

CITY COUNCIL
CITY OF NEW YORK

----- X

TRANSCRIPT OF THE MINUTES

Of the

COMMITTEE OF PARKS AND RECREATION

----- X

FEBRUARY 22, 2021
Start: 1:04 P.M.
Recess: 4:01 P.M.

HELD AT: REMOTE HEARING VIRTUAL ROOM 1

B E F O R E: Chairman Peter Koo

COUNCIL MEMBERS: Peter Koo
Darma Diaz
Joseph C. Borelli
Robert F. Holden
Kevin Riley
Ydanis Rodriguez
Francisco Moya
Carlina Rivera
Justin Brannan
Jimmy Van Bramer
Eric A. Ulrich
Mark Gjonaj

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

Margaret Nelson
Ken Conyers
Matt Drury
Patricia Perrone
Ken Podzina
Al Morales
Nzingha Prescod
Mara Mazza
David Ludwig
Rachel Cytron
Phil Konigsberg
Daniel Pohl
Wendy Hilliard
Jordan Baltimore
Rita Finkle
Peter Westbrook
Jenny Veloz
Adam Fraser
Anthony Rivera
Carlos Velasquez

1 COMMITTEE ON PARKS AND RECREATION

4

2
3 SGT. POLITE: Morning to the Cloud all
4 set.

5 SGT. BIONDO: Thank you.

6 SGT. POLITE: Back up is rolling.

7 SGT. BIONDO: Thank you. Good afternoon
8 and welcome to today's remote New York City Council
9 Hearing on the Committee of Parks and Recreation. At
10 this time, will all members please turn on their
11 video for verification purposes? Once again, please
12 turn on your video for verification purposes. To
13 minimize any disruptions, please place all electronic
14 devices on vibrate or silent. If you wish to submit
15 testimony, you may do so at

16 testimony@council.nyc.gov, again that is

17 testimony@council.nyc.gov. Thank you for your

18 cooperation. Chair Koo, we are ready to begin.

19 CHAIR KOO: Thank you for joining our
20 virtual hearing today before the Council's Committee
21 on Parks and Recreation. I would like to acknowledge
22 our fellow Council Members who are present. Council
23 Members Diaz, Borelli, Holden, and Riley. Good
24 afternoon. I'm Council Member Peter Koo, Chair of
25 the City Council's Committee on Parks and Recreation.

COMMITTEE OF PARKS AND RECREATION

5

I would welcome you to our virtual hearing that will examine the athletic permitting process of parks. When you think about the benefits the parks, you might think about the various recreational offers to all our residents, from playgrounds for our children to recreation centers to athletic fields and courts as well as the beaches and pools. Today's hearing will deal with the athletic features of our prior system and focus on the Parks Department's process for issuing permits for use of all these free 800 athletic fields, 1800 basketball courts, and 550 tennis courts throughout the city. A few years ago, DPR, which stands for Department of Parks and Recreation, DPR, we went the process to more fairly allocate ballfields and courts for a wide range of applicants by creating a process that will prioritize different categories of permit applicants. The youth and school leads have first access, followed by adult athletic organizations, and then by individuals who apply to use a field for specified season. It also implemented a web-based system to help make the application process more efficient. Since then, concerns about the whole process have continued to be raise, and on top of that, the COVID pandemic has

COMMITTEE OF PARKS AND RECREATION

6

1
2 resulted in much uncertainty among athletic field
3 users and usual park goers regarding how and when
4 permitting sport's activity will be restored. Prior
5 to COVID, numerous concerns were raised regarding
6 allegations that various organizations and
7 individuals who were issued permits sometimes held
8 them without actually using the field for which they
9 were issued the permit. This resulted in park users
10 being confused regarding what areas of a park were
11 available for use. Also, some alleged that various
12 permit holders have sold or scouted their permits to
13 those who wish to use the field at a different time
14 by trying to profit for themselves. Further, until
15 2020, athletic activity for even a greater variety of
16 sports was on the rise. Throughout the entire park
17 system, usership increased. This gave rise to an
18 increasing number of complaints regarding
19 unauthorized use of particular ballfields, which
20 added to the confusion and uncertainty already felt
21 by many. COVID obviously, did nothing to help this
22 situation. The parks being forced to stop all
23 permitting activity as in late March 2020. We
24 stopped (inaudible) and stopping it once again as the
25 numbers past the 3% threshold. Recently, parks will

COMMITTEE OF PARKS AND RECREATION

7

1
2 start processing permits for the spring and summer.
3 Permits will be issued to youth leagues and adults
4 for baseball, softball, racket games, field hockey,
5 soccer, lawn contact lacrosse, flag football, track
6 and frisbee. According to DPR, all permit applicants
7 must complete a COVID-19 safety plan and information
8 before the final review of a permit, and if safety
9 plan violations are served three times for a team,
10 DPR will revoke permits for the entirety of the
11 organization. I'm hopeful that this hearing will
12 examine rather the current practice the DPR has
13 implemented has in fact, led to a better and more
14 equitable permitting process, and rather the abuses
15 that have been allowed for years being properly
16 addressed by DPR. I also hope you will (inaudible)
17 in gaming a bit more certainty as to what DPR's
18 specific plans are in the near future to allow safe
19 permitted sports activities in light of the
20 difficulties that COVID pandemic presents. I would
21 also like to call attention to a Bill that we will be
22 considering as well today. Intro 1959 sponsored by
23 my colleague, Council Member Rodriguez which would
24 establish an office of sports recreation. The office
25 will consult with the city's official marketing and

1 COMMITTEE OF PARKS AND RECREATION

8

2 tourism organizations to promote the city as a base
3 for professional sports teams making recommendations
4 for the growth of (inaudible) sports recreation and
5 coordinate sport initiatives with other city
6 agencies. I look forward to responding in greater
7 detail today, and hearing what the Administration and
8 advocates think about this Legislation. Thank you
9 and welcome. At this time, I would like to invite
10 Council Member Rodriguez to offer a statement on the
11 Bill he has sponsored. Okay, we are also joined by
12 Council Member Borelli, Rodriguez, Moya, Rivera, and
13 Brannan.

14 CM RODRIGUEZ: Thank you, thank you
15 Chair, and thank you for the great job that you're
16 doing. I believe the broad topics that you are
17 addressing today are very important. The first one
18 related to the permits and the second one, again the
19 Bill that I have the honor to be speaking about today
20 that has the support of Public Advocate Jumaane
21 Williams also. It also has the support of Brooklyn
22 Borough President, Eric Adams. In many order, great
23 stake holders that you will hear today. When we will
24 open the sanction for the public, you will hear
25 members from the Road Runner, from Asphalt Green,

COMMITTEE OF PARKS AND RECREATION

9

1
2 from the Armory, in Brooklyn and Washington Knights
3 for Local Institution of Community, all of them
4 supporting, and according to first person, one of the
5 participants in Olympic competition, Prescott, who
6 also has been a great leader in this effort,
7 (inaudible) also another person who was the last
8 person in charge of a sport commission under Michael
9 Bloomberg, and he has the idea now we have this
10 opportunity to take our Mayor's Office of Sport and
11 Recreation back to our city. What is the goal? The
12 goal is to centralize everything that we're doing as
13 city when it comes to sports. Either some level of a
14 sport going on, the answer is yes. Which agency
15 plays a role dealing park departments DYCD. If we
16 ask New York City today, do we have the numbers, can
17 we look at how are we going as a city creating a
18 pipeline so that youth have the opportunity to get
19 the support that they need to be competitive in any
20 sport discipline that it choose, soccer, rowing,
21 baseball, basketball, swimming and others, they
22 answer with those, and that's what we would like to
23 see happen. So, today's Bill would like to
24 restructure and bring back the creation of the
25 Mayor's Office of Sports and Entertaining that will

COMMITTEE OF PARKS AND RECREATION

10

1
2 be responsible to put a strategy and initiative
3 together to support our youth to competitive sports.
4 We thank everyone that provide an opportunity to our
5 children and our youth in different sports
6 discipline; however, we can do better. Here in New
7 York City, we have Fordham University, division one
8 in baseball. They have like 35 players. Do you know
9 how many of them are black and Latino? Like three,
10 here in our city. Why? Because we don't have a
11 pipeline to support, to identify, support the youth
12 so that they get connected with all the training with
13 the conscious of their need to develop all the talent
14 that they have. We as a city have that opportunity
15 again to be a center of a sport. Here we have
16 Madison Square Garden. We have the Mets. We have
17 Barkley. We have the Yankee Stadium. We have all
18 these institutions that we feel they all can
19 contribute much more. So again, this not about
20 creating something that we have never had in the
21 past. This is about bringing the Mayor's office of
22 Sport and Recreation that we would be responsible to
23 put a strategy, to put an initiative together to
24 provide that opportunity for our children and our
25 youth to get all the support that they need to

COMMITTEE OF PARKS AND RECREATION

11

1 develop their sport's talents that they have. So,
2 that's (Speaking Spanish), and then when we hear from
3 the Administration as I have spoke to them, it's not
4 about what we're doing to parks, what we're doing
5 through DOE, or what we're doing through DOYCD. It's
6 about centralizing all those resources so that we can
7 elevate the level of opportunity for our youth, when
8 it comes to competitive sports in New York City.
9 Thank you, Chair.

11 CHAIR KOO: Thank you, Council Member
12 Rodriguez. We are also joined by Council Member Van
13 Bramer and Council Member (Inaudible) Kris Sartori.

14 COMMITTEE COUNSEL KRIS SARTORI: Thank
15 you, Chair. I'm Kris Sartori, Senior Council of the
16 Committee on Parks and Recreation, and I'll be
17 moderating this hearing. Before we begin, I'd like
18 to remind everyone that you'll be on mute until you
19 are called on to testify. At which point, you're be
20 unmuted by the host. During the hearing, I'll be
21 calling on panelists to testify, so please listen for
22 your name to be called as I'll periodically be
23 announcing who the next panelists will be. We will
24 first be hearing testimony from the Administration,
25 followed by testimony from members of the public.

COMMITTEE OF PARKS AND RECREATION

12

1
2 During the hearing, if Council Members would like ask
3 a question of the Administration or of a specific
4 panelist, please use the Zoom raise hand function and
5 I will call on you in order. We will be limiting
6 Council Member questions to five minutes, which
7 includes a time it takes to answer those questions.
8 For members of the public, we will be limiting
9 speaking time to three minutes in order to
10 accommodate all who wish to speak today. Once you
11 are called on to testify, please begin by stating
12 your name and the organization you represent, if any.
13 We will now call on Representatives of the
14 Administration to testify. Appearing today for the
15 Department of Parks and Recreation will be Margaret
16 Nelson, Deputy Commissioner for the Urban Park
17 Service and Public Programs, Ken Conyers, Deputy
18 Chief of Recreation, Matt Drury, Director of
19 Government Relations, and Patricia Perrone, Chief of
20 Staff for Park Services Programs. At this time, I
21 will administer the Affirmation to each
22 representation of the Administration. I'll call on
23 you each individually for a response, so at this
24 time, please raise your right hands. Do you affirm
25 to tell the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but

COMMITTEE OF PARKS AND RECREATION

13

the truth before this Committee and to respond
honestly to Council Member questions? Commissioner
Nelson.

COMMISSIONER NELSON: I do.

COMMITTEE COUNSEL KRIS SARTORI: Thank
you. Mr. Conyers.

KEN CONYERS: I do.

COMMITTEE COUNSEL KRIS SARTORI: Thank
you. Mr. Drury.

COMMITTEE COUNSEL KRIS SARTORI: Ms.
Perrone.

PATRICIA PERRONE: I do.

COMMITTEE COUNSEL KRIS SARTORI: Thank
you. At this time, I would like invite Deputy
Commissioner Nelson to please present her testimony.

COMMISSIONER NELSON: Thank you. Good
morning Chair Koo and Members of the Committee on
Parks and Recreation. I am Margaret Nelson, Deputy
Commissioner of Urban Park Service and Public
Programs. Joined with me are Matt Drury, Director of
Government Relation, and Ken Conyers, Deputy Chief of
Recreation for Manhattan who is heavily involved with
permit issuance. Thank you for inviting me to
testify today regarding the Parks Department's

COMMITTEE OF PARKS AND RECREATION

14

athletic field permit process. At New York City Parks, our mission is to offer resilient and sustainable parks, public spaces and recreational amenities for present and future generations. Making our athletic facilities available to the public is a significant way in which we fulfill that mission as is care and maintenance of those facilities. We are the steward of over 1000 athletic field and over 4000 athletic courts. In typical years, the agency issue approximately 8300 athletic field permits annually which represents just over 900,000 hours of playing time. It is our agency's responsibility to provide athletic permits to hundreds of schools, youth leagues, and adult recreation leagues for use of the fields all over the city. Our athletic field permit holders are as vast and varied as the population of New York City. Approximately 1000 youth leagues, 400 schools enrolled in the public school athletically, PSAL, an additional 400 schools affiliated with leagues other than PSAL and 600 adult leagues, all hosting games and practices of a wide variety of competitive sports. The agency, we believe, has made significant strides in recent years making the athletic field permitting process less cumbersome,

COMMITTEE OF PARKS AND RECREATION

15

more transparent, and more equitable for our users.

For example, since the last Council hearing on

ballfield permitting in 2018, the agency launched a

user-friendly searchable field and court availability

map. This tool helps permit applicants and permit

holders the ability to see current usage and open

availably for a field or court. In addition, the

tool allows members of the community the ability to

see when their local field is unpermitted and

therefore available to them for recreation. We

strive to create a simple and straight forward permit

system. Each season, fall, winter, spring, summer

has an application period where anyone interested in

obtaining a permit can go to our website and apply.

We also accept paper applications at our ballfield

permit offices if needed. We do not have a ballfield

permit application fee. Youth permits are always

free and adults pay an hourly fee. Once the

application period is over, the application are

reviewed by our staff. Applications are prioritized

starting with returning youth and official school

leagues, followed by returning adult permit holders

and finally any new permit requests prioritized first

for youth leagues and then for new adult leagues. We

COMMITTEE OF PARKS AND RECREATION

16

do our best to permit field for individuals interested in starting a new league or program by identifying open field space that may be suitable and by working with the existing permit holders that may not need all allocated hours. Some new organizations have trouble securing time at their preferred fields, but we often are able to work with them to find space so they can build their program to serve the youth in the community. After permit review, patrons are contacted about their requests and permits are issued based on availability of field, dates, times and payment received. Permit holders must agree to and sign our sports permit guidelines which delineates our rules and regulations. In winter season, we only permit synthetic field due to the damage that can be caused on our natural turf fields in increment weather. In 2019, we received 15,151 permit requests which was an increase of over 2000 requests from the previous year. We were able to issue approximately 8400 approvals from these requests. This increase in requests may be explained by our technological upgrades to the application system, making it easier to navigate the field and court availability map, and permit priority guidelines establishing well-defined

COMMITTEE OF PARKS AND RECREATION

17

1
2 application periods and expanded season of play to
3 accommodate growing demand. New York City Parks
4 makes every effort to fairly accommodate as many
5 requests for fields and courts as possible for each
6 season. We receive thousands of permit requests,
7 many of them for the same fields and times and we
8 make every attempt to distribute equitably. Since
9 2016, we have seen a steady increase in the number of
10 applications and approvals. We work in close
11 coordination with our parks enforcement patrol to
12 ensure that permit rules are being followed, confirm
13 that groups are using their permitted time
14 appropriately and minimize instances of permitted
15 time going unused. In an effort to better monitor
16 compliance with all athletic fields, rules, and
17 regulations prior to COVID, the agency implemented a
18 target inspection pilot program where parks
19 enforcement officers in each borough conducted field
20 inspections during the spring 2019 season. Our data
21 showed that 1122 inspections were completed citywide
22 and the effort resulted in the complete revocation of
23 baseball athletic field permit for an adult league
24 totally 189 hours of playing time. Additionally, 14
25 leagues lost field time because they weren't using

COMMITTEE OF PARKS AND RECREATION

18

1
2 the time allocated to them. A combined total of 545
3 hours were taken back from those 14 leagues.
4 Inspections were scheduled to resume in March of
5 2020, but priorities shifted due to the COVID
6 response. In 2020, we created an application to
7 track inspection data focused mainly on COVID
8 compliance. Overall, we found most permit holders to
9 be in compliance with our COVID guidelines delineated
10 in our COVID affirmations document for which we
11 require signature upon permit issuance. We look
12 forward to exploring other uses for the application
13 and potentially expanding its functionality in the
14 future. COVID related restrictions impacted most of
15 our 2020 permitting process. Right at the beginning
16 of our spring/summer on March 23rd, we suspended all
17 permits. Following state guidance and consultation
18 with the city Department of Health, the decision was
19 made on May 13th to cancel all permits for the rest
20 of the season, which ends on August 31st. Throughout
21 this time, our parks were being heavily used in an
22 unprecedented way. We had to restrict access to
23 certain park amenities in an attempt to decrease
24 spread of the virus. Fields were available on a
25 first come, first serve bases and we encouraged the

COMMITTEE OF PARKS AND RECREATION

19

public to share the spaces with their fellow New Yorkers. To the best of our ability, we worked with public and private open space stewards to increase accessibility to as many open spaces as possible. We also offered a plethora of virtual programming, everything from fitness classes to environmental education to keep people moving and engaged. As the COVID landscape continued to evolve, in an attempt to anticipate a fall season, we help a truncated fall application period from June 15th to July 31st. On September 15th, we started issuing fall permits to youth leagues only and did not issue any adult permits. All permit holders were required to sign an athletic affirmation form which dictated new guidelines based on known COVID restrictions and best practices. On November 19th, when the city reached a 3% seven-day average of positive COVID tests, and the Mayor closed schools, we suspended all permits to the close of the fall season, which ended on November 30th. On December 3rd, we began issuing winter permits for both youth and adults. We are currently in our winter season, which ends on March 16th. We have begun issuing permits for the spring/summer season for baseball, softball, cricket, racket games,

COMMITTEE OF PARKS AND RECREATION

20

1
2 field hockey, soccer, non-contact lacrosse, flag
3 football, track and ultimate discs. High contact
4 sports like football, basketball, volleyball, rugby,
5 and contact lacrosse are not being permitted at this
6 time due to COVID transmission concerns. As the
7 COVID landscape begins to change in the coming
8 months, and we with the new vaccinations and better
9 weather, inviting increased participation in our
10 public spaces, New York City Parks remains committed
11 to the health and safety of our visitors. Permitting
12 decisions are not made in a vacuum. They are made in
13 close coordination with guidelines and best practices
14 from help authorities at the state, local and federal
15 level. We completely understand the desire to get
16 outside and exercise, and the desire to get back to
17 what we once called normal; however, great care must
18 be taken to ensure the safety of everyone on our
19 fields and playing surfaces. The COVID pandemic has
20 also highlighted New Yorker's desire to access to
21 their parks. We understand the needs to communities
22 and worked hand-in-hand with community leaders to
23 build greater capacity in our permitting system.
24 Where ever feasible, we add lighted fields and courts
25 to extend permitted hours. In the last two years,

COMMITTEE OF PARKS AND RECREATION

21

1 we've installed field lights at one field and
2 installed sports lighting at two basketball courts.
3 We've also created a synthetic turf maintenance team
4 that works to maintain and extend the usable life of
5 our over 200 synthetic turf fields throughout the
6 city. This Administration knows how important it is
7 to build new field to serve New Yorkers. We've
8 invested \$150 million to renovate five beloved
9 neighborhood parks, which in every case included
10 upgrading or creating new field space. In Astoria
11 Park, we heard the community's need to an upgraded
12 soccer field, and we were able to meet that need by
13 converting a natural turf field to synthetic turf
14 soccer field and track. We also completed a new
15 synthetic turf soccer practice field in Highbridge in
16 Manhattan, and that's the picture behind me, and
17 renovated a natural turf field in St. Mary's in the
18 Bronx, and upgraded a natural turf soccer and
19 football field to synthetic turf in Besty Head (SP?)
20 in Brooklyn, which is also a strike for lacrosse.
21 Still to come in this project are two new soccer
22 fields in Freshkills Park in Staten Island, which
23 will also be striped to allow for other sports. In
24 total, in the past few years, we have completed
25

COMMITTEE OF PARKS AND RECREATION

22

capital projects that include renovating or creating 15 synthetic turf fields citywide with more in the pipeline. New Yorkers are passionate about living active, healthy lives from soccer in the Bronx, flag football in Brooklyn, basketball in Manhattan, Cricket in Queens, and youth baseball in Staten Island, our fields are put to use every single day in every corner of the city. We are proud of the steps our agency has taken to make the permitting process for athletic fields more accessible, transparent, and equitable. Thank you for allowing me to testify before you today and for all of your continued advocacy for our city parks. I will be happy to answer any questions that you may have, and I would also just like to point out that when we're done with our section, we will definitely have staff from Parks beyond the main Zoom call to just hear the public testimony, and I've also included in my testimony just a little bit of the schedule of when the different sessions are and when to apply.

COMMITTEE COUNSEL KRIS SARTORI: Thank you, Commissioner Nelson. Before we move on to questions from Chair Koo and Council Member Rodriguez, I would just like to know, there was a

1 COMMITTEE OF PARKS AND RECREATION

23

2 technical glitch or we didn't quite get Ken Conyer's
3 affirmation. So, I will just reissue the affirmation
4 once again, Mr. Conyers and just please respond
5 afterwards. Just bear with me one second, please.
6 Okay, do you affirm to tell the truth, the whole
7 truth, and nothing but the truth before this
8 Committee and to respond honestly to Council Member's
9 questions?

10 KEN CONYERS: I do.

11 COMMITTEE COUNSEL KRIS SARTORI: Great,
12 thank you very much, and thank you. At this point, I
13 will turn it over to Council Koo to ask questions.

14 CHAIR KOO: Thank you. Before I ask
15 questions, I want to announce that we are also joined
16 by Council Ulrich. Commission, Nelson, thank you
17 very much and your team coming here to testify. So,
18 my question to you, the first question is how many
19 permits for the use of athletic fields are issued by
20 DPR in a given season prior to COVID?

21 COMMISSIONER NELSON: So, it does vary by
22 season, but in general, I'm not sure I have it broken
23 down by like spring, summer, fall and winter..

24 (Crosstalk).

25

COMMITTEE OF PARKS AND RECREATION

24

CHAIR KOO: Can you, can you, do a break down by sport or by ball, by sport or by ball?

COMMISSIONER NELSON: So, what I can give you is, say for 2019, where we approved 8400 permits, we approved, is that, is that helpful like how many permits per year, per borough we approved? So, we approved in Manhattan 3328, in the Bronx it was 737, in Brooklyn it was 2129, in Queens it was 1709, and Staten Island it was 249. So, those were the numbers by borough, and in general, we approved approximately 50% to 60% of all permits requested, and it was pretty standard across each borough.

CHAIR KOO: What about by sport? Do you have it by sport, like the soccer, baseball?

COMMISSIONER NELSON: I don't think I have it by sport, but I can certainly get that to you after the hearing.

CHAIR KOO: Okay, thanks. So, the Department tracks complaints made against permit holders for violations of permit conditions or other rules. So, do you track the complaints?

COMMISSIONER NELSON: So, so, we have a couple of ways that we try to track our permit holders and how things are going. So, we do say on

COMMITTEE OF PARKS AND RECREATION

25

1
2 our permit that if a permit holder is seeing a
3 violation, by, you know, when they are out on the
4 field that they see a different league or a different
5 team in violation, they're not supposed to have the
6 field, we're telling everyone they should report that
7 to 3-1-1. So, 3-1-1 is one of the ways that register
8 complaints both by permit holders or by members of
9 the public, and those complaints, depending on the
10 nature of the complaint, they usually go immediately
11 to park officers to respond to. So, we seen, I would
12 say in a normal year, we might get certain complaints
13 where a league has shown up to use a field and they
14 find that there's a pickup game going on or there's
15 other folks who are not supposed to be there, and
16 they're having trouble getting them off. So, they
17 can call Parks for that. So, that's one way that we
18 kind of, are trying to help our permit holders. I
19 would say the other thing we do to monitor our permit
20 holders, and again, I mentioned this in my testimony,
21 is that we've started to do some more, kind of,
22 official monitoring and spot checking. So, we
23 started that based on when the Council passed their
24 AED Law which requires softball and baseball leagues
25 to have AEDs on site. So, that started a process

COMMITTEE OF PARKS AND RECREATION

26

1 where we're checking. We're going out to those
2 fields and checking to make sure the AEDs are there,
3 and that somebody who is trained on the AED is there.
4 So, that started in the spring of 19, so we have data
5 from that, and what we did find is that 90% of the
6 time when a team was there and playing, that they
7 were in compliance, so we think that is a good start,
8 but we are moving towards having more regular checks
9 and more data about what we're seeing when we go out.
10 So, this fall, as I mentioned, we also started having
11 PEP go out and really checking for COVID compliance,
12 and again, we were trying to check about 15% of
13 fields per week for COVID compliance, and again, we
14 found approximately 94% when there were teams on the
15 field, that they were in compliance with COVID
16 regulations and had their permit and were the right
17 team on the right field at the right time. So, I
18 would say in both of those situations, we have seen
19 some amount of fields not being used when they are
20 permitted, so sometimes that happens, you know, it
21 could be the weather, it could be they're an away
22 game, but that is something that I think as an
23 agency, we are looking to work on going forward even
24 more as we start doing these inspections cause we
25

COMMITTEE OF PARKS AND RECREATION

27

1
2 want to make sure that when a league has a field,
3 that they are using it because if they're not, we'd
4 like to make sure it's available for another league
5 or team to use.

6 CHAIR KOO: So, so, Commissioner, so
7 there are, there are PEP officers specifically
8 dedicated to address permit complaints, right? So,
9 there are some officers... (Crosstalk).

10 COMMISSIONER NELSON: Well, we're not
11 doing it with specific officer. We actually, our
12 officers are now all equipped with phone, with mobile
13 phones and we have an app on the phone, and kind of
14 all officers, kind of as they're out in the field,
15 some number of them are doing some spot checks. So,
16 it's not a specific unit doing the spot checks. As
17 you know, we have officer kind of based in, in the
18 boroughs, in different commands in borough, I would
19 say for every, each of those have commands and sub-
20 commands, sometimes during the week, officers are
21 doing spot checks.

22 CHAIR KOO: So, as something related to
23 the permits, PEP officers, when they are on the field
24 or in the parks, are they also enforcing other
25 regulations, like sometimes there are unlicensed

COMMITTEE OF PARKS AND RECREATION

28

1 vending in parks, do they do enforcement, at the same
2 time, while they're there, they see something..
3 (crosstalk).

4
5 COMMISSION NELSON: Yeah, so they're
6 basically out in their general operation, so they
7 might be stopping by a field to check on the permit,
8 but if they're on their way to that field, and they
9 see something else they need to crack, they are
10 totally able to do that. It's part of their, we're
11 just kind of adding it into their daily operations.

12 CHAIR KOO: Yeah, because I haven't heard
13 complaints from the park's conservancy groups. They
14 are low enforcement on the licensed vending in
15 certain parks, you know. So, I hope this issue is
16 brought to your attention.

17 COMMISSIONER NELSON: I will, I will
18 bring that back. I would say that, given COVID,
19 there has been a lot more focus by PEP officers on,
20 you know, not so much now, but definitely in the
21 spring and the summer, they were doing a lot of
22 compliance around COVID violations and crowding
23 conditions, and you know, when we had our closed
24 features and parks, making sure people weren't in
25 features that were not opened, so they had a lot more

COMMITTEE OF PARKS AND RECREATION

29

1
2 work that they were doing in the spring and the
3 summer related to COVID compliance and handing out
4 masks than they had, you know, because of the
5 pandemic.

6 CHAIR KOO: So, so how many complaints
7 were made last year by violation or permits?

8 COMMISSIONER NELSON: So, again, we
9 collect through 3-1-1, and we don't have it
10 necessarily broken down by which type of violation,
11 but I think that is something we're going to look to
12 do in the future. I would say in the past year,
13 maybe we've gotten, you know, 80 to 100, but a lot of
14 those were actually social dis-, like people
15 complaining about social distancing complaints on a
16 field like people are playing soccer without masks or
17 thing like that. So, I think we do more of a, kind
18 of a (inaudible). So, I don't have that breakdown
19 right now for you.

20 CHAIR KOO: So, can you get that to us
21 later? Yeah?

22 COMMISSIONER NELSON: Yes.

23 CHAIR KOO: Okay.
24
25

COMMITTEE OF PARKS AND RECREATION

30

1
2 COMMISSIONER NELSON: But your question
3 specifically, how many, how many complaints did we
4 receive for violations of a permit holder?

5 CHAIR KOO: Yeah, yeah, and again, how
6 many were investigated.. (crosstalk). Sometimes
7 people call 3-1-1 and then maybe nobody go over there
8 and take a look or sometimes because the office is
9 busy. So, how many, like how many complaints did you
10 receive and how many are investigated?

11 COMMISSIONER NELSON: Got it. I would
12 say in just a general review of the data, there were
13 very few complaints about a field being used by
14 somebody that was not the permit, by a different; I
15 think there were a lot of complaints about pickup
16 teams happening when a permitted user was trying to
17 use the field. I think there were a lot of
18 complaints related to social distancing, but we
19 didn't see in general a lot of complaints about a
20 different, you know, league or organized group using
21 a field. I will definitely check on that and get
22 back to you.

23 CHAIR KOO: Commissioner, with today's
24 testimony, you didn't mention anything about Bill
25 sponsored by, the Bill number is 1959, sponsored by

Council Member Rodriguez to create an Office of

Sports Recreation. How come you didn't have any, you

didn't mention anything in your testimony?

COMMISSIONER NELSON: I'm going to turn

that over to Matt to comment on the Bill. Thank you.

CHAIR KOO: Uh, okay.

MATT DRURY: Council Member, can you hear

me? Yeah, I'm Matt Drury... (Crosstalk).

CHAIR KOO: Yeah, I can hear you, yeah.

MATT DRURY: So, yes, you know, my

apologies for any confusion. Obviously, Commissioner

Nelson was kind of speaking to kind of the primary

oversight subject, but I'm absolutely pleased to talk

about, obviously, the Introduction we're familiar

with. I think you heard in our testimony today, we

share the sponsor's passion and the Council's passion

for promoting sports recreational activities. We

want to increase opportunities for sports recreation

throughout the city. That's true at the local and

community level, you know, that's at our recreation

centers, our courts, our fields, but for league

activities as you're hearing a lot about today, but

also, you know, pickup sports, obviously are part of

the life blood of New York City. In fact, it's also

COMMITTEE OF PARKS AND RECREATION

32

1 true for some real world class sporting event, you
2 know, quasi, professional or amateur that take place
3 in our facilities. You know, the USA Track and Field
4 Indoor Championship which has come to Ocean Breeze
5 Athletic Complex in Staten Island, really exciting,
6 you know, something of a real big draw, if you know
7 drawing, drawing teams from all over the country.

8 So, the long story short is we absolutely 100% agree
9 that sports recreation is vastly important. We
10 really appreciate the intent of the bill. You know,
11 we want to look forward to discussing it forward with
12 the sponsor and with the various other city entities.

13
14 CHAIR KOO: I think the Bill has a really
15 good intention behind it because we, as a big city,
16 we need to create a pipeline for future athletes.
17 Many children, they have special talents or potential
18 talents, but if discovered early, we can send them to
19 camps or special schools. Actually, in other
20 countries, this is a national policy. I mean, I
21 think in China, if you're only 3 or 4 years old, if
22 you have a special talent in doing certain things,
23 they will talk to the parents and say, "Hey, you're
24 kid has special talents" in something like gymnastics
25 or ping pong or even martial arts, or a 5 or 6-year-

COMMITTEE OF PARKS AND RECREATION

33

1
2 old, they will send them special school to train them
3 for like, for local competitions first, and then from
4 local competitions, they will go to like state
5 competition and then national competition, and that's
6 why they have a pipeline, to go to the Olympics or
7 other competitions. So, I think this is a good idea
8 that the city has a centralized space to create a
9 pipeline to monitor and coordinate all of these
10 activities together. Councilman Rodriguez, do you
11 have any questions for Matt?

12 CM RODRIGUEZ: I, I do, and thank you
13 Chair, and that, you know, as you will hear later on
14 from the testimony, as I say, we have Ken Podziba,
15 who now is the Executive Director of Bike New York,
16 that he won the larger bike tour in the United States
17 and the second one in the whole nation. He was the
18 last one that was in charge, and I want to correct
19 the typo because it's not a sport recreation. It's
20 the Office of Sport and Recreation, and because the
21 idea is that yes, like, you know, most of those
22 elected officials, we go through many parades, right,
23 and inner league baseball league, and we go through
24 all the sports, we go in bowling and basketball
25 tournaments. However, it is, you know, as a pitcher

COMMITTEE OF PARKS AND RECREATION

34

1
2 that I was for 15 years, I'm all about parks. So,
3 when you will hear from Ken Podziba, who, on the
4 Bloomberg, he was the Director of the New York City
5 Sport and Recreation, we will hear how Mayor
6 Bloomberg was committed. So, build a, an office that
7 was in charge to market New York City around sports.
8 So, while what we are saying is, we have a lot of
9 institutions, that they taking kids away to Olympic,
10 like (inaudible) and again, like, you know, my
11 daughter, she's in the swimming team there, and I
12 know that (inaudible) they do a lot of sport
13 programming as also we have the other institutions
14 that they do swimming in the George Washington, but
15 one thing is about, you know, bringing kids,
16 especially in this community and train to the lower
17 skill, and expose them to everything that is around
18 the sport. The other things is follow me exactly
19 what you're saying. Creating a pipeline. So, based
20 on what we know is that this thing that happened
21 through, you know, DOE when it comes to a sport. The
22 school that I used to be a teacher (inaudible) High
23 School, they didn't play last year because of the
24 COVID, but a year ago, they won the high school
25 baseball championship in the City of New York,

COMMITTEE OF PARKS AND RECREATION

35

1
2 playing in the Yankee Stadium. We, as a city, we
3 don't have, you know, we don't have an office that is
4 designated to put a strategy to put initiative back
5 in (inaudible) right now, how many kids do we have in
6 lower levels, in middle level, at the high school
7 level that are, can be competitive. Again, my nephew
8 used to play baseball. One of them is in Arizona,
9 but the oldest one, he was in the Fordham University
10 baseball team, which is college baseball division
11 one. Here in the Bronx, every five players, and like
12 three black, Latino or Asian. A lot have to do with
13 lack of pipeline. So, my thing is, and I'm happy
14 again to know, that City Hall is open, that we can
15 have conversation, and with the support of the Chair
16 and key players and from the speaker and my colleague
17 are from Brooklyn (inaudible) Eric Adam who also
18 supports this initiative. You know, I'm happy to see
19 that we will get it done, but my question is, if you
20 can answer that question now, can you share with us,
21 where do we have a level of centralized coordination
22 among city agencies and how do you see that this
23 Mayor's Office of Sports and Recreation can play the
24 role to help to promote competitive sports in our
25 youth, in the city of New York.

COMMITTEE OF PARKS AND RECREATION

36

1
2 MATT DRURY: Yeah, I think it's an
3 excellent point Council Member and well-stated. I
4 think, you know, obviously, our agency, we're
5 abundantly proud. There are, you know, there are
6 dozens, if not hundreds of, you know, sports legends
7 that gone to success, you know, that initially, you
8 know, learned their skills and honed their skills on
9 New York City's fields and courts, rather it's Rucker
10 Park or some, you know, some of our great ball fields
11 or our swim facilities, tennis courts, what have you.
12 So, that's, you know, we're certainly proud of that
13 success. It doesn't mean there couldn't always be
14 more, right? And even beyond, you know, short of
15 professional success, you know, that sort of
16 development, and you know, the life improvements that
17 can come out that, the educational lessons, teamwork,
18 you know, hard work, those sort of dedications.
19 Those kind of things are obviously priceless, so, we,
20 I think that's 100% heard and received very, very
21 well. I'm not aware that there is a sort of a, you
22 know, strategic obviously, it intersects with the
23 city's efforts towards education, health, you know,
24 public health obviously, you know, youth development.
25 There are so many different aspects that sports plays

COMMITTEE OF PARKS AND RECREATION

37

1
2 an important at, and we certainly work really closely
3 with all of those entities on a variety of different
4 efforts, but to the degree of rather they are sort of
5 a, you know, one entity, sort of mapping of a master
6 strategy, you know, I guess, at the time, there's
7 not, you know, a office of that sort. I wasn't here
8 when the actually sports commission was in place, you
9 know, obviously, our staff will be on to listen to
10 the public testimony, so, and some of us are familiar
11 with it in the past, economic development, and things
12 of that aspect are included. So, we're, you know,
13 understandably, I think we're open to hearing more
14 and look forward to the conversation.

15 CM RODRIGUEZ: Thank you, and the second
16 part that I want to bring is that, you know, we also;
17 my experience is that, again, as a former teacher, as
18 someone who has a younger brother, that, you know,
19 and everyone knows, sports provide the discipline,
20 you know, that children also need. I have younger
21 brothers of mine that they were in the track and
22 field at Aviation High School. Yes, he completed at
23 a high school level, he didn't pursue in that field,
24 but I think that a lot of the discipline that he got
25 in baseball, helped him out to be a captain in Jet

COMMITTEE OF PARKS AND RECREATION

38

1
2 Blue, flying in another field. So, it's about also,
3 you know, all the discipline that is there, and also
4 I think that we do agree also that there safe got.
5 When it comes to, you know, the middle and upper-
6 middle class New Yorkers able to, even, as you know,
7 like, I know that the Parks is doing a great job, and
8 as you know, in lower Manhattan, my worry is
9 connected with the money. So, I've been doing all
10 the investment when it comes to our Parks because I
11 do believe in that, but the other reality is that,
12 even in the tennis and code section, that the
13 concern, you know, are there enough to play it? You
14 know, sports are expensive, and it's different for a
15 lower class kid and a class A kid to say, "Here, I'm
16 into swimming, I'm into baseball, I'm into soccer"
17 when you pay \$2000 for six months, the quality of
18 training that you get is much higher than the other
19 program that we have in other places in the city.
20 What they don't have are resources. So, I think you
21 know, the quality of this is about how the wheels are
22 connected with the private sector. All those sport
23 institutions that we're mentioning and see how with;
24 and a foundation to say Guy, we need to connect our
25 youth to more resources so that they can get more

COMMITTEE OF PARKS AND RECREATION

39

1
2 training to develop their skills. So, I think that,
3 you know, I just want to make a point as I see part,
4 as a key player in this effort to also, as we would
5 have more conversation with City Hall and the speaker
6 that I thankfully, you know, he also supports this
7 initiative, Speaker Corey Johnson, that we can also
8 identify because we'll see more of that direct
9 creation, and that's why I say, Instagram is not a
10 sport recreation. It's not only about their
11 conversation, it's not about let's expand base
12 efforts so that more youth are in the parks and not
13 losing the time that's free. It's not about that.
14 It's about competitor, it's about Rowing New York.
15 You know, when they came to uptown, and thanks to
16 Amanda, that now they moved up to the national level,
17 I had that conversation with her. I said Rowing is
18 now part of a community group in lower Manhattan
19 because Dominicans are more connected with baseball
20 and basketball, but she came in, she thought outside
21 the box, and she put the Rowing program connecting
22 youth in Lower Manhattan, there was youth from Lower
23 Manhattan that had never rowed in the river, winning
24 a statewide competition and at the same time, being
25 competitive to get a scholarship. So, I don't know,

COMMITTEE OF PARKS AND RECREATION

40

1
2 you know, that's going to be what you want about that
3 approach, also bringing (Inaudible) supporting them,
4 and also bringing the private sector.

5 MATT DRURY: Yeah, no, I think that's an
6 excellent point. Row New York is an excellent
7 example obviously. We'll look forward to hearing
8 more from them later. You know, but I think Parks
9 certainly is always, you know, pursuing and actively,
10 you know, interested in, you know, those kind of
11 partnerships with private entities to help, you know,
12 fund opportunities for either, you know, facility
13 improvement or, you know, provide programing and also
14 you know, the hundreds of non-profit partners we have
15 providing really incredible opportunities for kids,
16 especially the youth, providing, you know, and access
17 to a new activity that, you know, maybe folk ten,
18 twenty years ago said wouldn't have made sense, you
19 know, in that neighborhood, you know, X-Y-Z, but, you
20 know, I think we've seen, you know, when you allow
21 those opportunities to be offered to folks, and you
22 know, and you can really see some, you know, amazing
23 transformative impacts, you know, in our youth, and I
24 think we, you know, that's exciting and we want to
25

COMMITTEE OF PARKS AND RECREATION

41

1
2 sort of explore that, you know, to every degree
3 possible.

4 CM RODRIGUEZ: Thank you and thank you
5 Chair.

6 CHAIR KOO: Thank you. Thank you. Thank
7 you Council Member Rodriguez. Well, can we go back
8 to Commissioner Nelson?

9 MATT DRURY: Of course.

10 CHAIR KOO: Thank you. Thank you, Matt.
11 Commission Nelson, Are you still here?

12 COMMISSIONER NELSON: Yep, I'm here.

13 CHAIR KOO: Okay. So, let me go back to
14 more questions about the permits now. Okay, before
15 that, we are also joined by Council Member Gjonaj.
16 What are the fees that are charged for the different
17 kinds of permits, and how are those fees determined?
18 I mean, I know most of the fees, most of the permits
19 are free, but some, some they have to pay, right?

20 COMMISSIONER NELSON: Yeah, so, again, if
21 the field is going to be used by youth as defined as,
22 you know, I think it's 18 or under, 17 or under, it's
23 a youth league, it's a youth team, there is no
24 application fee to apply for a permit. There is no
25 fee to use the field. If it is an adult league or

COMMITTEE OF PARKS AND RECREATION

42

1
2 adults are going to be playing on the field, we have
3 a schedule of fee which I can share with you. So, if
4 the ball field has lights so it can be played on,
5 kind of into the evening cause it's has lights, it's
6 \$25.00 an hour. Cricket, football, lacrosse, rugby,
7 soccer and ultimate frisbee fields are \$16.00 per
8 hour. Baseball, softball and volleyball turf and
9 soft surface fields are \$12.50 an hour. Basketball,
10 baseball, softball, roller hockey and volleyball,
11 again this is for permitting as opposed to just
12 pickup play, is \$8.00 an hour.

13 CHAIR KOO: Okay. Thank you. So, are
14 there any pertinent measures that can be taken by the
15 DPR against a permit holder who has violated any
16 permit conditions? Are their permits revoked or are
17 there any criteria for revocation?

18 COMMISSIONER NELSON: Again, we want to
19 make sure our fields are being used for athletic
20 purposes by as many people as possible, by as many
21 groups as possible. So, if we get a report that a
22 league is not using their field or is doing something
23 inappropriate, we would first really reach out to
24 them to find out what they're saying cause ideally,
25 we want to work with our teams and our leagues to

COMMITTEE OF PARKS AND RECREATION

43

kind of first try to work out an amenable solution.

So, if they say, oh, you're right, you know, we

thought we'd need this time, but we don't and they

give it back, and they give it back voluntarily,

that's great, or they say, we thought we needed this,

but actually we need something, else, we try to work

with them, but if we do find that we're seeing

repeated instances of leagues not using their fields,

we will revoke that time and that does mean that they

would not be grandfathered for that time going

forward. So, we do take that charge very seriously

in terms of being stewards of these fields, and

that's something we definitely want, again, we cannot

be everywhere all the time, so, we need people to let

us know what their seeing and report it to us, and I

would say again, our advances in our technology and

our website, you know, have given a greater level of

transparency to everyone, so anyone can go on and see

who has a permit for that field, at what time. So,

if somebody says, oh, I just was there, and this was

supposed to be permitted, but it's empty, they can

report that to us, and we can look into it. So, we

can either, as you mentioned before, you know, that

might be a complaint that's not looked at by PEP.

COMMITTEE OF PARKS AND RECREATION

44

1
2 That would go to the ballfield coordinator to look
3 into what's going on and they would reach out
4 directly to the holder of the permit. So, we have
5 revoked time. We will continue to revoke time. We
6 use it as a last resort because again, some of these
7 are, you know, community leagues. We want to have a
8 cooperative process with them. There might have been
9 an error or a mistake. We want to first reach out,
10 but we will move to that step of revoking permits
11 overall or at least, some, you know, the time that
12 they're not using. Similarly, for COVID, you know,
13 we took our charge of we wanted to provide space for
14 people to play and have healthy, you know,
15 activities, but we wanted to make sure people were
16 following the COVID restrictions. So, as you said,
17 we did say that there was kind of a "Three strikes,
18 you're out" rule for teams and leagues following our
19 COVID guidelines. If we found that a team violated
20 it three times, we were going to revoke that permit
21 for that team, not necessarily the whole league. We
22 did find, in the fall and winter, there were 20
23 instances of teams really not following the COVID
24 guidelines. Some handful got a second warning.
25 Nobody went to a third warning and had it revoked.

COMMITTEE OF PARKS AND RECREATION

45

1
2 CHAIR KOO: SO, for a permit holder who
3 violated the rules, are they prevented from obtaining
4 future permits? Say, suppose this team or this guy,
5 you caught them violating the rules three times.

6 COMMISSIONER NELSON: So, I would say
7 that we, if we found somebody violating the rules in
8 a way that was illegal or corrupt, like they were
9 selling their time to another league, that's a
10 serious violation, and we would seek to revoke their
11 permit. I would.. (crosstalk).

12 CHAIR KOO: Their future permit?

13 COMMISSIONER NELSON: I'm going to ask
14 Ken, whose closer to this process to talk about that.
15 Again, if we find them violating, you know, if
16 they're not using the field once or twice, you know,
17 we're not necessarily going to revoke their whole
18 permit. We might, again, we're going to start with
19 trying to work with them to see what's going on and
20 seeing if there's a way they would voluntarily give
21 back some time, but I'm not sure, there might be
22 other instances where we would fully revoke an
23 entire permit for a league. I'm going to ask Ken if
24 he has anything to add to this.

25 CHAIR KOO: Okay.

COMMITTEE OF PARKS AND RECREATION

46

1
2 KEN CONYERS: Well, that's absolutely
3 correct, Commissioner. We don't revoke, we revoke
4 permit-by-permit. We don't revoke all individual
5 permits. So, if somebody is not using that time, we
6 catch them three times not using it, we revoke that
7 permit. They're not barred from putting in additional
8 permits. They are not barred from other permits that
9 they currently hold, except for the case, like
10 Commissioner Nelson stated, in regard to doing
11 anything illegal or selling of permits, then they're
12 locked out as an organization, and hold their
13 permits, but not using time revocations are done
14 permit-by-permit, field-by-field.

15 COMMISSIONER NELSON: And just to
16 clarify, which I had to learn as part of, you know,
17 preparing for this hearing, a league can put multiple
18 fields and multiple times on one permit, or they can
19 ask for multiple permits for different fields, so
20 that's why you see kind of a large volume of permits
21 and maybe why you have, you know, a high volume of
22 permits not approved. It doesn't mean the league
23 isn't getting any time. It means, that maybe, you
24 know, they put in a different permit for different
25 fields and they didn't get all of their permits.

COMMITTEE OF PARKS AND RECREATION

47

1
2 CHAIR KOO: Okay. So, when the PEP
3 officers go on their jobs, do they spot check people
4 playing on the fields, rather they have permits or
5 rather they comply with the rules and conditions?

6 COMMISSIONER NELSON: I would say that
7 they are going out with a list of what fields they
8 are going to check for the day, and they know what
9 the permit holders are and they're going there
10 specially to check. I don't think if they come
11 across somebody playing on a field, they're
12 necessarily going to then go that field and check
13 that unless there was a complaint.

14 CHAIR KOO: Okay. So, so, next question
15 is since Parks is apparently ready to start
16 processing permit applications for spring and summer
17 for some contact sports, is there a timeline as to
18 when contact sports permitting, example, football,
19 basketball, lacrosse, may be started in 2021?

20 COMMISSIONER NELSON: Yeah, we, we do not
21 have a timeline yet. I think we will continue our
22 conversation with the Department of Health about when
23 it might be safe to restart those sports in the city,
24 but at this point, the collective determination is
25 that we're not ready to do that.

COMMITTEE OF PARKS AND RECREATION

48

1
2 CHAIR KOO: So, you haven't set up the
3 criteria yet?

4 COMMISSIONER NELSON: My sense is that
5 we're starting to permit the sports that we talked
6 about before, and then when, kind of based on the
7 Department of Health determination when it's safe to
8 bring back those sports, we would let those sports
9 start and they would have to sign the same COVID
10 affirmation that we're using for all permitted
11 sports. So, it would probably be just like a start,
12 not anything intermediate in terms of putting this..
13 (Crosstalk).

14 CHAIR KOO: So, do you expect vaccines to
15 be mandated for all participating, at some point in
16 the future, especially for the close contact sports?
17 Do you anticipate... (crosstalk).

18 COMMISSIONER NELSON: (Crosstalk) but
19 again I think we really look for the Department of
20 Health to take the lead on kind of who should be
21 vaccinated and on what schedule, and we work with
22 them on that. They're the health experts and we
23 defer to their judgement.

24

25

COMMITTEE OF PARKS AND RECREATION

49

1
2 CHAIR KOO: So, for the restrictions and
3 protocols requiring to participate in close contact
4 sports, you would defer to the Department of Health?

5 COMMISSIONER NELSON: Again, my sense is
6 that for close contact sports, you can't really do
7 those sports without the close contact, and so you
8 want to wait until the COVID rates are low enough
9 that it is safe to do those contact sports. I don't
10 know, I mean, that would be, we can, like, talk to
11 the Department of Health and get more information on
12 what that process might look like and get back to
13 you.

14 CHAIR KOO: Okay, yeah. So, when we
15 received the complaint, when you receive a complaints
16 through 3-1-1 about obstructing public use in parks,
17 since these complaints are going up in the last few
18 years with the exception of 2020 because of the
19 COVID, are these complaints related, people
20 complaining about unauthorized use of athletic
21 fields? If so, what steps can your department take
22 to reduce these complaints?

23 COMMISSIONER NELSON: So, I guess in
24 counter year 2020, there were about 70 complaints in
25 our 3-1-1 system related to field, and again, I think

COMMITTEE OF PARKS AND RECREATION

50

1
2 a lot of those, what we're going to get you the
3 breakdown, were more related to social distancing or
4 pickup games being on the fields when somebody was
5 looking to use their permit. So, I don't think we've
6 seen increases in complaints over time, but we will
7 definitely check on that and get back to you. I
8 think it's been fairly steady, probably a little bit
9 of an increase this last year mostly due to COVID
10 related complaints in terms of social distancing on
11 fields or people not wearing masks.

12 CHAIR KOO: Yeah, before COVID, it was on
13 the rise, the complaints were going up, but because
14 of COVID, it stopped or leveled down. So, my
15 question is, what steps are you guys taking to handle
16 these complaints? So, does DPR need more enforcement
17 and officers specifically dedicated to enforce permit
18 violations?

19 COMMISSIONER NELSON: So, we have two,
20 two ways of dealing with complaints. So, again, if a
21 call comes in, and a PEP officer is available to go
22 and investigate, they will do that. There is a large
23 number of times where we can't send an officer to
24 investigate that, or there might be, it might be the
25 kind of complaint that goes to the permit coordinator

COMMITTEE OF PARKS AND RECREATION

51

1
2 in that borough to investigate because it's not a
3 time sensitive, it's not like something is happening
4 on the field right now, and so, then it would be up
5 to the permit coordinator to follow up on that
6 complaint and take action, and again, if it's a very
7 serious complaint about some sort of further
8 corruption, we would refer that to DOI for
9 investigation, but to my knowledge, we have not had
10 any of those kind of complaints in the last several
11 years.

12 CHAIR KOO: So, is there a signage system
13 in the park or on the web-based system on the
14 internet that can inform people in real time as is to
15 who is authorized to be at the field or court at a
16 given time? Can people say, I can go on my cell
17 phone and find out who are these guys playing on the
18 field because they are not doing the right things,
19 no?

20 COMMISSIONER NELSON: Yeah, no, I think,
21 and again, I think this was this kind of transparency
22 in wanting to have more access to this information
23 was something that was brought up at the last Council
24 hearing in 2018 on the field permit system. I think
25 we share your interest in trying to make what is

COMMITTEE OF PARKS AND RECREATION

52

1
2 admittedly, kind of a complicated system. We have a
3 lot of fields, we have a lot of hours, we have a lot
4 of teams. I want to kind of give a shout out at this
5 hearing, to the 10, you know, field coordinator
6 citywide who are handling these thousands of permit
7 requests and working with leagues and teams to get
8 them the time that they need. They're doing an
9 amazing job, but we agree with you in trying to make
10 this system easier to navigate and more transparent,
11 and since the last hearing on the permitting process,
12 we have created an online map. It's an interactive
13 map. Anybody can go on it. You can go on it on the
14 computer, with your phone and you can pull up in real
15 time, who has a permit at that time. So, we think
16 that's really helpful for exactly what you said, so,
17 if somebody walks by and they want to know whose
18 playing, they should be able to see that. Again, if
19 the field isn't permitted and someone's playing
20 there, that's not necessarily a bad thing, but they
21 would also be able to see if somebody did permit it
22 and it was empty; like that is a bad thing and we
23 would want to follow up with that team if possible.

24

25

COMMITTEE OF PARKS AND RECREATION

53

CHAIR KOO: Thank you, Commissioner.

Now, I want to turn the questions to my colleagues (Crosstalk). Thank you.

COMMITTEE COUNSEL KRIS SARTORI: Thank you Chair Koo. Before we move on to Council Member question, I'd just like to note for all who are attending the hearing that the Zoom hand raise function at this point is only for Council Members to ask questions. Rest assured, anyone else from the public who is currently on this hearing will be called on to speak at some point during the hearing, so please bear with us, thank you. At this point, we will move on to questions from other Council Members, and I will call on these other Members in the order they've used Zoom raise hand function. If you would like to ask a question and have not yet used the raise hand function, please do so now, Council Members. Also, please keep your questions to five minutes. The Sergeant at Arms will keep a timer and will let you know when your time is up. Please begin once I have called on you and the Sergeant has announced that you may begin before moving on. At this point, I will call on Council Member Diaz to ask questions.

COMMITTEE OF PARKS AND RECREATION

54

SGT. SADOWSKY: Time starts now.

CM DARMA DIAZ: Good afternoon. Thank you for this opportunity to speak with you all today. My question specifically is to (inaudible) Nelson Deputy and is in reference homelessness and how it's affecting parks. At this point, can you please follow up with a indicator, are the numbers going up, are they going down, and how do you deal with homelessness. Last week, we had someone in one of our parks that we had to deal with and I'm glad I was able to put a team together to deal with him; definitely, suffering not only displacement of homelessness, but severe case of mental health issues. He was flashing children and senior and so on. So, I'm sure as this is happening here in the 37th Council District, it's happening across the city.

COMMISSIONER NELSON: Thank you for that question, Council Member. I don't have statistics here in terms of increased or decreased in homelessness, and we don't really track homeless people who are using our parks cause they're allowed to use our parks like anybody else, but we do work very closely with Department of Homeless Services and

COMMITTEE OF PARKS AND RECREATION

55

1
2 other city agencies when, as you say, somebody's
3 doing something inappropriate or illegal. We want to
4 respond to that right away. So, people should
5 definitely report that either 9-1-1- or 3-1-1. We do
6 work very closely with Department of Homeless
7 Services in relation to people who might be sleeping
8 over night in our parks. We want to make sure
9 they're getting the appropriate services and we do,
10 you know, for code red and code blue, we check on
11 homeless locations to make sure they're getting the
12 services that we can try to provide them on those hot
13 days or cold days.

14 CM DARMA DIAZ: And I guess to be clear
15 on my question, parks are free, and coming from
16 someone homeless for 13 years, definitely walked up
17 and use of the park by anyone, my question was more
18 so, for the tents, you know, that are developing
19 within our communities, thank you.

20 COMMISSIONER NELSON: I'd be happy to
21 follow up with you offline about what you're seeing
22 as well and how we can better address it.

23 CM DARMA DIAZ: Thank you very much.

24 COMMITTEE COUNSEL KRIS SARTORI: Thank
25 you. We'll now hear questions from Council Member

COMMITTEE OF PARKS AND RECREATION

56

Riley. At this point, if there are other members who have questions, please use the Zoom hand raise function. Council Member Riley.

SGT. SADOWSKY: Time starts now.

CM RILEY: Thank you Council and that you Chair Koo. Thank you to the Department of Parks for your testimony today, and I have a few questions pertaining to the summer tournaments. One is what measures are the park department taking into reinstall summer tournaments, and if so, how many permits will be permitted for summer tournaments like basketball tournaments, soccer tournament, cause as we see right now, our high school athletes, especially being that they cannot engage in activity like they usually would, or can't get exposure, they'll really be looking forward to summer tournaments to kind of get this exposure, and to get the skills that they need to, you know, take their talents, you know, to take them to college or whatever professions they want to get into. So, I just want to know what the Parks Department is doing to reinstall summer tournaments, and if so, how many permits will be guaranteed this summer?

COMMITTEE OF PARKS AND RECREATION

57

1
2 COMMISSIONER NELSON: So, I think we
3 would love to be able to able have summer tournaments
4 this summer. I think we are still in the planning
5 stages with the Department of Health about what is
6 going to be safe and allowed. So, we're not really
7 ready to share. We don't really have a plan yet.
8 That's still in process, and I don't think we set a
9 limit on the number of tournaments. We really tried
10 to accommodate as many tournaments and community
11 events that we can. We do try to have a balance
12 between having some open time on courts, you know,
13 versus 100% scheduled. So, that is one of the
14 factors we try to keep in mind, but we do try to work
15 with permit applicants to grant their requests to the
16 extent possible, but in terms of, you know,
17 tournaments, I think currently, they're not allowed
18 under the COVID regulations and, you know, as our
19 rates go down and things become safer, we can bring
20 those back. I do look forward to do that as well,
21 and providing that opportunity.

22 CM RILEY: Thank you Commissioner Nelson,
23 and my last question is as we saw during the
24 pandemic, the parks were heavily utilized, we did see
25 an abundance of garbage throughout the park, so I

COMMITTEE OF PARKS AND RECREATION

58

1
2 just wanted to know, is there a strategic plan to
3 keeping our parks beautified during this summer
4 that's coming up cause we will know as soon as it
5 gets nice out, especially for the amount of snow that
6 we've been getting, people will be utilizing the
7 parks. So, is there a plan to keep our parks
8 beautified? And the reason I'm asking is because I
9 don't represent it, but it's outside my District,
10 Pelham Parkway in the Bronx, which was extremely
11 utilized during the summertime and during the COVID
12 pandemic, but there was bonus of garbage always there
13 when people were trying to utilize the park. So, is
14 there a plan to keep our parks beautiful during this,
15 until we get back any form of normality.

16 COMMISSIONER NELSON: So, I think our
17 Maintenance and Operations folks do an incredible job
18 trying to keep up with, you know, the parks became
19 everybody's back yard, front yard, living room,
20 during the pandemic. I think that we'll continue
21 having incredible usage of the parks, which you can
22 kind of track by the increased amount of garbage, and
23 I think that we're out there, we're cleaning, our
24 staff is cleaning. I think we're looking to engage
25 partnerships and community groups to help us with

COMMITTEE OF PARKS AND RECREATION

59

1
2 some of that effort. There's also a, I think a
3 public education component to that of like, the
4 people can kind of pack in and pack out instead of
5 leaving it there, if there's not enough room, that
6 would be helpful, but I think we're constantly
7 strategizing and really seeing what you're seeing and
8 trying to come up with ways that we can keep our
9 parks as clean as possible so people can enjoy them
10 this summer.

11 CM RILEY: Thank you.

12 COMMISSIONER NELSON: And Matt, I don't
13 know if you want to add anything to that.

14 MATT DRURY: No. I think that, noting
15 the public education campaign, you know, we launched
16 an anti-litter campaign earlier and that's going to
17 be kind of taking on, so, we'd love to partner with
18 you and your office, helping us to get the word out,
19 you know, I think the message we kind of, parks were
20 clearly there for New Yorkers, you know, when things
21 were toughest. We kind of need New Yorkers to be
22 there in turn for their park, right, so I think it's
23 a fair responsibility, you know, we have the best
24 staff in the world. They are busting their butts
25 obviously, keeping our, you know, but at the end of

COMMITTEE OF PARKS AND RECREATION

60

1
2 the day, we also, you know, we're all New Yorkers, we
3 share these public spaces, we also need to all step
4 up and do the right thing as well. So, it's that,
5 you know, that working together, and, you know, what
6 to work with you in discussing that further.

7 CM RILEY: Looking forward to it, and
8 thank you so much Commissioner, thank you Matt.

9 COMMITTEE COUNSEL KRIS SARTORI: Thank
10 you. Next, we have questions from Council Member
11 Holden.

12 SGT. SADOWSKY: Time starts now.

13 CM HOLDEN: Thank you Deputy Commissioner
14 and thank you Chair for holding this important
15 hearing. Deputy Commissioner, I just want to talk
16 about enforcement of, you know, the allegations.
17 It's been going on for decades about allegations of
18 brokering permits, grandfathering permits. Even
19 though the team or league may have disbanded the
20 permits continued, and what I found frustrating
21 dealing with the process for over 25 years, was, yes,
22 do I do mention you had to get three cases where the
23 permits were not being used by the organization or
24 the league, and the documentation of it was very
25 difficult because you had to get a park supervisor

COMMITTEE OF PARKS AND RECREATION

61

1
2 down to the field to see that the fields weren't
3 being used. You couldn't submit photographs that are
4 timestamped, you couldn't submit video. You had a
5 park supervisor there three times, and that, Deputy
6 Commissioner was practically impossible. So, what
7 would happen, is this would continue and continue for
8 a very long time. The fields were unused. So, I was
9 getting complaints from the teams that they had to
10 travel all the way out to Long Island while their
11 home field was sitting empty for weeks and weeks and
12 weeks because we couldn't get a park supervisor out
13 there. Has that changed at all in the last 20 years?

14 COMMISSIONER NELSON: Well, I have not
15 been at Parks for 20 years, and I've been in this
16 position for about two years. I would like to say,
17 I'm going to have, I'm not necessarily going to
18 comment on what happened before, there definitely was
19 this sense of like three strikes before we pulled it
20 involuntarily, a permit from someone... (Crosstalk).

21 CM HOLDEN: What was the, no, can you
22 answer the, what is required for the evidence does a
23 park supervisor have to see that the fields are not
24 being used?

25

COMMITTEE OF PARKS AND RECREATION

62

1
2 COMMISSIONER NELSON: I would say that it
3 does not require a park supervisor since right now
4 we're using our PEP officers to go out in the field,
5 and that can be used as well, so, I think we are
6 trying to expand who we have out in the field looking
7 for these potential violations and again, as we
8 talked about, we don't have that many PEP officers
9 versus the number of fields and the number of
10 permits, so I was definitely say, if you should share
11 with us, and I'm sorry you've been doing this over 20
12 years, but I would like to take your concerns
13 seriously, and look at the fields that you're talking
14 about and leagues that you're talking about, and
15 really make it, anywhere we're hearing kind of a
16 pattern of repeated abuse, I think we should focus
17 our resources, our spot checks on those areas to make
18 sure we're catching that and rectifying it going
19 forward.

20 CM HOLDEN: Well, I just think you should
21 allow, if there's, everybody has a smart phone now,
22 it seems. Everybody has a camera on it that you
23 could just take a video and say look, it's, there's a
24 permit here for 10:00 a.m., I'm standing here at
25 10:30, and the fields are empty. Send it into Parks.

COMMITTEE OF PARKS AND RECREATION

63

1
2 That's legit, and they can call the league and say,
3 you know, we have information that you didn't give
4 back these permits, you could have, which is rarely
5 done in the permit world cause again, it has not
6 changed, Deputy Commissioner, and that's the problem.
7 We have, that's why we're having a hearing because we
8 need to change this to the point where it becomes
9 where if a team or league is not going to use the
10 permits, they call the Parks and say, alright, just
11 give this somebody, cause we're not going to use it
12 on the 15th, on Saturday the 15th, whatever it is.
13 You're not, at least have given advanced noticed
14 rather than just hold on it, and then kids have to
15 travel all the way out to Long Island to get into,
16 into a game in their own neighborhood, and that's
17 what we're seeing over and over again, and I don't
18 think it has changed. So, that's what we need from
19 Parks and that's what I think, you know, the Chairman
20 is talking about, that we need to figure out the
21 process enforcement. If a team or a league is
22 abusing the permits or brokering them, or giving them
23 to adult leagues, which happened, it was a youth
24 permit that they're giving to adult leagues, and
25 that's happened over and over again, which is a

COMMITTEE OF PARKS AND RECREATION

64

1
2 violation, that that needs to be documented and not a
3 supervisor going down and looking at the field or a
4 PEP, because try to get a PEP officer, try to get a
5 supervisor there in a two hour time slot is almost
6 impossible on any kind of basis. So, let's try to
7 come up with, we'll you'll accept other evidence of
8 the abuse, and I think that's where we need to be at
9 this point in the 21st century. Thank you Chair.

10 COMMISSION NELSON: I, I will say that we
11 will look into that, and I hear what you're saying,
12 is like if you call right now, PEP might not be able
13 to show up within that window, but I do feel like
14 doing more inspections, even if it's, you know, a
15 limited number of inspections per week, and going out
16 there for those time, will help us get that
17 information in a way that we haven't before and that
18 we have started to do that, and so, for example, when
19 we started to do the AED inspections in 2019, we did
20 find fields that were empty when they were permitted,
21 and I think, but for COVID, you know, COVID hit and
22 we had to change gears, and we're more, I think it's
23 a little more understandable if leagues kind of sign
24 up for time, and maybe aren't using it during COVID,
25 but once we're out of COVID, I think it is a priority

COMMITTEE OF PARKS AND RECREATION

65

1
2 for this agency to do more in making sure fields are
3 not being unused when they are permitted.

4 CM HOLDEN: Thank you so much.

5 CHAIR KOO: Thank you, Council Member
6 Holden. Commissioner, so my, I have one more
7 question, and then we will go to public
8 participation. It sounds like that because of the
9 PEP officers are needed everywhere, and you have
10 enough officers. So, do you need the support for us
11 to say that we may have to increase PEP officers in
12 the Parks Department because they are needed
13 everywhere and there are so many responsibilities
14 for them?

15 COMMISSIONER NELSON: I think PEP
16 officers do amazing work in our Parks, and I think,
17 like any resource, we have a limited resource of PEP
18 officers. If we had more, we could do more, we
19 appreciate the Council when you have given us funding
20 to have more PEP officers, and know we're going into
21 the budgets like, also, we look forward to those
22 conversation, but It's also, you know, very frankly,
23 a very difficult, physical environment, and so we
24 have amazing, we have an amazing force right now. We
25 have to target our enforcement. We have to

COMMITTEE OF PARKS AND RECREATION

66

1
2 prioritize our enforcement. I think we do a good job
3 at that, and so, we use the resources that we have as
4 best as we can, and I think, again, we're never going
5 to get to be, have a PEP officer every time there's a
6 permit, every hour of the day, every field, so we
7 have to have some sort of targeted enforcement,
8 rather it's the number we have now or slightly more
9 or slightly less, we have to manage that as effective
10 as we can, but we thank the Council for their prior
11 support of the PEP officers, thank you.

12 CHAIR KOO: Thank you. Kris, can we go
13 to public participation?

14 COMMITTEE COUNSEL KRIS SARTORI: Yes,
15 Chair, thank you. Thank you very much. We will now
16 move on to public testimony. I'd like to remind
17 everyone that, unlike our typical Council hearing, we
18 will be calling on individuals one-by-one to testify.
19 As I started earlier, each panelist will be given
20 three minutes to speak. Please begin once the
21 Sergeant of Arms has started the timer and given you
22 the cue to begin. Council Members who have questions
23 for a particular panelist should use raise hand Zoom
24 function in Zoom and I will call on you after the
25 panelist has completed their testimony. For

COMMITTEE OF PARKS AND RECREATION

67

1
2 panelist, once your name is called, a member of our
3 staff will unmute you and the Sergeant at Arms will
4 give you the go ahead to begin upon setting the
5 timer. So, please wait for the Sergeant to announce
6 that you may begin before delivering your testimony.
7 At this point, I would like to welcome Aldolfo
8 Morales to testify, followed by Nzingha Prescod.

9 SGT. SADOWSKY: Time starts now.

10 AL MORALES: Okay.

11 COMMITTEE COUNSEL KRIS SARTORI: Yes,
12 please begin.

13 AL MORALES: I'm ready.

14 COMMITTEE COUNSEL KRIS SARTORI: You may
15 begin.

16 AL MORALES: Okay.

17 COMMITTEE COUNSEL KRIS SARTORI: Thank
18 you.

19 AL MORALES: So, thank you for having me
20 this afternoon. Good afternoon Chairman Koo, Council
21 Member Rodriguez, Council Members, Park Officials.
22 My original testimony was just going to be about the
23 Bill 1959, which we're pretty excited. I represent
24 the United Athletic Association. We're an advocacy
25 group in the five boroughs and we're really excited

COMMITTEE OF PARKS AND RECREATION

68

1
2 about bringing back a new style, a new type of sports
3 commission. We ran the Sports Commission Citywide
4 Mayor's Cup for 10 years, and we believe strongly and
5 highly on recreational sports, amateur sports, and
6 professional sports in bringing that back in a big
7 way to the city, and of course, making it something
8 the amateur athletes have a big roll in running and
9 participating in. So, we're excited about that, and
10 I'm in favor and would be interested in participating
11 in any planning and getting involved in any way I can
12 to help. I wasn't going to testify on the park's
13 permit, but there's a couple of questions there that
14 I have, and so I'd like to bring that up. I applaud
15 the Parks Department over the years. I have been an
16 organizer. I'm also one of the league organizers
17 that have been doing this for 45 years, and I applaud
18 the park's department. They've done a lot of good
19 work, a lot of strides in the right direction. To
20 make it short and clear on terms of the permit
21 issues, I think the Parks Department needs to bring
22 organizers closer together to the parks, meet with
23 them on a regular basis. I would be a lot easier to
24 identify who is doing the public service and who is
25 not. That would cut through a lot of red tape in

COMMITTEE OF PARKS AND RECREATION

69

1
2 investigating. I mean, obviously, it would be easier
3 to identify people who you know and who are doing the
4 right thing and who are not, if you are meeting with
5 them face-to-face. So, we're excited and interested
6 in meeting with Parks, our members are, and we
7 encourage the Parks to meet regularly with those,
8 especially those that they suspect are doing wrong.
9 Also, so issues about that I'd like to discuss with
10 the Parks Department at a future date where there are
11 some field that are being reclassified. There's an
12 incident where 300 participants were moved off a
13 field to allow eight people to practice on the field,
14 and so, that needs to be addressed. There are
15 baseball and softball fields that are built strictly
16 for that, and... (Crosstalk).

17 SGT. SADOWSKY: Time has expired.

18 AL MORALES: Thank you.

19 COMMITTEE COUNSEL KRIS SARTORI: You can
20 finish up your comment.

21 AL MORALES: Okay, so, yeah, they somehow
22 have been reclassified and those athletes are not
23 able to use those field for what they were originally
24 built for, and there are just people practicing on
25 them on certain nights, and so, we'd like to, you

COMMITTEE OF PARKS AND RECREATION

70

1
2 know, talk more about that and find out how we could
3 correct that.

4 COMMITTEE COUNSEL KRIS SARTORI: Thank
5 you. Thank you very much. Next up is Nzingha
6 Prescod who will be followed by Mara Mazza.

7 SGT. SADOWSKY: Time starts now.

8 NZINGHA PRESCOD: Hi. Good afternoon
9 Committee on Parks and Rec. Thanks for hosting this
10 hearing. Thank you to Council Member Rodriguez for
11 introducing the Bill to discuss the Office of Sports
12 and Recreation further. My name is Nzingha Prescod.
13 I'm a two-time Olympian and world medalist in
14 Fencing, born and raised in Brooklyn. I've been
15 organizing and strategizing with Council Member
16 Rodriguez's team as a subject matter expert in sport.
17 I've been in sport for more than 20 years. My mom
18 believed that sport was a tool for developing strong
19 character, and she enrolled my sister and I into the
20 Peter Westbrook Foundation, and we're lucky enough to
21 have Peter on the call and he'll be speaking in a
22 few, but Peter's program afforded me a once in a
23 lifetime opportunity to participate in a league
24 training with premiere coaches which my mom wouldn't
25 have been able to afford otherwise. Fencing was one

COMMITTEE OF PARKS AND RECREATION

71

1
2 of my greatest gifts. Through fencing, I learned my
3 power and developed discipline, resilience, and maybe
4 most importantly, purpose. Fencing opened the doors
5 to excellence in sport, academics, and
6 professionally. I graduated from Stuyvesant in
7 Columbia, I've traveled the globe, and have
8 incredible experiences like walking in open
9 ceremonies and meeting the Obamas. Through Fencing,
10 I secured my consulting at EY, and now I'm a proud
11 community leader. All of this to say, sport was a
12 blessing, but I was certain an anomaly growing up as
13 an elite athlete in the outskirts of Flatbush. The
14 disparity of access to this form of education is
15 clear. There is a ceiling on the opportunities and
16 possibilities presented to my peer in a predominantly
17 black public school. Sports operate on a pay-to-play
18 model which systemically excludes who can't compete,
19 and that burden often falls on black and brown
20 communities. I'll be sending additional material
21 that will be circulating further details of this
22 disparity, and so, it's always been my mission and
23 inspired by Peter's role in my life to scale my
24 experience because there are so many capable children
25 in this city who were never given the chance to fill

COMMITTEE OF PARKS AND RECREATION

72

1
2 this potential. So, a city agency dedicated to youth
3 sports from recreation to high-performance is not a
4 novel concept. As Chairman Koo mentioned earlier,
5 many countries operate sports at all levels and it's
6 an universal offering. The amended Bill you will
7 receive outlines how this can be a reality. It
8 proposes coordination between existing stake holders
9 and resources to maximize impact from working with
10 city planning to grand elite programs, serving under-
11 resourced communities, access to city facilities to
12 realizing a sport develop pipeline through rethinking
13 physical education in public schools to expose youth
14 to organized sport. Like Chairman Koo mentioned,
15 children should have the opportunity to explore a
16 range of sports to discover their talents. This is
17 possible through coordination with the DOE, the
18 DOICD, and the Parks Department. Ballet Tech, a
19 middle school offering intensive ballet is a great
20 model for what is possible in the form of a sports
21 academy... (Crosstalk).

22 SGT SADOWSKY: Time has expired.

23 NZINGHA PRESCOD: May I have a few more
24 seconds? Can I continue?

25

1 COMMITTEE OF PARKS AND RECREATION

73

2 COMMITTEE COUNSEL KRIS SARTORI: Please
3 finish your statement, please, thanks.

4 NZINGHA PRESCOD: The office can work
5 with the US Olympic and Para-Olympic Committee and
6 build strategic partnerships with nonprofits,
7 corporations, and universities with the goal of
8 providing options for any child to pursue sport at
9 the highest level. Thanks for listening and hope to
10 have subsequent conversations to discuss how we can
11 innovatively develop this office.

12 COMMITTEE COUNSEL KRIS SARTORI: Thank
13 you very much, and Council Member Rodriguez would
14 like to speak.

15 CM RODRIGUEZ: Wow. I guess the Peter
16 (inaudible) because I have (inaudible) express as a
17 former teacher that when you see either student
18 moving forward, and you know the struggle that we go
19 through, I don't think that anyone that doesn't live
20 that experience can even know what we go through, and
21 when we see a black and a Latino kid, you know, we
22 are not demanding space as I'm talking. You know,
23 we're demanding a fair share, and right now, like, I
24 can give you like so many examples, like in Lower
25 Manhattan, we don't have an indoor pool in the whole

COMMITTEE OF PARKS AND RECREATION

74

1
2 Lower Manhattan area, and that's the sort of
3 experience that we live every day. So, listening to
4 Nzingha about, I'm not going to say the word, but
5 it's about, we gonna do it. You know, we moving
6 forward. Look at the area in this community, there
7 are many opportunities for the upper class and you
8 see the key that sports equip. We owe those tools and
9 look at the community, and then we expect that those
10 kids, at the age of 18, they will be at the same
11 level, so Nzingha, like, what difference does it make
12 in your own experience to get additional resources?
13 For you still got, you know, good people through
14 foundation, private sector, that have been able to
15 give you the opportunity to get additional training
16 and how do you see that this office will be able to
17 go to the private sector, to go to the public sector
18 and say, can we add those additional services? What
19 was your experience with the additional resources
20 that you got in order for you to develop yourself at
21 the sport field, and what impact did it have in your
22 life to be where you are today as a role model to
23 many people, especially the generations such as my
24 daughter, 14 and 8 years old that I know that they

25

COMMITTEE OF PARKS AND RECREATION

75

1
2 will be looking at you, and you will have a lot to
3 offer in a sport?

4 NZINGHA PRESCOD: Thanks for the
5 question. Well, to be honest, I wouldn't have had
6 any resources in fencing because I wouldn't have
7 known about it. Peter's program, Peter Westbrook's
8 program has done a phenomenal job of changing the
9 landscape of who has access to a sport like fencing,
10 a historically white, you know, predominantly white
11 sport, and so he's produced so many Olympic athletes.
12 I'm one of many that he's produced, and the exposure
13 and the visibility, you know, at a young age, like
14 Chairman Koo mentioned, is so important because how
15 can you know that's a possibility for yourself, if
16 you're not, if it's not accessible to you in your
17 immediate vicinity. So, definitely have a program
18 like Peter's, but also be able to scale a program
19 like Peter's so more kids can have access to it, is
20 what I see a goal of the office to be able to
21 sustainably provide that kind of service is what I
22 see the opportunity is, and I think a lot of
23 corporations and nonprofits can work together for
24 this common goal. Sport is so universal. There are
25 so many people who would like to empower sport, and

COMMITTEE OF PARKS AND RECREATION

76

so, it's really about tapping into the those resources and aggregating them, and maximizing the impact.

CM RODRIGUEZ: Thank you.

COMMITTEE COUNSEL KRIS SARTORI: Next up is Mara Mazza.

SGT. SADOWSKY: Time starts now.

MARA MAZZA: Hello everyone. Thank you Chairman Koo and Council Member Rodriguez, and Nzingha, and the many Council Members attending here today. My name is Mara Mazza and I'm the Communications Director at Kings County Tennis League. There is an urgent need to address the inequitable access to playing sports opportunities for underserved populations in New York City, especially in our black and brown communities, and the COVID-19 pandemic exposed and exacerbated the youth sport's system even more. Children need and have a right to play. Social and emotional learning through sport is as important to childhood development as learning in the classroom. Access to play and youth sport is a race justice issue. There are higher rates of disease and lower sports participate rates in the black and brown communities,

COMMITTEE OF PARKS AND RECREATION

77

1
2 and these discrepancies can stump the future economic
3 empowerment of our underserved communities. Any Bill
4 about a new Sports and Recreation Office would be
5 incomplete without an explicit focus on accessible
6 sports programing to reach these communities. KCTL,
7 Kings County Tennis League is one of the sports-based
8 youth development organizations in New York City.
9 More than 95% of our student players are children of
10 color, 35% live in public housing. KCTL moves all
11 the barriers to tennis by creating and renovating
12 underused play spaces in and around major
13 developments in Central Brooklyn, and we bring our
14 staff, our volunteers, equipment, and programs to
15 where our students reside. Now, tennis is often
16 perceived as a country club sport. We had to address
17 the stereotype with our student's family because in
18 the beginning, they felt tennis was not their sport.
19 Ten years later, I can assure you there is thriving
20 junior tennis community at each of our program sites,
21 and each student is a very proud member of it. In
22 New York City lack of available play spaces hinders
23 equal access and opportunities in sports. Due to
24 people not living within a mile of a park are four
25 times more likely to use it than those who live

COMMITTEE OF PARKS AND RECREATION

78

1
2 further away. Our model is a resourceful solution.
3 For the health and welfare of our children, more
4 community-based play opportunities need to become
5 available that are of low cost and close to
6 children's homes. Make this investment in youth
7 sports, help rebuild and strengthen our underserved
8 New York communities during this challenging time of
9 post-COVID recovery. Thank you again for your
10 consideration.

11 COMMITTEE COUNSEL KRIS SARTORI: Thank
12 you very much. Next, we will hear from David Ludwig
13 of Asphalt Green, followed by Rachel Cytron of rural
14 New York.

15 SGT. SADOWSKY: Time starts now.

16 DAVID LUDWIG: Good afternoon, Chair Koo
17 and Member of the Council, and thank you for holding
18 today's important hearing. I've David Ludwig. I'm
19 Senior Director of Community Programs at Asphalt
20 Green, and I'm testifying today in strong support of
21 Intro 1959. Asphalt Green is a nonprofit
22 organization that runs competitive sports programs
23 for over 1000 youth athletes across the city as well
24 as proving an instructive and introductory program
25 that reach tens of thousands of children each year.

COMMITTEE OF PARKS AND RECREATION

79

There is a great need in New York City for the proposed Mayor's Office and Asphalt Green fully supports its creation. Sports have the power to change lives and they bring people of all ages and background together in activities that build positive relationships, life skills, and health habits. At a time when so many people are in need of positive social interactions, the creation of this office has the potential to make a significant impact on the lives of countless New Yorkers, especially our young people. Asphalt Green is committed to increasing the profile and presence of sports and recreation throughout New York City, especially in some of its most underserved areas. As a stakeholder in his office's endeavors, we pledge to join forces and collaborate to make New York City a healthier place for children through increasing access to the highest quality sports programming in the country. As an organization that works on both ends of the competitive spectrum, both giving children their first change to swim or dribble a ball and coaching youth athletes to Olympic medals and college scholarships, we are confident that the investment necessary to deliver on this office's charter will

COMMITTEE OF PARKS AND RECREATION

80

1
2 repay itself many times over. By increasing quality
3 of life and health, and raising our city's profile as
4 a destination for excellence in sports, this office
5 will ensure New York City remains the greatest city
6 on Earth for generations to come. Thank you for the
7 opportunity to testify today. I also want to thank
8 Council Member Rodriguez and his staff for
9 championing this effort, and for offering Asphalt
10 Green another sport nonprofit opportunity to
11 collaborate on this Legislation.

12 COMMITTEE COUNSEL KRIS SARTORI: Thank
13 you and Council Member Rodriguez does have a
14 question.

15 CM RODRIGUEZ: Yeah, thank you David, and
16 I know first time, you know, on this (inaudible) that
17 the important quality program that you, Asphalt Green
18 provide to our youth, and also the effort that you
19 make, going the extra mile also to connect youth and
20 also ready in the Bronx and Lower Manhattan, all the
21 area, it's different sport, but especially in
22 swimming. I was there at 6:00 in the morning and
23 Asphalt Green was waiting for my daughter to come out
24 from practice, I leave (inaudible) and I know that,
25 cause I know, the rest, you guys, you know, being,

COMMITTEE OF PARKS AND RECREATION

81

1
2 you were here in the city. Can you share a little
3 bit about how this office can be helpful, especially
4 since you guys, and you were here, and we will hear
5 from other swimming institutions too, because, but,
6 if you can share about the work that you have done or
7 are producing some swimmers to compete at the Olympic
8 and how an office that will be organizing important
9 initiatives together on sport can even hold much more
10 institutions like yours to also expand that
11 opportunity so that we can see more New Yorkers train
12 at the Asphalt Green to compete at the Olympics and
13 to participate in Olympic competition?

14 DAVID LUDWIG: Yeah sure, thank you
15 Councilman. You know, we have a scholarship fund at
16 Asphalt Green for competitive swimmers from
17 underserved neighborhood, and what we see here and
18 your out is that there's, you know, we don't have,
19 we're not seeing enough kids come up from, to that
20 competitive level, and so we need more pre-
21 competitive programs out in communities, and before
22 COVID, we were teaching about 4000 kids a year to
23 swim at a bunch of different locations, but that's
24 not enough, you know, it's not enough to build the
25 interest in competitive swim and to foster that kind

COMMITTEE OF PARKS AND RECREATION

82

1
2 of support needed to get up to the competitive level,
3 and I think that this office can just make a lot of
4 connections, like, all the organizations on this call
5 are all doing amazing work and in some regard there,
6 you know, we're always trying to partner, but
7 somewhat isolated, and I think a Mayor's Office could
8 have some real leverage and kind of teeth in
9 garnering resources and kind of making those
10 connection to get the middle ground from the
11 introduction to the sport through like the
12 competitive pathway up. So, we're really excited
13 about this.

14 CM RODRIGUEZ: Thank you.

15 DAVID LUDWIG: Yeah.

16 COMMITTEE COUNSEL KRIS SARTORI: Thank
17 you. Next up, we have Rachel Cytron followed Phil
18 Konigsberg.

19 SGT. SADOWSKY: Time starts now.

20 RACHEL CYTRON: Hi. Thank you. Good
21 afternoon. My name is Rachel Cytron. I'm the
22 Executive Director of Row New York. In case you're
23 unfamiliar with us, Row New York is the only
24 organization in the five boroughs that makes the
25 sport of rowing accessible to all New York City

COMMITTEE OF PARKS AND RECREATION

83

1
2 Youth, and we do this in a way that's inclusive of
3 all backgrounds and abilities, and much like KCTL,
4 we're working on a sport that's historically a white
5 sport, and that many students of color are not
6 familiar with until we get them involved. I'm
7 testifying today on behalf of Row New York and ten
8 additional New York City sport space developments
9 organizations which are listed in my written
10 testimony. We are all in support of the sport's Bill
11 sponsored by Council Member Rodriguez to initiate an
12 Office of Sports and Recreation. At Row New York, we
13 recently asked our young people what does the
14 organization and the sport of rowing do for you? We
15 were really interested in these questions because we
16 had some ideas of adults, but we really wanted to
17 hear from the young people, and I just want to share
18 with you what they told us. They told us that rowing
19 helps them with their teamwork and their social
20 skills. They told us that rowing helps build their
21 physical and mental strength. They told us it helps
22 them build respect for others and form community and
23 they told us it helps them persevere and show
24 commitment and tenacity, and it helps them understand
25 themselves and what they're capable of, and these

COMMITTEE OF PARKS AND RECREATION

84

were the words of young people, and I believe, as I know my ten other colleague believe, that these benefit of sports are incredibly powerful and that they are life changing and should be accessible to all the young people in New York City, but we know the reality is that sports in New York City are not accessible to all young people. There's increasing privatization of youth sports and pay-to-play fees that are required by many entities who have contributed to the disparities that define youth sports in New York City. I don't have any stats on New York City specifically, but I do know there's been a national study by the Aspen Institute about this issue, and that shows that about 70% of students from families earning over \$100,000 play sports, but only 30% of students from families that earn under \$25,000 are playing sports. So, there's just a tremendous disparity and we believe this disparity is unacceptable and that the sport's Bill can help make quality sports spacing development accessible for more of New York City's youth. Thank you very much for including our testimony.

COMMITTEE OF PARKS AND RECREATION

85

1
2 COMMITTEE COUNSEL KRIS SARTORI: Thank
3 you very much. Council Member Rodriguez has a
4 question.

5 CM RODRIGUEZ: Rachel, I know that you
6 took over, again, the responsibility of Amanda, and I
7 know that you would do the same or even better job.
8 That's what we should expect. I want my children to
9 do better than me, and I know that having Amanda, you
10 know, moving into the National level, is just
11 something that also we should, you know, you should
12 share, you know, as incorporating the question
13 because we have partner, not only at the city level.
14 We have partner at the state, national, international
15 level, and we will hear from Ken when it comes to
16 cyclists too. So, in the case of rowing, as I'm not
17 going to repeat what I said before about being
18 Dominican, probably, I'm one of the few Dominican's
19 that is not that much into baseball, but people think
20 about Dominican, Alex Rodriguez, Manny whatever,
21 Pedro Martinez, so for me it's about, rowing was new.
22 How, can you explain what's about, at the level of
23 rowing, especially because what opened my heart to
24 me, and I can say because I am biased, because when I
25 say people coming with a new program, for me, this is

COMMITTEE OF PARKS AND RECREATION

86

1
2 about here you coming and usually, and very often, it
3 requires identification about when it can or Rowing
4 New York. My first question to Amanda was how were
5 diversified? And this is a competitive one. You
6 know, my wife is all about the kids who enjoy the
7 sports, and the second part thinking about a
8 scholarship. So, as we are thinking about a
9 scholarship, how you been able to connect rowing with
10 a pre-college program because when I heard about your
11 efforts to make it competitive through rowing, but
12 also to take them through college, and to prepare
13 them also to go for a scholarship?

14 RACHEL CYTRON: Yeah, absolutely. I
15 think I will just talk briefly to a couple of things.
16 One, Council Member Rodriguez, is making mention of
17 Amanda Crouse (SP?) our former founder and CEO, and
18 she is now the head of US Rowing, the whole governing
19 body for the sport, and is really helping us in terms
20 of diversifying the sport at the next level with
21 different kinds of opportunities and resources, so
22 that's really exciting for us to have that
23 connection, and I think, in general, we're very
24 focused on the sport's youth development kind of
25 ideas that I mentioned in my testimony and we have

COMMITTEE OF PARKS AND RECREATION

87

1
2 many, many students who are interested in rowing at
3 the next level, and we try to make sure that they are
4 connected to scholarship opportunities, and I would
5 say between 10% and 20% of our students are rowing in
6 college and many of the feel that their rowing in
7 college, in many cases, they're attending
8 predominantly white institutions and there are many
9 of the elite institutions in this country have rowing
10 teams, and in many cases, they're saying that their
11 participation on a rowing team in college is really
12 helping them stay in college because they have a
13 community of rowers that support them through college
14 on their rowing team. So, a good portion of our
15 students are interested in that, and I would say for
16 all of our students, we use the sport of rowing to
17 help support them through high school and through
18 college rather they're going to row at a competitive
19 level or not. So, we want to make sure that we're
20 providing the opportunities for students who want to
21 row competitively, but if some students don't want to
22 keep rowing, it's a very grueling sport, very
23 physically grueling, not every student wants to
24 continue rowing in college, but for those students
25 who don't, we want to make sure that all the skills

COMMITTEE OF PARKS AND RECREATION

88

1
2 that they have learned in our program were
3 transferrable to the academic skills and the social
4 skills that they'll need in college as well.

5 CM RODRIGUEZ: Thank you.

6 COMMITTEE COUNSEL KRIS SARTORI: Thank
7 you very much. Next up is Phil Konigsberg who will
8 be followed by Ken Podziba.

9 SGT. SADOWSKY: Time starts now.

10 PHIL KONIGSBERG: Hello everyone. Thank
11 you for holding this meeting, this this. My name is
12 Phil Konigsberg. I'm the Chair of Queens Community
13 Board 7, the Health Chair, excuse me, not the Chair,
14 the Health Chair of Community Board 7, but I'm
15 speaking here for myself only, and I just first want
16 to say that I'm in favor of both pieces of
17 Legislation. However, the rest of my testimony, I'd
18 like to basically, it's really coming out of left
19 field, and what I'm saying is it's regarding a
20 specific park. It's Flushing Meadows Corona Park and
21 within Flushing Corona Park, specifically, City
22 Field. It's almost two years that I've been trying
23 to resolve and issue that goes on at City Field.
24 Both the previous ownership, and at this point, I
25 don't see any changes with Steven Cohen, hopefully

COMMITTEE OF PARKS AND RECREATION

89

1
2 that will change. Let me be as brief as I can on
3 this. City Field allows three designated smoking
4 areas within the stadium. Now, New York City Smoke-
5 Free Air Act prohibits any smoking within New York
6 City parks. City Field is within, Flushing Meadows
7 Corona Park, as I said, I brought this issue up, as I
8 said, for almost two years now. As far as I know,
9 it's gotten to the park's council, Alessandro
10 Cavaliere's office. I was told 16 months ago that
11 this issue would be cleared up by the beginning of
12 the opening of the baseball season. Well, obviously,
13 that was really a mute point in 2020, but we're
14 approaching, hopefully, the start of fans in the
15 stands for this current year. I have written to
16 every member of the Parks Committee. I've not gotten
17 a response. I was hoping that Council Mark Levine
18 might still be here to input something as far as
19 health issue, and I've also spoken, after I got on
20 Brian Lira (SP?) radio talk show, I spoke with the
21 Mayor and I got a call from Matt Drury. See, he's no
22 longer on the participation here. I would like to
23 get an answer to please remove the three designated
24 areas within City Field because I believe it's part
25 of the New York City Smoke-Free Air Act, and I've

1 COMMITTEE OF PARKS AND RECREATION

90

2 never gotten any response yet, and I think I just hit
3 my three-minute mark.

4 COMMITTEE COUNSEL KRIS SARTORI: Thank
5 you.

6 PHIL KONIGSBERG: Okay.

7 COMMITTEE COUNSEL KRIS SARTORI: Thank
8 you very much. Next up is Ken Podziba, followed by
9 Daniel Pohl.

10 SGT. SADOWSKY: Time starts now.

11 KEN PODZIBA: Good afternoon, Chairman
12 Koo, distinguished Members of the City Council, and
13 everyone I see on Zoom. I see a lot of familiar
14 faces. My name is Ken Podziba and I'm the President
15 and CEO of Bike New York. I'm here to
16 enthusiastically support the establishment of an
17 Office of Sports Development and Youth Performance.
18 Prior to arriving at Bike New York, I served as the
19 Commissioner of the New York City Sport's Commission
20 for 12 years, and I believe that it would be
21 tremendously beneficial to New Yorkers to bring back
22 a former office as proposed in Intro 1951-2020. The
23 Sport's Commission, under my leadership served as an
24 important engine for the city's economic growth
25 through sports. We competed with other city

COMMITTEE OF PARKS AND RECREATION

91

1
2 throughout the country and around the world for the
3 right to bring major sporting events to New York. We
4 also marketed the city to event organizers as an
5 ideal place for them to host their athletic events,
6 and we assisted them throughout the entire process
7 including guiding them through this city's
8 bureaucracy; something that they simply wouldn't be
9 able to do without us. The agency served as the
10 city's liaison to this multi-billion dollar industry
11 including our teams and major annual events that was
12 estimated to account for two and half percent of the
13 city's total annual economy. Beyond the economics,
14 the sport's commission had a big heart and focused
15 most of it's time and resources on transforming the
16 lives of the city's most underserved communities.
17 After having numerous conversations with City Council
18 Member Ydonis Rodriguez, Sponsor of the Bill, and
19 knowing how he's dedicated so much of his life
20 towards improving the lives of our city's most
21 economically disadvantaged people, I'm convinced that
22 this office will be fully dedicated towards helping
23 New Yorkers, especially our young people and those
24 from the most vulnerable populations lead healthier
25 and more productive lives. There are countless

COMMITTEE OF PARKS AND RECREATION

92

1
2 nonprofits that provided needed recreation and sports
3 programs to New Yorkers, but unfortunately, not
4 everyone knows about them or how to access their
5 services. Wouldn't it be great to have a Mayor's
6 Office that can create and awareness of these
7 programs. For example, the Sports Commission offers
8 a variety of bike education safety skill programs
9 including summer camps and after-school programs, all
10 free of charge to underserved children. I'm on the
11 board of the Achilles Track Club, a nonprofit
12 organization that transforms the lives of people with
13 disabilities through athletic programs and social
14 connections. Having an influential Office of the
15 Mayor encouraging New Yorkers to participate and
16 benefit from the vast array of programs that already
17 exist in our great city, would be priceless, and
18 there are so many grassroots organizations and
19 recreational organizations that can and should be
20 doing more to help the residents in their
21 neighborhoods. They just need a little help and some
22 technical assistance, and this office can be source
23 of support to them in a real force for positive
24 changes. More than half the city's population is
25 overweight or obese, and nearly half of our

COMMITTEE OF PARKS AND RECREATION

93

1 elementary schools students and Head Start students
2 do not have a health weight. I'm confident that this
3 newly office would.. (Crosstalk).

4
5 SGT SADOWSKY: Time has expired.

6 KEN PODZIBA: Is that time?

7 COMMITTEE COUNSEL KRIS SARTORI: Please
8 finish, you may wrap up, please.

9 KEN PODZIBA: Okay. I believe that a
10 newly created Office of Sports and Recreation would
11 help level the playing field in our city and put so
12 many New Yorkers on a better path to good health and
13 success. Thank you for your consideration, and I'll
14 take anyone's questions if you have any.

15 COMMITTEE COUNSEL KRIS SARTORI: Thank
16 you. Council Member Rodriguez does have questions.

17 CM RODRIGUEZ: First of all, I know that
18 this is something that, since I heard the word from
19 the Chairman at the beginning and also we both agree,
20 Chairman Koo that in China and many other countries,
21 they have, you know, a robust plan on how to put the
22 pipeline to create, you know, the opportunity and
23 this is about competitive, as I say, a lot of things
24 happen in recreation and we support it, and I think
25 even the other piece of this Legislation and other

COMMITTEE OF PARKS AND RECREATION

94

1
2 part of this conversation about permits is something
3 that is important. You know, Ken, do you think that
4 there is a course, as I said before, Ken, cycling is
5 a sport, and I think that when we look at friend in
6 other places, and country in the world, like there's
7 365 days of investing in cyclist competitions. So,
8 and of course, Bike New York, and I'm a big champion
9 because I feel that the work that you guys is doing
10 with the tour, that hopefully will happen now in
11 August. Everyone should know, this is the largest
12 bike tour that we have in the nation, and Chairman
13 Koo, by adding two or three more hours and we can
14 talk, for them to add an additional number of
15 cyclists, they can train this bike tour as the
16 largest one in New York City. Can you look, can you
17 think about two things. Two questions to you. One
18 is how do you think that we still can support more
19 the competition or Bike Tour or cycling competition
20 in New York City, where do you see that we are still
21 short and we can do more, and how can this office be
22 focused on that, accomplish the goal and second,
23 because I believe that we have a good topography. We
24 have good enough from Jersey to New York and other
25 places, I think that we have the opportunity to

COMMITTEE OF PARKS AND RECREATION

95

1
2 continue expanding competitive competition in the
3 city when it comes to cyclists. In the second
4 question, do you think there is an appetite in the
5 foundation, in the private sector from all the sport
6 institutions as I said, Madison Square Garden,
7 Barkley, Yankee Stadium, the Mets, and others, if we
8 are able to put this office together, to also
9 increase the contribution because guy, when we have
10 this conversation, it's very easy to make the number,
11 you know, an institution can say we support because
12 we give this number of tickets every year. It's not
13 about tickets. It's about putting resources to
14 promote and provide support to our youth. So, can
15 you elaborate a little bit on those two things?

16 KEN PODZIBA: Yeah, absolutely. The
17 first part of your question, I wish we had an Office
18 of Sports right now being at Bike New York. We have
19 a lot issues with the city and you've been very
20 helpful, Council Member Rodriguez, and so have other
21 Council Members, but it's really been very
22 challenging dealing with the city bureaucracy and how
23 great would it be if we had an office that helped us
24 navigate through that bureaucracy. Sometimes you
25 don't know who to talk to and then you pass it on to

COMMITTEE OF PARKS AND RECREATION

96

1
2 someone else and then someone else, so I think not
3 just Bike New York, but so many organizations out
4 there that could benefit from an Office of Sports and
5 Recreation. You know, it's kind of weird that we
6 don't have one. Every major city around the world
7 has a sport's office, so I just don't understand why
8 New York doesn't have one, so I'm glad it's coming
9 back. To answer your second questions, absolutely.
10 I think the teams, the leagues, the event organizers,
11 everyone will support this office in so many ways.
12 My testimony was shortened, but I wanted to tell
13 everything that one of the most impactful programs we
14 had at the Sport's Commission was also the easiest to
15 run. It was called The Mayor's Take Me Out To The
16 Ballgame Program, and all the teams, leagues, event
17 organizers gave us free tickets, they donated the
18 tickets when the didn't sell out, and we in turn,
19 gave it to organizations that served the poorest and
20 most underserved kids in the city, and we got the
21 most heartwarming letters from kids saying they'd
22 never been out of their neighbors or boroughs before,
23 and how great it was to meet their heroes, we
24 arranged autographs. So, my point is there's so
25 much, this little office could do so much leverage

COMMITTEE OF PARKS AND RECREATION

97

1
2 that the Office of the Mayor and all the city
3 agencies could do so much. We had a citywide Mayor's
4 Cup events, so we had all this top athletic
5 competitions in the high schools, the middle school.
6 There's so much this office could do, and with good
7 leadership, I have no doubt it's going to just be a
8 bang up organization. I delivered hundreds of
9 Mayoral proclamations. A good leader will be a
10 cheerleader for New York City going around to
11 communities and letting them know the Mayor's Office
12 in the city cares about you. We care about your
13 event. There are numerous reasons to have this
14 office, so I thank you for doing your best to restore
15 it, and I hope the powers, that they give it the
16 consideration it deserves and votes yes, because we
17 need it, and all the people here could do so much
18 more with a good office to support what they need and
19 could really service a way of making awareness.
20 There's so many great programs, but people don't
21 necessarily know about them. An Office of the Mayor
22 could really help, you know, go to schools, talk to
23 teachers, talk to parents, and they get people moving
24 through our programs.

25

COMMITTEE OF PARKS AND RECREATION

98

1
2 CM RODRIGUEZ: Thank you, Ken, I would
3 like to acknowledge, as I said, you have been very
4 important since you also represent the continuation
5 of the Mayor's Office of Sport that we have the
6 number and again and seeing that the rest of the
7 team, and I got to recognize also that the Public
8 Advocate Jumaane Williams and the Brooklyn Borough
9 President, Eric Adams are the ones that are also
10 having a voice who advocate for sports in our
11 community, especially in this. The idea is for this
12 office is something that we have a close conversation
13 somewhere again that support this Bill, thank you.

14 KEN PODZIGA: And I will do everything in
15 my power to help this office succeed along with you
16 and everyone on this call, so thank you.

17 COMMITTEE COUNSEL KRIS SARTORI: Thank
18 you. Next up we have Daniel Pohl followed by Wendy
19 Hilliard.

20 SGT. SADOWSKY: Time starts now.

21 DANIEL POHL: Thank you. My name is
22 Daniel Pohl. I'm a volunteer coach with the West
23 Side Little League. Returning to the issues around
24 field permits. The Parks Department is preventing
25 organized and safe youth sports when it fails to

COMMITTEE OF PARKS AND RECREATION

99

1
2 issue permits or revokes permits, and instead
3 institutes that first come, first serve field access.
4 That's because organized sports leagues like our
5 little league can't play without permits because we
6 have liability insurance policies that required
7 permitted or reserved fields. Our league's insurance
8 don't cover play on pickup or first come, first serve
9 fields. So, not only do organizations have liability
10 insurance, we have rule books, safety officers,
11 umpires, participating adults like myself, a
12 volunteer coach have completed CPR and AED training,
13 and background checks. Little league coaches carry
14 those automated external defibrillators, the AED
15 devices to every game. All those safety protections
16 go away when the Parks Department fails to issue
17 permits or revokes permits, and these organizations
18 with the safety protocols and insurance can't play.
19 Second, the Parks Department Field and Permit
20 Closures are harming kid's mental and physical health
21 and removing options for safe outdoor play. Does the
22 Parks Department realize how badly these program
23 cancellations and permit cancellations are affecting
24 kids physical and mental health? I'm shocked at the
25 poor physical and mental condition that many of our

COMMITTEE OF PARKS AND RECREATION

100

2 kids are in. A lot of the kids that I've know over
3 the years have gained weight and seem mentally off
4 coming out of COVID. These kids really need the
5 sports leagues to stay physically and mentally
6 healthy. Regarding the COVID spread, the safest
7 place for kids to play is outside. The Parks
8 Department is effectively pushing kids indoors where
9 COVID spreads easier when they reduce the option to
10 play outdoors in the organized sports leagues. The
11 Parks Department at City Hall must provide
12 transparency about why these services are closed and
13 exactly what retriggers them to reopen. City Hall
14 and the Parks Department needs to be transparent
15 about when things will reopen. We, New Yorkers
16 understand the need for social distancing, but we
17 need so much more hope about the future. If we heard
18 specifics about when things can open, the vague
19 closed until further notice messages coming from the
20 Parks Department or we're waiting to hear from the
21 Department of Health, it just makes things so much
22 more depressing, and that's even what I'm hearing
23 today when we were discussing the contact sports
24 earlier. We deserve specific reasoning about why

25

COMMITTEE OF PARKS AND RECREATION

1
2
3
4
5
6
7
8
9
10
11
12
13
14
15
16
17
18
19
20
21
22
23
24
25

101

service is closed and specific criteria about...
(Crosstalk).

SGT SADOWSKY: Time has expired.

DANIEL POHL: May I finish?

COMMITTEE COUNSEL KRIS SARTORI: Please
do.

DANIEL POHL: We deserve specific
criteria about when programs and field permits can
reopen. It's not good enough just to say close to
prevent the spread of COVID. There should be a
mandate to reasonably explained, based on science,
why any closure actually does more good than harm,
and last, the Parks Department is missing the
opportunity to be the hero in this pandemic. Even
after the CDC recommended outdoor activities over
indoor, the city has shut down or threatened to shut
down playgrounds, dog runs, tennis courts, golf
courses, beaches, and just weekend, the Central Park
hockey rinks. Why does the Parks Department seem to
be seeking ways to shut down safe outdoor activities
instead of promoting them? Going forward, please
look for ways to support organized sport leagues,
like our little league. Instead of making arbitrary

COMMITTEE OF PARKS AND RECREATION

102

and seemingly punitive rules that do little to prevent the spread of COVID. Thank you.

COMMITTEE COUNSEL KRIS SARTORI: Thank you. Next is Wendy Hilliard who will be followed by Jordan Baltimore.

SGT SADOWSKY: Time starts now.

WENDY HILLIARD: Good afternoon. I appreciate the opportunity to talk to you today. I want to thank Representative Rodriguez and Nzingha Prescod for their efforts to bring this critical issue to light. Now, I took gymnastics at a training center, at a recreation center. My coaches, Russian coaches were hired by the city of Detroit. We practice in our local recreation centers and it cost me about \$20 a year to take gymnastics. I was the first black to represent the US in international competition. My teammate went to two Olympic games. I came to New York City to finish school, but I also became the President of the Women's Sport's Foundation, coached my athlete to the Olympic games and performed on Broadway. Twenty-five years ago, I started my foundation, which has provided almost 25,000 youths with free and low-cost gymnastics. The only one like it in the city, and very few in the

COMMITTEE OF PARKS AND RECREATION

103

2 country. Note, that there is no, not one, public
3 gymnastic center in New York City. There was one and
4 it went to the piers probably 20 years, but there's
5 not one public gymnastic center in New York City when
6 the most famous gymnast in the world, is the best
7 athlete and she is an athlete of color, she's a
8 gymnast of color. I think we can do better New York.
9 I also want to say, I'm not just here for gymnastics,
10 but I'm here for all sports, primarily non-
11 traditional sports and sports for girls and youths
12 with disabilities. I was Director of the New York
13 City Olympic and Para Olympic band for the Olympic
14 games. I worked very closely with Ken Podziba. We
15 had to design a plan that would leave a legacy for
16 Olympic and Para Olympic sports, so I can assure you
17 that New York City has the sports, has the coaches,
18 the experts, the facilities, and millions of youth
19 who want and need sport competition right here in
20 their city. We have the infrastructure to make this
21 work. This investment will circle back to ensure
22 that these young people will learn the critical
23 educational fundamentals Physical Education
24 fundamentals that will make them healthy adults and
25 raise healthy children. We know what needs to be

COMMITTEE OF PARKS AND RECREATION

104

1 done. Bringing all of us together is what we can do.
2 You see, our young people have been online and inside
3 for the past year. Let's do this and make it work.
4 You know, we talked about the Peter Westbrook
5 Foundation and having someone else come through ranks
6 and I have my coach, Alexis Page from Harlem,
7 starting with us at 7 years old, made the national
8 team, competed around the world for four years, and
9 is now coaching again. So, this will work and we
10 really have to do it, and we can do it. Thank you
11 very much.

12
13 COMMITTEE COUNSEL KRIS SARTORI: Thank
14 you very much, and Council Member Rodriguez has a
15 question.

16 CM RODRIGUEZ: We are already enforcing
17 the importance of the work. Of course, I'm going to
18 be checking on you because my little one is in
19 gymnastics. So, the Council Member is a father. So,
20 and all I say is about, when anyone says not everyone
21 is college material, I say, my daughters are, and
22 it's that expectation that I have for my daughter,
23 then that's the expectation for every single kid.
24 So, if I believe that my daughter can be great or
25 whatever they choose, then I believe that every

COMMITTEE OF PARKS AND RECREATION

105

1 single children also should have those cards. So,
2 where in which particular area do you think that we
3 need to focus the most when it come to connecting
4 kids who live in this community, and guy, that's not
5 in Africa, Latin America, or Asia. That is happening
6 here in our background.
7

8 WENDY HILLIARD: Oh yeah.

9 CM RODRIGUEZ: Your mind is away from
10 whatever we live, there's a group of kids that they
11 have all the talent to be competitive in the same
12 field that a kid who mainly, who lives in an upper
13 class community. So, where do you see that we have
14 to tackle it the most in order to connect more youth
15 to competitive sport field that our youth need in New
16 York City?

17 WENDY HILLIARD: Well, thank you for the
18 question. I think you have to focus more. You can do
19 this in each borough, but you already have all these
20 organizations that do specialized sports. We need a
21 place to do it and it has to be coordinated. I think
22 you also really have to focus on the girls. I heard
23 a lot about the permitting and the one question I
24 would ask, is how many of these permits go to girl's
25 groups. I mean, you really have to make sure that

COMMITTEE OF PARKS AND RECREATION

1

106

2 when do you do things for girls and youth with
3 disability, you have to make access. You have to go
4 extra. It's not about how many people want to do it,
5 you have to make sure that they're, the situation is
6 good for girls so that they can come, and they need
7 indoor space. Not everybody's going to be out at
8 that basketball court. So, I think the first thing
9 we should focus on is finding who is doing sports and
10 connect them with a space where they can do it, and
11 we can all work together. The one thing is, all of
12 us coaches, all the people that do the sport, that
13 grow up in, we know how to do it. We just need to
14 coordinate with a site that's safe for kids to go to
15 and that's what this office can do and then we can
16 make it work from that point, but we can do this
17 definitely.

18

CM RODRIGUEZ: Thank you.

19

20 COMMITTEE COUNSEL KRIS SARTORI: Thank
21 you. Next up is Jordan Baltimore, followed by Rita
22 Finkle.

22

SGT SADOWSKY: Time starts now.

23

24 JORDAN BALTIMORE: Good afternoon. I'm
25 Jordan Baltimore from New York Empire Baseball. I
want to thank the City Council, Chairman Koo for

COMMITTEE OF PARKS AND RECREATION

107

2 hosting this testimony, this hearing. I want to
3 thank you for the opportunity to testify as well. I
4 want to point out on the permitting process our
5 experience, and we've been doing this for about 11
6 years, and the last three years have definitely
7 demonstrated improvement across a number of aspects
8 of the process. One of them, and maybe the most
9 important is communication. In the last three years,
10 undoubtedly compared to the eight years prior, the
11 response time, the permit publication dates, the
12 communications, and even the inspection process has
13 improved and I know that we're more than likely to
14 hear about the complaints in the process, and I
15 wanted to point out that there's undoubtedly been
16 improve along those lines. Certainly, it can continue
17 to get better. I can also tell you that during the
18 COVID, you know, during the COVID permitting in the
19 fall, our organization was inspected eight straight
20 days on baseball fields. I'm happy to report that we
21 passed all eight straight days, but that's not the
22 point. Eight straight days of being inspected says
23 to me there is a tremendous focus from the Parks
24 Department and resources are being utilized well and
25 maybe to everyone's point earlier, they do need more

COMMITTEE OF PARKS AND RECREATION

108

2 resources, but that might not solve it because we'll
3 never have enough resources. I can't imagine that
4 there's enough funding in the entire city to have
5 enough PEP officers to really patrol all of this, and
6 do we really want to spend those resources patrolling
7 what may be a somewhat broken permitting process.
8 We'd rather spend those resources on field
9 maintenance, wouldn't we? Because that would open up
10 more field, and more fields and more access, and that
11 brings me to some of the challenges that we've
12 continued to experience. Even though the permitting
13 date and publication date has gotten better, it's
14 still not early enough, so, there's still difficulty
15 in planning that I'm sure many of my colleagues and
16 in other sports, not just baseball, have shared, and
17 there is still a persistent of some large
18 organizations that continue to apply for and not use
19 permits and they're being grandfathered over and over
20 and over again, and again, do we really want to spend
21 it. I understand we may have to, but do we really
22 want to spend very, very, challenged resources
23 patrolling people who aren't doing the right thing,
24 and who otherwise say that they're here for the
25 children, when in reality, they're not. So, I wander

COMMITTEE OF PARKS AND RECREATION

109

1
2 if there are meaningful conversations to be had
3 around the cost of permits, and if that's a deterrent
4 to smaller and nonprofit organizations like ours,
5 then maybe there's some public/private partnerships,
6 a community outreach person, and even reduced fees or
7 waved fees for organizations that quality and need
8 those reductions and maybe there are significant
9 finds for non-usage. I realize my time is up, but I
10 do want to say one more thing.

11 SGT SADOWSKY: Time has expired.

12 JORDAN BALTIMORE: For Council Member
13 Rodriguez, I can only say this about the Bill that
14 has been proposed. It makes me extremely optimistic
15 about the future of youth sports in this city.
16 Before being a part of New York Empire Baseball, I
17 was a PSAL Baseball coach and I followed children
18 from four years old all the way up through college,
19 even to the Cincinnati Reds organizations, and all I
20 can tell you is that what you've proposed will have
21 tremendous effect, not just for the children who go
22 on to play at a very high level, but even for the one
23 who don't go on to play a very high level, because
24 the focus that you will provide for every child that
25 participates in youth sports in this city will be

COMMITTEE OF PARKS AND RECREATION

110

extraordinary for everything they do in their life.

So, thank you, and anything that we can do and that I can do personally and professionally to be a part of that, count me in. Thank you.

COMMITTEE COUNSEL KRIS SARTORI: Thank you, and Council Member Rodriguez has a question.

CM RODRIGUEZ: I just want to say thank you, Jordan. Definitely, we will follow with you, and I agree 100% with what you say.

JORDAN BALTIMORE: Thank you.

COMMITTEE COUNSEL KRIS SARTORI: Thank you. Next is Rita Finkle, followed by Peter Westbrook.

SGT. SADOWSKY: Time starts now.

COMMITTEE COUNSEL KRIS SARTORI: Rita, I think you're on mute. Ms. Finkle, could you just pause for a second. Yes, while we unmute you. And please, you can restart. Please, go ahead.

RITA FINKLE: Thank you very much. Good afternoon Chairman Koo, and thank you to Council Member Rodriguez for the invitation to address you today. My name is Rita Finkle and I am the Co-President of the Armory Foundation. I am here today to advocate for the establish of an Office of Sports

COMMITTEE OF PARKS AND RECREATION

111

2 and Recreation. During my 22 years in working with
3 young athletes, first as the Executive Director of
4 the Fencer's Club where I got the pure joy of meeting
5 Ms. Nzingha Prescod and Peter Westbrook and Wendy
6 Hilliard and Ken Podziba, and for the past 15 years
7 at the Armory Foundation. I have witnessed the
8 tremendous impacts sports can have on building the
9 human spirit. To some, the Armory in Washington
10 Heights is the home of the National Track and Field
11 Hall of Fame and the fastest track in the world. To
12 others, the Armory is where magic can happen and
13 often does, both on and off the track. Our mission
14 is keeping kids on track. What follows is a glimpse
15 of what happens at the Armory in a non-COVID year.
16 Thousand of New York City High School track athletes
17 call the Armory home for both training and
18 competition. For decades, on Tuesdays and Thursday
19 afternoons from mid-November through the end of
20 March, we welcomed up to 1500 athletes to train with
21 their coaches from over 80 New York City public
22 independent and parochial schools. More than 100
23 track meets have happened during these months. Five
24 years ago, we piloted Little Feet, a program for
25 hundreds of third through fifth grade community

COMMITTEE OF PARKS AND RECREATION

112

1 children to run, jump, throw, and giggle twice a week
2 from October through the middle of May. Through the
3 years, we have expanded and now include children in
4 grades two. They are our Tiny Feet. In addition to
5 Little Feet and Tiny Feet, we have City Track,
6 offered at the Armory and part of the joy of moving
7 and promoting healthy habits for children in grades
8 six through eight. So, you do not get the idea that
9 all we do is fun and games, we also work with our
10 track and field athletes to help them gain access to
11 great high schools and four-year colleges with the
12 funding to make a college degree a reality. Armory
13 College Prep is a dynamic after school college
14 success program that puts students in grades five
15 through twelve on track for lifelong success by
16 helping to and through college, ongoing despite the
17 pandemic. For the last four years, 100% of our
18 seniors have been admitted to four-year colleges. In
19 the 80s, the Armory was a homeless shelter. Today,
20 the Armory is a representation of a public/private
21 partnership that has had the great privilege to be
22 part of the development of many of the world's top
23 track and field athletes. Despite COVID, we firmly
24 believe in the ability of sports to continue to
25

COMMITTEE OF PARKS AND RECREATION

113

2 connect and teach young people lifelong lessons of
3 discipline, determination, and dedication, all while
4 having fun, building friendships, and maintaining
5 fitness. We would like to stress to the Council that
6 our track record... (Crosstalk)

7 SGT. SADOWSKY: Time has expired.

8 RITA FINKLE: I'm just wrapping up. Of
9 excellent high-impact programming has allowed us to
10 reach thousands of young New Yorkers. We offer the
11 above only as a starting point for the type of work
12 that could be supported and developed and brought
13 much further by an Office of Sports and Recreation.
14 For all New York as we reimagine New York City post
15 COVID. Thank you very much and thank you for your
16 attention.

17 COMMITTEE COUNSEL KRIS SARTORI: Thank
18 you very much, and Council Member Rodriguez has a
19 question.

20 CM RODRIGUEZ: Well, I think that, you
21 know, it's difficult to have this conversation about
22 the potential the Armory would owe. I remember Dr.
23 Sander is someone also that I know having working
24 influence on Rita and the rest of the leadership at
25 the Armory. So, for me, like, you know, one thing,

COMMITTEE OF PARKS AND RECREATION

114

2 again, with my grey hair at 55, my eleven years, my
3 last year with the Council right now, but I'm trying
4 to see that how do we create permanent working
5 relationship, you know, and creating a network, and I
6 think that's what we have seen today. Key citywide
7 institutions are so connected with so many people and
8 so many resources. I know that the architect who
9 build said (inaudible) is the one with the signing
10 the new facility for Run New York and such, there's
11 the type of more members that all of you have in all
12 of the institution, and Rita, two things with that is
13 about, how do you see yourself as the partners that
14 you are at the Armory for New Balance to Order, the
15 (inaudible) interest to also engaging conversation to
16 see how they can, again, be part of helping this
17 office, and the second thing I just want to say is
18 thinking about after COVID. When we think about
19 athletics and sport, and thinking about supporting a
20 young person to compete, it's not only about the
21 discipline that he or she gets, it's about everything
22 that is around or what is needed, and that's why I,
23 you know, the way I started connecting with the
24 Brooklyn Borough President, Eric Adams on this, was
25 about the nutrition effort that he's making, and how

COMMITTEE OF PARKS AND RECREATION

115

1
2 do you think that the Armory being, working so close
3 with Columbia Medical School, Columbia University and
4 New York private schools can add the piece or
5 engaging them to be part of this. So, that if you
6 think about the Mayor's Office of Sports and
7 Recreation, we also think about nutrition. You're
8 thinking about also training and providing those
9 youth in this community that they don't have, the
10 family, they don't make enough to go and buy organic,
11 you know, how do you see that piece related to
12 (inaudible) and how do you think that the partners
13 should I really have with the private sector and the
14 medical school, the hospital can also be involved in
15 this effort?

16 RITA FINKLE: Thank you, Council Member
17 Rodriguez for both those questions. I think that
18 with our sponsors, the key is have a very well laid
19 out plan, and I think this group is thinking about a
20 very well laid out plan. This is not going to
21 haphazard. I think there is a, right at this moment,
22 there is a desire for corporate America to step up
23 and do something and do something that's meaningful
24 and big and not just kind passing papers around, and
25 I think that you idea here is so rich. I would say I

COMMITTEE OF PARKS AND RECREATION

116

1 don't think you're going to have trouble connecting
2 with sponsors and I also think that my neighbors
3 where we sit in Washington Heights, Columbia
4 University Medical Center and New York Presbyterian
5 Hospital, they are wonderful partners. They are
6 wonderful partners. They help us on so many levels
7 and I think they would be, you know, I don't want to
8 speak for them, but decision makers at the table, are
9 going to think this idea is terrific, it's terrific.
10

11 CM RODRIGUEZ: Thank you.

12 RITA FINKLE: My pleasure.

13 COMMITTEE COUNSEL KRIS SARTORI: Thank
14 you. Our next speaker is Peter Westbrook, followed
15 by Jenny Veloz.

16 PETER WESTBROOK: Wonderful. Can
17 everyone hear me?

18 STG SADOWSKY: Time starts now.

19 PETER WESTBROOK: Okay, let me speak fast
20 because I definitely do not want to get the hook.
21 First of all, my name is Peter Westbrook, not to
22 boast, I'm a six-time Olympian, bronze medalist in
23 the Olympic sport of Fencing, and I am the President
24 of the Peter Westbrook Foundation. I just want to
25 thank each and every one of you, this Committee, the

COMMITTEE OF PARKS AND RECREATION

117

2 Parks and Recreation Committee for an amazing job at
3 what you are doing. Council Member Rodriguez, I want
4 to thank you. I like your passion, but I didn't know
5 that this was your initiative. So, as they say in
6 our sport, you're the man, brother. Let me proceed.
7 This sport of Fencing, let me just say that I created
8 this foundation 30 years ago, and the reason I
9 created this sport, I grew up in the housing projects
10 of Newark, New Jersey, and I would have fell through
11 the cracks like 90% of the kids that grew up with.
12 Thousands of them fell through the cracks. So, this
13 sport saved my life, the Olympic games elevated my
14 whole life to a new way of thinking and existing.
15 That's why we started the foundation, that's why I
16 give back. No matter what I do, I can't give back
17 enough. So, we create Olympians, world champion
18 medalist, national champions. We'll have Olympians
19 going to this one, the games in Tokyo, a bunch of
20 them, but more important than Olympians, let me say
21 guys, what you do, and I'm so proud of each and every
22 one of you, we have 100% high school graduation rate,
23 98% of our kids move on to colleges, not only state
24 colleges, Harvard, Yale, MIT, MY, University of Penn.
25 We have about 150 to 180 kids in our program. So,

COMMITTEE OF PARKS AND RECREATION

118

1
2 forget about becoming Olympians, what we do is this;
3 like all of you, we elevate the children to overcome
4 all obstacles, to be the best that they can be, to
5 achieve greatness, so I appreciate creating
6 Olympians, but more so, I appreciate what we are
7 doing, which is creating Olympians in life. So, I
8 want to thank you Council Member Rodriguez. I am in
9 favor of your Bill, and as I close, I would say, as
10 my kids say, Council Member, forgive me, but you're
11 the man.

12 COMMITTEE COUNSEL KRIS SARTORI: Thank
13 you. Council Member Rodriguez.

14 CM RODRIGUEZ: Well Peter, thank you. I
15 know about, you know, as a recent immigrant myself,
16 again (inaudible) to wash dishes and a lot of people,
17 especially my other sisters, a lot to do for me to be
18 here today, and I all about, you know, we are the
19 continuation. I'm here because I two classes with
20 Professor Jeffers (SP?). I went to lecture with
21 (inaudible), and for me, I know, I too believe that
22 it is important to think about the present, but most
23 important the future generation, and one thing that
24 all of us has learned, changes take longer than what
25 we thought when we were high school students, and

COMMITTEE OF PARKS AND RECREATION

119

2 that's my approach and again, this is not only my
3 idea, this is the idea of Brooklyn Borough Present,
4 Eric Adams with who had this (inaudible) we plan
5 together and we incorporate the piece related to
6 nutrition and then the need to also create better
7 condition for a youth to eat healthy in order for
8 them to do better when they practice any sport, and
9 also I would like to, you know, thanks the Office of
10 Mayor (inaudible) for also being open. I've been
11 engaging in conversation with the Legislative team of
12 his office, and they're open and we will be getting,
13 engaging conversation and the thing you are here
14 today, you know, be ready because we will have next
15 meeting, a meeting with City Hall, with our Speaker
16 Corey Johnson, who also had to spend time and
17 (inaudible) because both of them bring support. So,
18 when the Administration is open, positive, when you
19 have partner such as the Brooklyn Borough President,
20 Eric Adams, when you have the City Hall and the
21 Speaker saying we want to work with you, and then we
22 have all of you guys. There's no one way on how
23 we're going to make it, so we will. So, Peter, one
24 piece to you is about, what is there in the City of
25 New York, when it comes to, you know, relationships

COMMITTEE OF PARKS AND RECREATION

1

120

2

with National and International Institutions that

3

also we can connect a relationship, but also to be

4

engaged in whatever we can plan at the city level?

5

PETER WESTBROOK: Just what we're doing

6

right now. Connecting with great leaders like Wendy,

7

like Rita, like Ken, and my little Zingy, Nzingha,

8

just what we're doing right now, connecting with

9

these leaders, getting them in a room together, and

10

great things will happen. It doesn't make a

11

different what sport, you get us together in a room,

12

Council Member, and great things will come out of

13

this. We will do great things together. I want to

14

say that I'm so proud of my little girl, Nzingha.

15

She's amazing, Olympian, World Champion, and now

16

she's an Olympian in life. She came to me when she

17

was nine years old. Now she, whatever age she is

18

now, but Zingha, you're amazing, and thank you for

19

inviting me to this. I'm so proud of you. Thank you

20

Council Member.

21

CM RODRIGUEZ: Thank you.

22

COMMITTEE COUNSEL KRIS SARTORI: Thank

23

you. Our next speaker is Jenny Veloz, followed by

24

Adam Frazier.

25

SGT. POLITE: Time starts now.

COMMITTEE OF PARKS AND RECREATION

121

JENNY VELOZ: Hi. Good afternoon. My name is Jenny Veloz. I'm a Community Organizer and New York Lawyer for the Public Interest, and I'm here on behalf of the Fair Play Coalition. The Fair Play Coalition is a coalition of students, teachers, coaches, principals, parents, activists and advocates standing together for all high school students in New York City. New York City Public Schools have equitable access to the PSAL and to all athletic fields and courts controlled by the DOE. For the last four plus years, Fair Play has advocated for equity and publicly funded afterschool sports for public school students. We have engaged in Legislative advocacy and successfully passed a Bill in this Council requiring the Department of Education to make public how it allocates it's resources among students when funding afterschool sports. We've engaged in outreach and community organizing, and we have sued the DOE to try to require it to fix its discriminatory manner in which it allocates afterschool sports teams throughout the city. Why have we focused our energy on the DOE? It's because a primary agency already exists that provides publicly funded sports and recreation opportunities

COMMITTEE OF PARKS AND RECREATION

122

2 to student across the city, and it is operated within
3 the DOE, the public school athletic beat. The PSAL
4 is well-established and has historically borne the
5 responsibility of providing sports and recreation
6 opportunities for students across the city, and while
7 we continue to advocate to fix the PSAL's inequitable
8 policies, we do not believe that creating an entirely
9 new separate ambiguous office with a similar mission
10 is the correct move. Particularly in these times of
11 fiscal restraint. While we appreciate the concept of
12 creating an Office of Sports and Recreation, we are
13 concerned that this entity will shift the focus from
14 the more pressing issue at hand, and surely work to
15 bring back already existing afterschool sports in an
16 equitable manner. Intro 1959's stated goal that this
17 new office will work to provide access to sport's
18 related opportunities for students and promote the
19 role of sports and education and recreation is
20 duplicative. Since the PSAL provides the same
21 service to public high school students, albeit in an
22 inequitable way. We believe that instead of creating
23 a new office, the City and Council's priority should
24 be fixing the PSAL system. The Fair Play Coalition
25 continues to advocate on behalf of black and Latin

COMMITTEE OF PARKS AND RECREATION

123

1 students who especially now, with the suspension of
2 sports due to COVID-19 have had to endure almost a
3 year with no sports. Instead of what seems to be an
4 almost redundant service, we should be focusing on
5 solutions to improve the PSAL system and assure equal
6 access to all high school students in New York City.
7 It has been almost a year since afterschool sports
8 were suspended due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Mayor
9 De Blasio recently spoke about bringing back after
10 school sports, prioritizing health and safety, but
11 did not mention equity. For years PSAL has been
12 denied access to sports to black and Latin X students
13 while providing more resources to larger, more
14 integrated school. The Mayor and PSAL have the
15 opportunity now to implement a plan for a safe return
16 to sports, while also ensuring that resources are
17 distributed equitably. However, access to sports
18 goes beyond athletics and there is also an equality
19 regarding school athletic facilities. Schools lack
20 the equipment... (Crosstalk).

22 SGT. POLITE: Times expired.

23 JENNY VELOZ: I'm almost done. And there
24 is also an equality regarding school athletic
25 facilities. Schools lack the equipment, practice

COMMITTEE OF PARKS AND RECREATION

1 124

2 facilities, and other resources to field a proper
3 team. If Intro 1959 were to move forward, we would
4 consider supporting and amended Bill focused on
5 coordination of access to parks, park permits and
6 facilities to ensure equity. All schools, large and
7 small should be able to field a team or conduct
8 practices utilizing proper facilities. We look
9 forward to continuing our advocacy with the Council,
10 the Administration, and our student's strong voices.
11 Once again, thank you for your time.

12 COMMITTEE COUNSEL KRIS SARTORI: Thank
13 you, and Council Member Rodriguez has a remark.

14 CM RODRIGUEZ: Yeah, I just want to say
15 that I appreciate your level of advocacy and
16 commitment and letting you know that I'm more than
17 happy to follow a conversation with you because we
18 don't look to take away any role that any not for
19 profit to private to PSAL, as I said, I'm a co-
20 founder to a school before being elected, after
21 graduating in 93, I was the co-founder of Gregorio
22 Luperon High School which runs two years ago the
23 baseball high school championship and they played in
24 the Yankee Stadium, and we had great sports program
25 in volleyball and other fields and as well as being

COMMITTEE OF PARKS AND RECREATION

1 125

2 the co-founder of the Washington Heights Academy, so
3 I do agree with you, that especially schools that are
4 mainly, what I call the school of the working class,
5 and need to get more attention and to get more
6 resources. If the ideas of the Office are
7 established with a level of collaboration, and as an
8 office that can work together and try to centralize
9 what I feel is things that are happening through DOE,
10 through the Department of Parks, and DYCD. So, I'm
11 more than happy to continue a conversation with you
12 to see how we can, again, join forces together.
13 Thank you.

14 JENNY VELOZ: And we're happy to meet
15 with your office to continue this discussion.

16 CM RODRIGUEZ: Alright. Thank you.

17 JENNY VELOZ: Thank you.

18 COMMITTEE COUNSEL KRIS SARTORI: Thank
19 you. Our next speaker is Adam Frasier who will
20 followed by Anthony Rivera.

21 SGT POLITE: Time starts now.

22 ADAM FRASER: Hello, and thank you for
23 the opportunity to testify about the Office of Sports
24 and Recreation. I'm Adam Fraser, Chief Executive of
25 the Laureus Sport for Good Foundation. We are graph-

COMMITTEE OF PARKS AND RECREATION

126

2 making capacity building and coalition enabling
3 organization founded under the patron of Jim Nelson
4 Mandela after the role he played in rebuilding post
5 apartheid South Africa. We've raised almost 200
6 million dollars for the Global Sports Youth
7 Development Sector over the past 20 years and
8 impacted the lives of six million young people. In
9 New York City, we've given more than a million
10 dollars in grants over the past four years and built
11 sports (inaudible) which is the coalition of more
12 than 60 local organization using sport for social
13 change, also providing testimony for this area. As
14 you might expect with an organization founded under
15 the patron of President Mandela, we believe in the
16 powerful relationship between sport and government,
17 and with funding from the likes of Mercedes Benz, the
18 Richmond Group, Nikey and many others, we believe in
19 the power of public/private partnership, and we
20 believe in the outcomes of sport safety development.
21 We have points all around the world. In the
22 Netherlands, we have a nationwide partnership with
23 the Dutch government using sports to prevent youth
24 incarceration and (inaudible). In the UK, where I
25 grew up, the Mayor's Office partners with Nikey to

COMMITTEE OF PARKS AND RECREATION

127

2 directly support our coalition with grants and focus
3 on social integration. As an immigrant to the US and
4 a resident of New York, I can speak personally about
5 the role sports played in my own journey in the
6 relationship that allowed me to build in this city,
7 but as we've heard, not everyone has that same level
8 of access, which is critical for so many reason. So,
9 I would believe in this Office as a belief in
10 opportunity to untap partnerships with professional
11 teams, leagues, business and our experiences show
12 what can be unlocked when those booths engage with
13 youth sports programs to unleash the power of sport
14 to drive social change, build bridges, and transcend
15 racial and economic barriers. All of the those are
16 crucial and the current system can be one of pay-to-
17 play dominance creating and inequity to access to
18 sport and play. This Office can provide oversight
19 and support to change that landscape and provide
20 streamline possibilities for youth sport-based
21 development programs to pass into strategic
22 initiatives that of the Mayor's Office. Youth sport
23 organizations throughout the city and the country
24 have been waiting for government to recognize the
25 potential of sports to tackle social issues including

COMMITTEE OF PARKS AND RECREATION

128

1 violence, discrimination, and inequality via the key
2 focus area we work to end. We believe this office
3 can provide centralized support, an oversight needed
4 to provide every young person with an opportunity to
5 access the high quality youth development centered
6 sport experience. Thank you.

8 COMMITTEE COUNSEL KRIS SARTORI: Thank
9 you very much. Our next speaker is Anthony Rivera
10 who will followed by Carlos Velasquez who is the last
11 registered speaker for the hearing.

12 SGT. POLITE: Time starts now.

13 ANTHONY RIVERA: Thank you everyone. My
14 name is Tony Rivera. I'm the president of the Lower
15 East Side OLS Little League. We are an organization
16 that's been around for 60 years servicing mostly
17 people of color. Our organization is, we'll say,
18 recreational, but we also appreciate what the Council
19 Member is doing with this new proposal. We also have
20 a very competitive portion to our program and in the
21 past, we've had the luxury of having someone like
22 Dellin Batanza start his little league career with
23 us, the All-Star Yankee Pitcher, and now with the
24 Mets. We've also had the benefit of producing
25 several players that have gone on to get full

COMMITTEE OF PARKS AND RECREATION

129

1
2 scholarships in college through baseball and they've
3 gone through very diverse colleges. Some of them in
4 Texas, Oklahoma and Detroit. So, you know, our
5 appreciation what these kid of programs can do for
6 the youth is well on the sit by us, and we've also
7 tried to connect with other countries like Puerto
8 Rico and Santo Domingo where we've taken a group of
9 kids, a team of 15/16 year-olds and flown them over
10 there and play a week or a week and a half of games,
11 and we did that on a shoestring budget with \$400
12 being charged per player. Imagine feeding, flying,
13 and having all of this done for the kids for the
14 price of \$400. So, an agency like this can really
15 help us out with resources. We think that perhaps
16 having additional resources like a sport's facility,
17 indoor training facility in the lower east side I
18 think is sorely needed, quite frankly. There are
19 spots where that could be done, and you can actually
20 force this kind of high-level competitive student
21 athlete. As far as the permit situation, we also
22 appreciate what the Parks Department is doing in
23 terms of, you know, pre-COVID procedures and being
24 care, but I also want folks to understand that we're
25 all-volunteer organization, like so many other

COMMITTEE OF PARKS AND RECREATION

130

1 organizations. We're asking these same coaches who
2 are volunteering, and not getting paid to go out
3 there, train and develop youth, but also, we're
4 asking them to, you know, carry around the AEDs, be a
5 standby EMT member if some situation develops on the
6 field, now we're asking them to do temperature checks
7 and a whole host of other things that we need to
8 manage for them which, you know, you can appreciate,
9 no one's getting paid to do this, so, park's
10 enforcement, yes, we appreciate, we want that. We'd
11 like park enforcements to help us actually enforce
12 it, not to just be there issuing citations or
13 violations, and you know, we shouldn't be worried
14 that our permits are going to be taken away if one
15 person or a passerby is not complying with COVID
16 measures. So, I think what I heard was there would
17 be, you know, not too heavy-handed, but I think there
18 needs to be..

20 SGT. POLITE: Time expired.

21 ANTHONY RIVERA: Yeah. I think that was
22 it. Thank you.

23 COMMITTEE COUNSEL KRIS SARTORI: Thank
24 you very much.

25

COMMITTEE OF PARKS AND RECREATION

131

1
2 ANTHONY RIVERA: One last thing I'd like
3 to, Council Member Rodriguez, I'd love to make a
4 connection. I don't have your contact details, but
5 it seems like we're clearly supportive of your
6 initiative, and we'd love to have a dialogue and get
7 engaged on that front.

8 CM RODRIGUEZ: Of course, my email is
9 YRodriguez@council.nyc.gov. So, if you shoot me a
10 text, I have my phone here and I will immediately
11 rely and give you my cell phone again.
12 Yrodriguez@council.nyc.gov, and that's great also
13 that you can join this effort.

14 ANTHONY RIVERA: Perfect, thank you.

15 CM RODRIGUEZ: Thank you.

16 COMMITTEE COUNSEL KRIS SARTORI: Thank
17 you very much. Our last registered speaker is Carlos
18 Velasquez.

19 SGT. POLITE: Time starts now.

20 CARLOS VELASQUEZ: Thank you to the
21 Council for having this meeting and allowing me to
22 testify. So, my name is Carlos Velasquez. I'm the
23 Chief Program Officer of the Boys Club of New York.
24 For those of you who are not familiar with the Boys
25 Club of New York, we've been around 145 years serving

COMMITTEE OF PARKS AND RECREATION

132

2 young men in East Harlem and the lower east side, and
3 Flushing Queens, and now recently in Brooklyn and in
4 the Bronx. So, in terms of the establish of an
5 Office of Sports and Recreation, I just want to urge
6 everyone to really consider thee points which are
7 really impacting the access to sports for young
8 people. One is the equitable distribution of permits
9 to community-based organizations in communities that
10 service young African American and Latino and
11 underserved students or young people that they're
12 receiving permits, that there is equitable allocation
13 of permits. I think that we've seen more kids in the
14 park. We have a clubhouse on East 111th Street
15 between first and second avenue, right across the
16 street from Jefferson Park and two things happen. I
17 either see the park full of young people who are not
18 from East Harlem or I see the park empty. This fall
19 we were able to conduct fall sports leagues even with
20 COVID going on. We had 200 young people there every
21 Saturday, participating in soccer skills, rugby
22 skills and a flag football tournament, but I have to
23 navigate the process of how can I have more kids on
24 the field because there was an organization who had
25 permits that didn't use them for the whole time. So,

COMMITTEE OF PARKS AND RECREATION

133

thankful with Deputy Commissioner for community partnerships of the NYPD, (inaudible), we was able to give us flood lights so we could illuminate the fields in the evening so we could have more kids on the field, and in terms of access to sports and creating a pipeline, there needs to be an entry point, and the way you have an entry point is by creating programs that are recreation and less competitive so kids can develop the skills, but right now, the entry point programs come with a price tag of anywhere from \$100 to \$385 that I've seen for the same young people in a community that are having trouble to eat, having trouble with their parents having employment, so I really urge the Council to really push the Parks Department and make sure that these leagues and these programs are coming in are equitable and affordable to the young people in the neighborhood, and just really the establishment around protocols around the field permits. I put in for Spring Field permits as far back as December, and I still haven't heard back. I have field permits still in questions for this spring that I put in a couple weeks ago, and they're still, I still haven't heard back. I can plan appropriate and strong

COMMITTEE OF PARKS AND RECREATION

1 134

2 programs without really having the logistics set up,
3 and being able to...

4 SGT PILOT: Time expired.

5 COMMITTEE COUNSEL KRIS SARTORI: Just go
6 ahead, please finish.

7 CARLOS VELASQUEZ: Yeah, and the last
8 part is, you know, I'm coming from a place where our
9 programs are \$5. We operate, we have currently
10 member in the NBA or Major League Baseball, we have
11 swimming pools inside our buildings, and that is all
12 for \$5 a year. So, we are a program that provides
13 free access, basically free access to sports and free
14 access to resources. We just need the ability to
15 have a place to have these activities and to make
16 sure that our young people have access in the
17 communities that they live in right now.

18 COMMITTEE COUNSEL KRIS SARTORI: Thank
19 you very much, and Council Member Rodriguez does have
20 a question.

21 CM RODRIGUEZ: I just want to say thank
22 you also for the work that you're doing and I would
23 definitely, when you come to the permit, we also have
24 to address those concerns, but I'd also like to close
25 by thanking the Chairman, the Chair of this

COMMITTEE OF PARKS AND RECREATION

135

2 Committee, our friend, Peter Koo for allowing us to
3 also include this Bill in this hearing. I know that
4 he's a big supporter when it comes to creating
5 mechanism to support competitive sports. I also want
6 to thank James Bakers and (inaudible) from the
7 Legislative team of the Council. Jason Goldman, also
8 the Chief of Staff, Corey Johnson and the Speaker
9 Johnson also for expressing their support to this
10 Bill. That's also thanking Jumaane Williams, a
11 Public Advocate, Brooklyn Borough President, Eric
12 Adams who also is partner supporting this initiative,
13 and City Hall. They already have expressed that we
14 will be, you know, they're open and most important is
15 that we will continue conversation to see how we can
16 build this office together. I also like to thank
17 from my office my Chief of Staff, Elizabeth Conforme
18 (SP?) and Evelyn Cojado (SP?), Tomas Garita (SP?),
19 and Jose Reyes. They helped me to connect with
20 everyone, all the stake holders that testified today.
21 So, let's get it done. Let's be sure that, as we
22 have to close the gap of women and minorities
23 technology that also we connect those kids in working
24 class community to the same access and resources that

25

COMMITTEE OF PARKS AND RECREATION

136

they need in order to excel in the sport field.

Thank you.

COMMITTEE COUNSEL KRIS SARTORI: Thank you, Council Member Rodriguez. At this point, all persons who have spoken have registered. If we have inadvertently missed anyone who is registered to testify and has not yet spoken, please use the raise hand function, and you'll be called on to speak.

Seeing none, I will turn it back to Chairperson Koo to deliver closing remarks and adjourn the hearing.

CHAIR KOO: Thank you. So thank you to the New York City Parks Department, the Deputy Commissioner and all the staff, and for everyone who came out to testify today. As we head into the warmer months and folks want to spend more time in the parks, we know there are parks and our athletics fields will be more popular than ever. We also know that they athletic field permit system had challenges prior to COVID and the new ones came up during the pandemic, and issues will continue after the pandemic. We look forward to continuing to work with the Parks Department and all stake holders to make this more equitable and transparent process for all. I also want to say thank you to Council Member

COMMITTEE OF PARKS AND RECREATION

137

Rodriguez on this Bill. We will work together to make this a success. Thank you again for everyone, and I also want to thank for staff on the Committee of Parks and Recreation, Kristopher Sartori, Patrick Shima, and Monica and my own staff, and Scott and other ones. Thank you. So, this meeting will be adjourned.

C E R T I F I C A T E

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



Date April 24, 2021