliminary Budget Hearing for the
14 Committee on Parks and Recreation is now adjourned at
15 5:25. [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 July 15, 2026