

CITY COUNCIL
CITY OF NEW YORK

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TRANSCRIPT OF THE MINUTES

of the

COMMITTEE ON PARKS AND RECREATION

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March 31, 2009
Start: 11:42am
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HELD AT: 250 Broadway
14th Floor

B E F O R E:
HELEN D. FOSTER
Chairperson

COUNCIL MEMBERS:
Alan J. Gerson
Helen Sears
Gale Brewer
Elizabeth Crowley
Diana Reyna

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

Adrian Benepe
Commissioner
Department of Parks and Recreation

Kevin Jeffrey
Deputy Commissioner, Public Programs
Department of Parks and Recreation

Fiona Watt
Assistant Commissioner, Forestry, Horticulture and
Natural Resources
Department of Parks and Recreation

William T. Castro
Manhattan Borough Commissioner
Department of Parks and Recreation

Sue Donoghue
Assistant Commissioner for PlaNYC
Department of Parks and Recreation

Cheryl Huber
Director of Research and Planning
New Yorkers for Parks

Jane Cook
Executive Director, New York Chapter
American Society of Landscape Architects

Lowell Barton
New York State Laborers Organizing Fund

Linda Eskanaz
North Shore Waterfront Greenbelt

2 CHAIRPERSON FOSTER: Good morning.

3 I'm Council Member Helen Diane Foster. This is
4 the preliminary budget for the Parks and
5 Recreation. I'll be joined by colleagues. We
6 have quite a few hearings going on at the same
7 time. So as soon as they get here I will
8 introduce them. I am joined by Walter Pitts, our
9 Financial Analyst and Lyle Frank, the staff to the
10 Committee. Today we will hear from the Department
11 of Parks and Recreation about its Expense and
12 Capital Preliminary Budget actions, general agency
13 operations and the fiscal 2009 Preliminary Mayor's
14 Management Report. The Department's fiscal 2010
15 Preliminary Budget is approximately \$340 million,
16 including all funding. It includes \$14 million in
17 expense programs to eliminate PEGs, \$4 million in
18 revenue PEGs and \$12 million in other adjustments.
19 The Committee looks forward to hearing from the
20 Parks Department about several important issues,
21 including the impact that recent 5% and 7% PEG
22 programs for fiscal 2010 will have on the Agency's
23 operation, headcount and service level. The
24 Department's proposed capital budget for Fiscal
25 2009 through 2013 totals \$265 billion, which is

1 less than 1% lower than the adopted capital
2 budget-- sorry that was me. In January, the Mayor
3 announced his intention to reduce the City's
4 capital plan by 30%. The objective of the capital
5 cut is to reduce the amount of debt services as a
6 percentage of total revenues. The 30% reduction
7 in the ten-year capital plan for fiscal 2010 to
8 fiscal 2019 would reduce the long-term average
9 growth in debt service costs to 3.4%, equal to the
10 level of forecast growth in City revenues. The
11 Capital cut will eliminate approximately \$561
12 million, excuse me, worth of plan commitments from
13 the Parks Department's current plan of \$1.87
14 billion. We hope that Commissioner Benepe will
15 explain to us today what I just read and help us
16 realize the cost savings and how it prioritizes
17 the capital projects. As you can see, I didn't
18 write that. Thank you Walter, though, because I'm
19 sure it made sense to you. We've been joined by
20 the newest member to our Committee, Elizabeth
21 Crowley from Queens, and my general factotum
22 Patrick Mulhill. That means, you know, the person
23 I turn to for everything. That being said, good
24 morning, Commissioner, and you may start.

ADRIAN BENEPE: Good morning. Good morning, Chair Foster, Council Member Crowley, welcome. A pleasure to have you on this Committee and welcome to the Council. I'm Adrian Benepe. I'm the Commissioner of the Department of Parks and Recreation, and on behalf of Mayor Bloomberg and our First Deputy Mayor Patty Harris, I want to thank you for the opportunity to talk about parks with you today. I also want to thank the many citizens and the responsible citywide advocacy groups who are here today including New Yorkers for Parks and the American Society for Landscape Architects, New York State Chapter. And I'm joined here by a number of Parks Senior Staff who may be joining us up here at the table to help elucidate parts of the testimony, they include our Deputy Commissioner for Public Programs, Kevin Jeffrey; our Deputy Commissioner for Finance and Administration, Bob Garafola; Assistant Commissioner David Stark, who is also our Chief Fiscal Officer, he's a New York Knicks fan as you can tell by the hat. Well actually he's wearing a Phoenix Suns hat. That's a long story. There's always a long story in the Parks, but you don't

1
2 want to hear it though. Our Deputy Commissioner
3 for Projects, Therese Braddick; our Assistant
4 Commissioner for Forestry, Horticulture and
5 Natural Resources, Fiona Watt, who is over here;
6 our Assistant Commissioner for Parklands and
7 Planning, Joshua Laird, over there; Assistant
8 Commissioner for Recreation and Public Programs,
9 Nancy Barthold, who is over there; along with our
10 Accessibility Coordinator, Victor Collisi
11 [phonetic]. We're also joined by Jonna Carmona-
12 Graf, whose title I'm not-- she's recently been
13 promoted-- Senior Team Leader. She's in charge of
14 all of the design teams on Capital Projects, Sara
15 Coin, who is a Director of the Urban Park Rangers,
16 and a number of other Parkees we'll introduce as
17 need be. I'm here today to talk to you about the
18 budget for Parks, Recreation Centers and other
19 facilities. Like some of you, unfortunately the
20 Chair is not old enough to remember those days, I
21 remember our parks in the 1970s. During that
22 fiscal crisis, our parks were victimized by
23 vandalism and neglect. Our buildings were
24 abandoned and shut down. I think this
25 administration understands that safe, clean parks

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2 and facilities are anchors for neighborhoods and
3 communities in every borough, and that even in a
4 difficult fiscal climate, and make no mistake this
5 is a difficult fiscal climate, we will not allow
6 our parks to slip. Fortunately, we are entering
7 this time of fiscal austerity following a period
8 of unparalleled expansion of our expense and
9 capital budgets. I want to thank the Mayor and
10 the City Council for that. I compare this period
11 to a healthy person who gets the flu-- you feel
12 lousy for a while, but you do get better. We will
13 not repeat the mistakes of the 1970s, and to that
14 end, we have learned to do more with less. We
15 learned those lessons in the 1970s. While we have
16 to cut back in some areas, we'll still be able to
17 maintain our parks, facilities, beaches, pools,
18 street trees and natural areas. I forgot one
19 introduction, speaking of green and natural areas,
20 Sue Donoghue, our Assistant Commissioner for
21 PlaNYC is also here, and Manhattan Borough
22 Commissioner Bill Castro next to Sue. So, when we
23 get to Million Trees and PlaNYC to come up. Now
24 as with every agency, we're facing significant
25 cuts to our capital expense budgets. The good

1 news however, from our point of view, is that we
2 are not being cut disproportionately.
3

4 Historically in the Parks Department and things
5 like Cultural Affairs and Libraries were cut
6 disproportionately in favor of the other services.

7 So we are all being cut the same rate, which is
8 good for Parks. And our headcount was at a modern
9 high when the cuts began, so we can cut from a

10 strongpoint. We have achieved our target for 12%
11 savings with the help of our Agency's revenue and
12 through the expense budgets. Our approach to the

13 cuts will be to reduce services impacts to the
14 public by maximizing new technologies and

15 leveraging the help of volunteers and interns to
16 keep our parks clean and safe. And this team will
17 carry us through the lean times. That said, it

18 will be a challenge. To meet our cuts we are in
19 full attrition mode. We expect to see the result

20 of that decrease in staff in the coming years. So
21 far, fortunately, it has not hit yet. We will

22 reduce our six-month seasonal staff, that is the
23 people who come in six months at a time during the

24 busy season, by approximately 370 positions, and
25 we may lose as many as 303 fulltime staff members

1 through attrition. That has not happened yet.
2
3 The \$2.5 million reduction in tree pruning
4 contracts will result in approximately 38,000
5 fewer street trees being pruned. Over the past
6 few decades, the Parks Department has built a
7 sophisticated network to maintain the parks
8 system. This includes over 3,000 job training
9 participants at the height of the season who work
10 in parks year-round and our network of 800 civic
11 groups and 55,000 volunteers who provide donated
12 labor to the parks, along with a dozen major non-
13 profit organizations, who together raise about \$90
14 million to help care for parks or deliver sports
15 and cultural services across the City such as our
16 great partner across the city, The City Parks
17 Foundation, or more neighborhood specific groups
18 like the Bronx River Alliance, the Greenbelt
19 Conservancy in Staten Island, the Open Space
20 Alliance in Greenpoint and Williamsburg, and the
21 Forest Park Trust in Queens. In addition to these
22 alternate workforces, we are also doing more with
23 less through new technology that boosts
24 operational efficiency and helps keep our
25 environment more sustainable. And even though

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2 times are tough, we are focused on the Agency's
3 core mission. We are still maintaining our 29,000
4 acres of parkland, planting loads of new trees,
5 building for the future, greening our City,
6 keeping our children and all New Yorkers healthy,
7 and bringing New Yorkers to the waterfront. I'd
8 like to share with you some ways that we're
9 working to continue to improve the quality of life
10 for all New Yorkers. In the general area of
11 maintenance and specifically under technology in
12 the field we are equipping our more than 650
13 comfort stations, comfort stations is a nice word
14 for public toilets, with light sensors and compact
15 fluorescent lights, these will reduce energy
16 needs, and replacing paper towel dispensers with
17 automatic hand driers. Not only will these
18 changes reduce the time our staff needs to clean
19 public toilets, it's also better for the
20 environment and you're more likely to get the
21 proper services you want. Also in technology, we
22 are providing additional direct connect phones to
23 facilitate more efficient communication among
24 managers, supervisors and field staff in daily
25 operations. I remember the old days when

1 supervisors used to have to carry a roll of
2 quarters in their pocket and try to find a working
3 payphone so they could call in a request for more
4 supplies. Those days are over and we now have
5 instant communication across the field and all of
6 our far-flung district offices are equipped with
7 computers. With these investments, we'll be
8 better able to respond to local conditions as they
9 emerge in real time. Our fleet. This agency only
10 moves to the extent that we have lots of rolling
11 stock. Last year we were presented the National
12 Greenest Fleet Award, from the National Fleet
13 Managers Association, or NAFA. We use 20%
14 biodiesel fuel for all of our 850 diesel trucks
15 and other equipment, and approximately two-thirds
16 of our entire fleet uses some type of alternative
17 fuel. We're not resting on our laurels either.
18 In 2008 we successfully piloted a more aggressive
19 use of biodiesel in Orchard Beach in the Bronx.
20 We will expand this pilot to over 100 vehicles for
21 the summer, and in addition to using alternative
22 fuel vehicles we are going smaller where we can by
23 exchanging 100 SUVs for hybrid sedans over the
24 last three years. Under the energy efficiency
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2 rubric with the help of the New York Power
3 Authority or NYPA, we are also making our park
4 facilities more energy efficient. We are
5 collaborating with NYPA and the DCAS Office of
6 Energy Conservation to implement ENCORE, another
7 plan for energy cost reduction in parks. ENCORE
8 projects conserve energy, reduce energy costs and
9 improve the environment. So we're doing that at
10 recreation centers and other parks buildings
11 around the system. We are also trying to manage
12 our power usage better. We installed a variable
13 transformer at Randall's Island at the cost \$6,000
14 to stabilize a power supply. The investment has
15 already paid for itself and it continues to save
16 \$3,000 a year in electricity costs. In the same
17 vein, we are in the process of completing a 12,000
18 square foot green roof on a facility on Randalls
19 Island, experimenting with 12 distinct green roof
20 system technologies. When this is complete, it
21 will be the largest municipal green roof in the
22 five boroughs, and it will provide a wealth of
23 noise, heating and energy related benefits. It
24 will also be a working laboratory for green roof
25 design and construction, and lessons learned here

1
2 will be applied to future installation at other
3 park facilities. Council Member Brewer, welcome.
4 I see Council Member Sears has also joined us.
5 Some of my favorite-- oh, sorry. It's nice to
6 know who our Council Members are. It's only taken
7 me eight years. This is a terrific roof, and by
8 the way, I'd like to invite you all to come out
9 and visit. It's right off the Triborough Bridge.
10 Just get off-- you can visit anytime, and you can
11 see all the different kinds of green roof
12 technology in one place. We've made like a trial
13 thing, and then we're putting out a huge new one
14 using the latest technology. So if you're
15 interested in the concept of green roofs and how
16 they work, we've actually created a laboratory for
17 green roofs on this vast roof of our automotive
18 repair facility, and we're going to use this as
19 lessons for how to do future installations in many
20 parks facilities. And we're been joined by Hector
21 Aponte, our Bronx Borough Commissioner. Let's
22 talk about quality of life. Quality of life is
23 one of my favorite topics because many people
24 believe that quality of life in New York City is
25 often defined by parks. Now our mission is to

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2 ensure a high quality of life for park users and
3 neighbors of parks. Now here is a category of
4 information that may be too much information for
5 you, but it's important for us. Let's talk about
6 canine waste. Now we do these very detailed parks
7 inspections, you know, 5,000 inspections a year,
8 and try to identify problems. And for the last
9 several rounds, canine waste left behind by
10 inconsiderate dog owners, which is a euphemism--
11 there are other words I can think of for people
12 who don't pick up after their dogs, but this being
13 polite company I'll say just inconsiderate dog
14 owners. This is a major problem as we try to keep
15 parks safe and clean. In an effort to combat a
16 growing problem caused by people's failure to
17 clean up after their dogs on the city streets, and
18 by the way I consider-- if you can't pick up after
19 your dog you shouldn't own a dog. It's as simple
20 as that. It's a very basic thing and it's a
21 measure of civilization. We have joined forces
22 with the Department of Sanitation to step up
23 enforcement against people who don't stoop to
24 scoop, to reeducate the public on the law and to
25 encourage New Yorkers to use the 311 information

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2 line to tell us about patterns of violations. In
3 other words, if some inconsiderate person is
4 leaving behind a mess for their dog in your
5 neighborhood, particularly your neighborhood
6 playground or park, let us know about it. Let us
7 know the time, the place, give us a description,
8 and our PEP officers will be going out. Now to
9 give you an indication of how seriously we're
10 taking it, which is about-- and alone we've issued
11 71 summonses for failure to remove canine waste.
12 Now that's a very difficult thing to catch
13 somebody in the act, because it's usually under
14 the cover of darkness and they're looking around
15 furtively to see who might be seeing them. But
16 we're going to be doing it. We have undercover
17 officers. That person sitting at a bench reading
18 a paper might well be an undercover officer. We
19 just want to warn people. They should be doing
20 it. It's their civic duty. But if you don't, we
21 will catch you. And we will be issuing lots of
22 summonses to people who don't pick up after their
23 dogs or bring dogs illegally into playgrounds to
24 chew on the play equipment or whatever it is they
25 may do. And Council Member Gerson. How are you?

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[Off Mic]

ADRIAN BENEPE: You're in Washington Square?

[Off Mic]

ADRIAN BENEPE: Good.

[Off Mic]

ADRIAN BENEPE: Oh, probably was. Playing chess.

COUNCIL MEMBER GERSON: I plead the fifth.

ADRIAN BENEPE: He pleads the fifth. Okay. Let's talk about another unpleasant quality of life offense, Graffiti. We work terrifically well with our City partners, and one of them is the New York Police Department and their citywide vandals taskforce, and we're working with them to combat graffiti in parks. Members of our senior staff attend GraffitiStat meetings each week, and we have relationships with the precincts in each borough. We are forwarding conditions with dates and pictures for the NYPD to review for occurring violations. We are also training our field staff in how to remove graffiti from delicate public monuments, and we are

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2 experimenting with cameras in our parks to
3 discourage vandals. We have also established a
4 Parks Enforcement Patrol special operations unit
5 to address vandalism as well as other late night
6 illegal activities. So last year, for example,
7 our PEP officers made 14 vandalism related
8 arrests, more than four times the previous years,
9 and it's also extremely difficult to catch,
10 because if you're spraying paint on a wall,
11 chances are you're going to look around to see if
12 somebody's watching you first. So again, our PEP
13 officers go out undercover, and they've been
14 particularly successful. We're going to keep on
15 doing it and do it more. Recently there was a lot
16 of publicity about the historic Arcade and the
17 Bethesda Terrace, one of the great landmarks of
18 the entire world, was severely vandalized by four
19 young people with spray paint. They caused
20 \$50,000 in damage. Fortunately in this case, an
21 alert citizen happened to see them and alerted
22 Central Park Police Precinct officers who were
23 driving by and they were able to catch them
24 literally purple handed-- they had purple spray
25 paint all over their hands. And they have been

1 charged with a felony for doing this damage. So
2 that's-- I'm very pleased that the police made the
3 arrests and the District Attorney took it very
4 seriously. About Highbridge Park, this is kind of
5 interesting, there's an area with very little
6 pedestrian traffic. It's sort of hidden below
7 some highway ramps. And it had been riddled with
8 ongoing problems of people coming in late at night
9 and trying to live there-- lots of vandalism, it's
10 a big spray paint graffiti area. So we installed
11 a motion sensitive flash camera, which gives
12 public announcements late at night after you're
13 not supposed to be in the park, for a two-month
14 pilot period. During the time we had zero
15 incidents of graffiti and vandalism, which enabled
16 us to deploy our staff to other locations. It
17 reduced vehicle emissions, it reduced supply costs
18 and paint costs and improved how the park looks to
19 neighbors. And because of its effectiveness, we
20 are now trying this technology at other high
21 problem areas. We're also going to continue to
22 monitor the issue of homeless people who try to
23 live in our parks at night. It's not a safe thing
24 to do. There's no facilities for overnight use.
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2 So we worked closely with the Department of
3 Homeless Services Outreach Units and the NYPD
4 Homeless Outreach Unit to ensure our parks remain
5 safe and that people receive the needed attention
6 and go to the safety of a shelter. We have
7 established a Parks Enforcement Patrol Nighthawk
8 Unit to address issues with homeless individuals
9 in encampments and also monitor curfew violators
10 in the parks, particularly during the cold weather
11 months where the low temperature and precipitation
12 make conditions dangerous to be outside, our units
13 check target sites and you can make sure that
14 individuals accept services, or else if we have to
15 we'll arrest them for their own safety. 2008 we
16 transported 264 homeless individuals to nearby
17 shelters. So switching from the nitty-gritty of
18 how we maintain quality of life in parks, let's go
19 to some of the vision, the visionary thinking as
20 we try to become more efficient and stay on top of
21 our quality of life concerns, we can't lose sight
22 of long-term priorities. We still plan to fulfill
23 our part of the Mayor's PlaNYC initiative. The
24 Mayor has pledged to ensure that all New Yorkers
25 live within a ten-minute walk of a park or

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2 playground by the year 2030, and they have more
3 and better places for active recreation. We're
4 also making the future of the City greener and
5 more sustainable, and part of that task involves
6 getting 1 million additional trees planted, an
7 initiative that we call Million Trees NYC.

8 Especially in this economy, we need to think about
9 investing in trees that will pay us back with many
10 long-term benefits, ranging from environmental
11 management to raising property values to slowing
12 down climate change. So as far as Million Trees
13 NYC, it's rare that I get to say this, but we are
14 ahead of schedule to plant an unprecedented 1
15 million trees in New York City by 2017. Our first
16 year planting goal was originally set at 93,397
17 trees. We've exceeded that goal by 17,714 trees.
18 Since Million Trees NYC was launched in October
19 2007, we have planted 173,229 trees. Bette
20 Midler, whom many of you know, was a key figure in
21 bringing this idea to New York and her New York
22 Restoration Project, a non-profit organization
23 founded in 1996 to reclaim green space in
24 underserved neighborhoods has been a terrific
25 partner in this effort. Now, I know you all knew

1 this off the top of your heads, but tomorrow is
2 the beginning of Million Trees Month. Right, it's
3 on your calendar. Right there. Well it is now.
4 At any rate, I would love to have you get
5 involved, and you can start by getting the word
6 out. We will be planting 20,000 trees in a single
7 day as part of New York Cares 50th Annual Hands-on
8 New York Day, that's Saturday, April 25th. There
9 will also be tree plantings, free tree giveaways
10 and stewardship events all month in many of your
11 districts and throughout the five boroughs. If
12 you'd like to join in and plant some trees or you
13 want to find out how your constituents can get
14 coupons for reduced price trees or maybe get free
15 trees, just let us know and we'd be happy to help
16 you with that. Trees don't plant themselves for
17 the most part-- well they do in the woods, but not
18 on streets. And they don't take care of
19 themselves, well they do somewhat. So after
20 Million Trees Month ends, we're going to continue
21 to conduct free tree stewardship seminars
22 throughout the summer, including in community
23 gardens across the City. New Yorkers will learn
24 about how to take care of all these new trees, but
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2 they will also help us relieve a part of the
3 maintenance burden by learning how to keep the
4 trees healthy. Tree stewardship programs are a
5 wonderful example of how a low cost investment
6 that will benefit New Yorkers financially,
7 environmentally in the long run can work. So you
8 and your constituents can always visit
9 www.milliontreesnyc.org for the latest news or
10 events or simply call 311 and we'd love for you to
11 get involved. We're moving forward on many other
12 parts of the Mayor's PlaNYC initiatives. This
13 year we'll expand our active recreational
14 opportunities by breaking ground on two long-
15 awaited major regional park projects, Ocean Breeze
16 Park in Staten Island and McCarran Pool in
17 Brooklyn. The construction of Staten Island's
18 Ocean Breeze Park will feature the City's premiere
19 indoor track and field facility, the largest of
20 its kind in New York City and one of the best in
21 the Northeast. And the McCarran Park Pool in
22 Brooklyn is a lesson for us not to give up on city
23 parks that are facing fiscal challenges.
24 Unfortunately the pool was closed in the 1980s due
25 to deteriorating conditions. They couldn't decide

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2 what to do at the time, so it sat closed for more
3 than 25 years. We despaired of ever getting the
4 money we needed to reopen it, but thanks to
5 PlaNYC, it will be rebuilt this summer as an
6 outdoor pool and as a year-round recreation
7 center. Another thing we have learned from the
8 fiscal crisis of the 1970s is that we should make
9 our best efforts to keep as many facilities open
10 as we can, and even to open new facilities in lean
11 times. We must work together to improve the
12 health and physical fitness for all New Yorkers.
13 New facilities help improve the community's
14 health. We fend off the dangers of diabetes and
15 other obesity related diseases, we lower
16 healthcare costs and provide opportunities for
17 gifted student athletes to achieve excellence. As
18 you know, we operate 37 recreation centers across
19 the five boroughs and we very recently opened the
20 new Al Oerter Recreation Center in Flushing
21 Meadows Corona Park, a truly state of the art
22 recreation facility as well as the nearby World
23 Ice Rink in the Flushing Meadows Corona Park
24 Natatorium and Ice Rink Building. These new
25 complexes are already drawing thousands of new

1 users in just the last three months. Over 15,000
2 registered users have signed up at Al Oerter, and
3 34,600 memberships purchased at the pool over the
4 past year. Now overall, and this is an astounding
5 figure, recreation center membership is up by 55%
6 citywide from the 2007 numbers. Let's talk about
7 water and the many ways that water features into
8 parks. It's an unfortunate fact that across the
9 country death by drowning is the second largest
10 cause of death for children and rates are even
11 higher in minority communities. Many of our
12 indoor and outdoor pools are located in minority
13 neighborhoods, and that gives us the means and
14 opportunity to help address swimming skills among
15 children across the city. Last year alone we
16 taught more than 10,000 people, many of them
17 children, to swim through our free Learn to Swim
18 program, and since 2005 we have also partnered
19 with the New York City Department of Education to
20 offer Swim to Safety, another free instructional
21 program for public school students. Based in our
22 Parks and Recreation Centers, this free program
23 helps children develops a level of comfort in the
24 water and teaches the essentials necessary to keep
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1 children safe from drowning. We are currently
2 seeking funding, whether through the City Council
3 or elsewhere, to create Advanced Swim, a new
4 program that would develop a cadre of strong youth
5 swimmers who can swim competitively through park
6 swim teams, and perhaps more important, train to
7 become a New York City Lifeguard and help save
8 lives. Any help you can provide to get this
9 program underway would be appreciated. Speaking
10 of lifeguards, as you know, we need lifeguards to
11 protect and defend our beaches and pools from
12 unsafe conditions and protect the people who use
13 them. Our goals are to keep our 14 mile of city
14 beach and 54 outdoor pools safe and open each and
15 every day from Memorial Day to Labor Day. Ideally
16 we'd like to hire 1,200 lifeguards to fully
17 operate pools and beaches, and we have been
18 recruiting more lifeguards in recent years. We
19 have set a record number of lifeguards in each of
20 the past three years, 1,016 in 2006, 1,092 in 2007
21 and 1,148 in 2008. I am pleased to report that as
22 of March 20th, 429 out of 1,034 eligible
23 candidates have passed the qualifying tests and
24 are either in training or scheduled to begin their
25

1 training soon. On the same date last year 330 of
2 842 candidates had past the test, so we're well
3 ahead in both categories. Typically 75% of
4 lifeguards from the previous year return, so we
5 hope to start with a base of around 850 returning
6 lifeguards. We're kind of optimistic that the
7 silver lining to this tough economy is that more
8 people will take advantage of this terrific, very
9 well paying summer job and that we will have a
10 strong recruiting year. Now we welcome your help
11 in telling your constituents who are looking for
12 employment about this opportunity. The enrollment
13 period will be coming to a close on Friday, so we
14 encourage interested candidates to take the
15 qualifying test as soon as possible so we can get
16 them trained for the summer. Beyond beaches and
17 pools we want to help bring people back to the
18 waterfronts. New York has a long and proud
19 history as one of the great harbor cities of the
20 world, especially this year, 400 years after Henry
21 Hudson sailed into the New York Bay, we have to
22 continue to transform our formerly industrial
23 waterfront and make it a green destination. We
24 can accomplish this by continuing to build great
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1
2 new waterfront parks and connect our 21st Century
3 greenway system. I notice with some pleasure that
4 there was funding providing in the stimulus money
5 for the further development of the Hunts Point
6 Greenway, South Bronx, and we've been working to
7 work with DOT to connect parks through greenways.
8 We could also do more with what we have and
9 develop innovative new strategies to bring people
10 to the waterfront. One of our substantive efforts
11 to reconnect the public with the City's waterfront
12 and with its water is our NYC Water Trail. With
13 28 locations and more in development for canoers
14 and kayakers to gain access to the water, this
15 project is a result of a team effort between our
16 Queens Borough Commissioner, Dottie Lewandowsky, a
17 non-profit organization called Going Coastal and
18 the Canoe and Kayak Communities in New York City.
19 Last March Commissioner Lewandowsky, a water
20 sports enthusiast, an accomplished kayaker, and
21 like me and Commissioner Jeffrey, a park ranger
22 who started 30 years ago this month or next month,
23 we developed a water trail map and guide
24 identifying where New Yorkers can legally canoe
25 and kayak. The Parks Website includes an

1
2 interactive map of the citywide water trail
3 system. Now, if any of the members of this
4 council or of this Committee have never kayaked or
5 canoed, you need to try it. So just let us know,
6 we'll be happy to take a group of Council Members
7 and staff out on the water, perhaps you can join
8 the great flotilla down the Bronx River. Did you
9 do that?

10 [Off Mic]

11 ADRIAN BENEPE: Oh, you haven't
12 done that yet?

13 [Off Mic]

14 ADRIAN BENEPE: This spring.
15 You're all invited and you can enjoy the
16 remarkable waterfront we have in this City. We
17 give you lifejackets, so it's okay. If you fall
18 in the water, the water is clean. Have you done
19 it?

20 [Off Mic]

21 ADRIAN BENEPE: Well listen, I
22 promise if you come you won't tip over. And if
23 you do, we'll be there to fish out any Council
24 Member who has committed capital expense funds.

25 [Laughter]

ADRIAN BENEPE: So, now in fact on Saturday May 16th, we'll be celebrating the reclamation of the waterfront on It's My Park Day, which is our semi-annual volunteer event in partnership with our significant citywide associate, the City Parks Foundation. We'll celebrate the day with shore cleanups, free paddling and rowing and other fun water-based activities at sites throughout the City. So I'm going to call on everyone here to come out to your neighborhood park and take the day to volunteer. Now, as I've mentioned, we live in an era of reduced expense budget, so we're going to be relying even more on the efforts of volunteers. Fortunately, New Yorkers really are singular in the world in their tremendous civic spirit. I have seen it. I know each of you have seen it as well. To that end, we have identified two parks in each borough that we've targeted for, quote, community developments. And we-- with an emphasis on community. We will encourage new friends groups, local businesses and institutions to get more involved in these neighborhood parks. With their support and yours we will develop programs

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2 and events in these locations that suit the
3 surrounding community's interests and capitalize
4 on local resources. We also have a great many fun
5 things to look forward to in 2009 and beyond. In
6 addition to the PlaNYC projects, we have many
7 projects in construction that will be opening this
8 year. For example, you'll be opening the first
9 sections of the High Line in Lower Manhattan, a
10 new section of the Harlem River Greenway in East
11 Harlem, and Concrete Plant Park, a crucial link in
12 the Bronx River Greenway in the South Bronx. Also
13 we're beginning work on a new recreation complex
14 in College Point Park in Queens, including ball
15 fields and sports lighting, reconstruction of the
16 Flushing Meadows Corona Park Boathouse and a new
17 gateway to Midland Beach in Staten Island. And,
18 as was announced yesterday, Parks received funding
19 for several key projects from the American
20 Recovery and Reinvestment Act, also known as
21 Stimulus, that will augment our municipal budget,
22 but most notably, we have been given an extra \$30
23 million in displaced funding to finally make long-
24 needed repairs to the boardwalks at Coney Island
25 and Rockaway Beaches. For a while we've had to

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2 make piecemeal repairs to the structurally unsound
3 areas of the boardwalks, and we had previously
4 committed some capital dollars ourselves through
5 the Mayor's budget, but now we'll be able to
6 repair entire sections using the most sustainable
7 materials. We've also received \$3.7 million in
8 funding for the trees and sidewalks program;
9 that's a very popular program that repairs
10 sidewalks that have been damaged by curbside
11 trees. The transportation stimulus package also
12 calls for the repair of several pedestrian bridges
13 connecting to parkland including the Wards Island
14 Pedestrian Bridge that crosses the Harlem River
15 from East Harlem, as well as construction of a
16 Greenway through Hunts Point and Port Morris in
17 the Bronx with a waterfront access at Hunts Point
18 Landing. So we want to make sure that parks are
19 host for people in tough times who want to go for
20 a walk or just relax. Parks are not only
21 backyards, but also just a subway ride away from
22 an adventure or a stay-cation, which are becoming
23 increasingly popular. We do anticipate a big
24 increase in visitation to our parks and to our
25 recreation facilities. City parks will always be

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2 there for New Yorkers and visitors who want to get
3 healthy, enjoy a respite or just maintain a good
4 quality of life. So I thank you very much for
5 your time and for your continuing support of our
6 parks system. I'd be happy to answer any
7 questions.

8 CHAIRPERSON FOSTER: Thank you
9 Commissioner. As you mentioned, we've been joined
10 by Council Member Sears, Council Member Gerson,
11 Council Member Brewer and Council Member Reyna.
12 I'm going to start with questions from Council
13 Member Sears, she has a hearing that she needs to
14 get back to.

15 COUNCIL MEMBER SEARS: Thank you
16 very much, Madam Chair. I'm sorry, but we have so
17 many Committee hearings, and the one thing is that
18 they're in this building, so we go from 14 to 16,
19 because the roof is falling down in City Hall
20 where we meet. Okay. I mentioned that. Now it's
21 good to see you, Commissioner, and I really thank
22 you for everything you do. I recognize the cuts
23 that are being made and certainly with the Chair
24 and I serving on the Committee on Budget
25 Negotiating, we're only too much aware of the cuts

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2 that need to be made. But I would be remiss if I
3 didn't say that at a time, and you're quite right,
4 that people are going to use the parks and the
5 playgrounds are going to be more overcrowded than
6 they will every have been, and certainly in my
7 district that is true, I'm going to urge you to
8 look at the PEP workers. Because I don't see how
9 in our playgrounds with probably multiplying the
10 use that we have of them and although I have to
11 make that point, although everybody knows that,
12 since we really don't have parks in my entire
13 district, we have overcrowded playgrounds, to the
14 point where as much as we put in and renovate
15 that, they constantly need that repair because
16 they're so overly used. I think it would be a
17 level field if I had to talk about the
18 overcrowding of the schools and the overcrowding
19 of the playgrounds. I think they're probably on a
20 par, so you know just how strong that is. So I
21 hope that of the 370 seasonal positions, I was
22 going to ask if you have any of that around the
23 PEP workers.

24 ADRIAN BENEPE: By PEP do you mean
25 the Park Enforcement Patrol, the people who--

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COUNCIL MEMBER SEARS:

[Interposing] Yes, yes.

ADRIAN BENEPE: --provide the law enforcement?

COUNCIL MEMBER SEARS: Yes.

ADRIAN BENEPE: They generally are year-round workers for the fully--

COUNCIL MEMBER SEARS:

[Interposing] They're seasonal-- I mean they're full-time?

ADRIAN BENEPE: --shielded. But we do hire some seasonal PEP officers--

COUNCIL MEMBER SEARS:

[Interposing] I know.

ADRIAN BENEPE: --who don't have the enforcement capability--

COUNCIL MEMBER SEARS:

[Interposing] Okay.

ADRIAN BENEPE: --but can provide. So we're going to continue to do some seasonal.

[Off Mic]

ADRIAN BENEPE: Right. So how many seasonals in total will we bring on?

[Off Mic]

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2 ADRIAN BENEPE: So we'll be
3 bringing on still over-- despite the cost we'll
4 bring in over 400 seasonal PEP officers and
5 trainees to augment the approximately 280 year-
6 round staff.

7 COUNCIL MEMBER SEARS: Do you see
8 any way of perhaps with the seasonal to making
9 them full-time? And I'm not being facetious by
10 that. I'm looking at--

11 ADRIAN BENEPE: [Interposing] Well
12 I think it will be hard to--

13 COUNCIL MEMBER SEARS: --what gets
14 used and sometimes we have to add as we're taking
15 away in order to equalize, to equalize the playing
16 field of cuts and what it means.

17 ADRIAN BENEPE: Yeah, I think
18 Commissioner Jeffery here, who like me started as
19 a Park Ranger 30 years ago next month, he has a
20 better handle on--

21 COUNCIL MEMBER SEARS:
22 [Interposing] Congratulations.

23 CHAIRPERSON FOSTER: You'll get in
24 trouble if you keep saying that 30 years ago.

25 ADRIAN BENEPE: Well we were both

1
2 ten years old.

3 CHAIRPERSON FOSTER: Because he
4 keeps looking at you-- okay.

5 COUNCIL MEMBER SEARS: Oh, he
6 smiled when you said that.

7 [Laughter]

8 KEVIN JEFFREY: We certainly
9 appreciate your question, Council Member Sears.
10 One of the things we do with the playgrounds is
11 during the summer we hire another 120 seasonals,
12 we call them playground associates. And their
13 main function is to do two things, one to do light
14 cleaning in the morning, and also to provide
15 programming. And fortunately that program is
16 completely intact. So we'll be doing that at 120
17 playground sites in addition to the enforcement
18 efforts. And we certainly can dedicate some of
19 the seasonal Park Enforcement Patrol Efforts to
20 the playgrounds.

21 COUNCIL MEMBER SEARS: Okay. And I
22 bring that up because those PEP Officers are very
23 critical. When you talk about animal waste,
24 etcetera, I can tell you it's just rampant and you
25 are quite right about that. And the enforcement,

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2 certainly in those very overcrowded playgrounds,
3 and there are many of them, is that-- and when I
4 sit here, you know, I'm not parochial because I
5 look at the City in its universe, so certainly
6 what affects my district has to affect some, but
7 not quite to the degree that it's affected when
8 you don't have a park in your district. That
9 cement is their greenery and that means that
10 everyone comes to that park and when they're not
11 taking vacations, when they are not traveling,
12 they are in that cement playground, and it can be
13 chaotic and that has got to be true throughout.
14 So what happens when you do make those cuts and
15 you don't add those PEP officers? It also becomes
16 health issue, and that's why I raise that. When
17 you are, even if you're outdoors, the fact is that
18 it becomes a health issue. So I'm combining both
19 of these things to recognize that we have to
20 seriously look at adding some of them so that we
21 also have a health issue that we can actually
22 protect, because the overcrowding, everything that
23 goes on in them, needles and everything else, is a
24 health hazard as well as being extremely
25 overcrowded. So I, you know, I thank the Chair

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2 for her patience, but I really have to bring that
3 up because I think that is so detrimental and I
4 urge you to really look at that.

5 ADRIAN BENEPE: I totally agree
6 with you here and I think what we'll do is we'll
7 work with Commissioner Jeffrey and we'll come up
8 with a model for using some of our seasonals in
9 sort of rapid response teams just to sort of go
10 around and address playground conditions in terms
11 of the quality of life issue. So when we hear
12 from constituents about there's a problem in the
13 evenings with people bringing out dogs or hanging
14 out where-- we'll create some teams in each
15 borough to just go out and address those perhaps
16 at the odd hours when the complaints are coming
17 in.

18 COUNCIL MEMBER SEARS: And--

19 ADRIAN BENEPE: [Interposing]
20 Luckily we have the flexibility to do something
21 like that.

22 COUNCIL MEMBER SEARS: To do
23 something like that. And one other question is
24 what is the lifespan of your trucks?

25 ADRIAN BENEPE: Well the average

1
2 age has been coming down because luckily we've had
3 a good influx of capital dollars for vehicle
4 purchases, so the average age had come way down.
5 It used to be well over ten years. It's now down
6 to about seven or eight years. But, yes, so seven
7 or eight years, which is not bad. We've been able
8 to make some significant purchases of vehicles.

9 COUNCIL MEMBER SEARS: So that's
10 ongoing is it--

11 ADRIAN BENEPE: [Interposing] It's
12 ongoing, yeah. We still have \$1 or \$2 million a
13 year just for buying vehicles.

14 COUNCIL MEMBER SEARS: So buying
15 them is ongoing.

16 ADRIAN BENEPE: Buying them is
17 ongoing, yes.

18 COUNCIL MEMBER SEARS: Okay.

19 ADRIAN BENEPE: Our fleet is
20 actually in the best condition it's ever been in
21 right now.

22 COUNCIL MEMBER SEARS: Oh, okay.
23 And one last thing, getting back to the dogs. And
24 if you can't stoop, you shouldn't have a dog. One
25 of the things I've notice and I would agree with

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2 that, except that many seniors, and it may sound
3 funny, but many seniors have dogs and you see many
4 elderly walking their dogs. And I swear if they
5 were to bend down they would never get up again.
6 So we must look at-- there was a time when there
7 were pooper-scoopers, and we would be able to
8 really give them to seniors. Is there any way
9 that the Parks Department could look at doing
10 that?

11 ADRIAN BENEPE: We'd be happy to
12 look into that. In fact I think we--

13 COUNCIL MEMBER SEARS:
14 [Interposing] Because that could be so helpful.

15 ADRIAN BENEPE: --were going buy--

16 COUNCIL MEMBER SEARS:
17 [Interposing] And maybe in the council...

18 ADRIAN BENEPE: We'll work with the
19 Health Department and Sanitation, see if we can't
20 do that. Maybe we can get a corporate sponsor to
21 stick their logo on it.

22 COUNCIL MEMBER SEARS: Right, that
23 would be okay.

24 ADRIAN BENEPE: For free.

25 [Laughter]

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2 COUNCIL MEMBER SEARS: I can tell
3 you, I think all of us would be able to identify--

4 ADRIAN BENEPE: [Interposing] I'm
5 sympathetic to people who have a hard time bending
6 down.

7 COUNCIL MEMBER SEARS: Well we
8 can't ignore the senior population.

9 ADRIAN BENEPE: No, we can't. Dogs
10 often provide able company.

11 COUNCIL MEMBER SEARS: Which is
12 their only companion.

13 ADRIAN BENEPE: You're right.

14 COUNCIL MEMBER SEARS: Thank you
15 very, very much.

16 ADRIAN BENEPE: You're very
17 welcome.

18 COUNCIL MEMBER SEARS: Thank you,
19 Madam Chair.

20 CHAIRPERSON FOSTER: Thank you. We
21 started a trend, so we'll keep going. We've got
22 Council Member Crowley, who also has to leave for
23 a Committee. She has questions.

24 COUNCIL MEMBER CROWLEY: Thank you,
25 Chair Foster. Good morning, afternoon,

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2 Commissioner. I'd first like to start by
3 complimenting you. I represent the areas of
4 Ridgewood, and a couple of other neighborhoods in
5 Queens including Glendale, Middle Village,
6 Richmond Hill. We have Forest Park, it's sort of
7 in the center of our district. And last night I
8 was at a Visionary Meeting for the future of the
9 Ridgewood Reservoir. So I compliment your efforts
10 on that regional park, and the Borough
11 Commissioner, Dottie Lewandowsky. There was
12 probably about 80 different people who came to
13 meet, and there was eight different tables, and
14 they had terrific ideas about the future, what
15 they thought should be included in the Ridgewood
16 Reservoir project.

17 ADRIAN BENEPE: Good.

18 COUNCIL MEMBER CROWLEY: And while-

19 -

20 ADRIAN BENEPE: [Interposing]

21 Dottie lives right there in Middle Village.

22 COUNCIL MEMBER CROWLEY: Dottie's
23 in my district. She's a few blocks from my
24 office, yes.

25 ADRIAN BENEPE: I think-- Therese,

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don't you live somewhere?

[Off Mic]

ADRIAN BENEPE: Cunningham Park.

COUNCIL MEMBER CROWLEY: Cunningham Park. While we're on the Ridgewood topic, the Ridgewood Property Owners have mapped out where they could place 3,000 trees. And there are many other areas throughout the district that I represent that we could put trees, you know, just along Woodhaven Boulevard or just neighborhood streets alone. I'm curious to know how for this effort on April 25th with the 20,000 trees, how many would be given to each area? Are there specific neighborhoods that will be getting more? How can I advocate and help you in that process with the million trees?

ADRIAN BENEPE: Okay. On the 25th those 20,000 trees are actually trees that are being planted in park landscapes for reforestation, so they're little trees that get planted so they're going to create new forests. The trees in Ridgewood, and it's a terrific association and they've done so much to get trees planted there, those would be street trees, so

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2 they'll be planted through our street tree
3 planting process. And the good news is that we
4 have been able to triple the number of street
5 trees that we plant each year thanks to PlaNYC and
6 the Million Trees Program. Fiona, would you like
7 to come up and give us some more specifics about
8 that? And congratulations on the landmarking of
9 Ridgewood. It's such a beautiful neighborhood and
10 the combination of the beautiful buildings and the
11 trees really work well. What are we doing, what's
12 our plan for street tree planting this year? This
13 is Fiona Watt, who is our Assistant Commissioner
14 for Forestry and Horticulture and Natural
15 Resources.

16 FIONA WATT: As the Commissioner
17 said, we're planting more street trees than ever
18 before this spring planting season has already
19 begun. We expect to plant over 10,000 trees
20 across all five boroughs. We have two targets to
21 our planting programs, one is greening entire
22 blocks, we call that Block Planting Program, and
23 another is responding to individual requests when
24 homeowners would like to see a tree planted in
25 front of their house after a tree has been removed

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2 or if they've never had a tree before. We are
3 focusing on our planting efforts in our Trees for
4 Public Health neighborhoods around the City.
5 These are neighborhoods with low tree canopy and
6 high asthma rates. But we're also, as I said,
7 planting thousands of trees because homeowners
8 have requested them. So many requests, in fact,
9 we have over 6,000 requests outstanding that we
10 can't meet at any one season. So urge anybody who
11 wants a tree call 311. We have a process set up
12 there to take their request, or go to the Million
13 Trees website or the Parks website and lodge their
14 request and then we go inspect immediately and put
15 it on our list to plant.

16 ADRIAN BENEPE: But the answer is,
17 we will fill up all of the streets with street
18 trees, so every single spot that's available in
19 Ridgewood, in Glendale, will get a tree. It will
20 not happen right away, because as the Commissioner
21 mentioned, there's 6,000 outstanding requests.
22 But it will happen, and probably fairly soon,
23 within the next two or three years. All of the
24 sort of new requests will get honored, because
25 we're actually looking for places to plant trees.

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2 So by the time the ten years is over, we will have
3 planted an additional 220,000 street trees on top
4 of the 600,000 we currently have. And we will
5 have filled up all the space.

6 CHAIRPERSON FOSTER: Thank you.
7 Council Member Brewer?

8 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Thank you
9 very much. I also always want to congratulate you
10 Castro and Simon and Everybody else who is in that
11 Department, that's the Manhattan folks.

12 COUNCIL MEMBER GERSON: For what?

13 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: For
14 everything, all day long. You can make your own
15 comments, Gerson. My question is the following:
16 when you gave a wonderful overview of the great
17 things that Parks is doing, but one of the
18 questions I have is the PEG for 09 and the other
19 one for 10, you're going to have fewer seasonals
20 and of course they'll have an impact, I think on
21 the parks, because all these great things don't
22 happen unless you have the staff to do it,
23 particularly on the horticulture and maintenance
24 issues. So how do you plan to do so much with
25 less staff, particularly seasonal workers?

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ADRIAN BENEPE: Council Member
Brewer, I think it will be a challenge and I think
we have-- as I mentioned before, we have some
tools that we didn't have during the last fiscal
crisis.

COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Like what?

ADRIAN BENEPE: During the 70s we
didn't have a very large Welfare to Work program
with 6,500 people coming through in a given year.
And they're truly motivated workers where they're
being paid to work for us. What is the salary now
for a J2B [phonetic]?

[Off Mic]

ADRIAN BENEPE: \$9.22 an hour,
which isn't bad; well above minimum wage. They're
terrific workers.

COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: They are.

ADRIAN BENEPE: And they are-- and
they have been sort of what's enabled us to
achieve such high levels of cleanliness and great
conditions of parks. In addition to providing
basic maintenance we have specialized teams now
through projects that we've done working with HRA.
We have specialized teams on building maintenance,

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2 specialized teams on horticulture, other trades.
3 We've got a green careers program, a pilot
4 program, aimed at a group known as disconnected
5 youth, that is young people who don't have jobs,
6 maybe haven't finished school.

7 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: How is that
8 funded?

9 ADRIAN BENEPE: That's being funded
10 by a combination of City money and grants. We
11 were lucky to get a very nice grant from the
12 Altman Foundation, and who else funded that, Sue?

13 [Off Mic]

14 ADRIAN BENEPE: The Dodge
15 Foundation.

16 [Off Mic]

17 ADRIAN BENEPE: The Mayor's Council
18 of Economic Opportunity provided that. So we have
19 about 30 young people who are working just
20 learning the green career skills, the planting,
21 the horticulture, installation and management of
22 green roofs and so on. We have special crews just
23 doing horticulture. Horticulture, as you know
24 Council Member Brewer, is one of my strong
25 interests. We have tripled the number of

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2 gardeners that we have working out in communities,
3 particularly in neighborhood parks to provide the
4 maintenance that flowers need. Landscapes really
5 don't take care of themselves. Some forests do,
6 but a manicured landscape doesn't. Between the
7 fulltime staff, the seasonal staff and the Welfare
8 to Work programs as well as volunteers, we have
9 wonderful volunteers, one of the problems in New
10 York is that people don't have backyards and they
11 don't have any place to exercise their green
12 thumbs. We make that easy for them to exercise
13 their green thumbs by doing it in parks. So we
14 have thousands of volunteers, many of whom are
15 doing horticultural work for us. That's another
16 lesson we learned in the fiscal crisis of the 70s,
17 that we can't do it alone, people need to be there
18 with us, and we have a much higher level of
19 citizen engagement in parks than they have in
20 other cities. So between the Welfare to Work
21 programs, the seasonal budget, which is still
22 intact, though somewhat cut, the volunteers and
23 then the wonderful non-profit groups like the
24 Riverside Park Fund or the Central Park
25 Conservancy or the Bronx River Alliance, they also

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2 bring additional resources. So given all that, I
3 think that we're unlikely to see any significant
4 impacts because there are so many people working.
5 We have almost 11,000 people working in parks over
6 the summer between all of those different
7 entities-- that if-- I frankly don't expect to see
8 major impacts from these cuts.

9 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: But I know
10 for instance in my neighborhood we're trying
11 everything we can, but due to cuts you have like
12 maybe three or four workers who are in charge of
13 two or three more parks. So if you have-- I'm
14 just thinking about the trash issue, because
15 people unfortunately have trash and then they
16 overflow and, you know, people are-- particularly
17 when you have some concrete parks and some
18 playgrounds, then your wonderful workers who are
19 from the WEP [phonetic] Program have to go from
20 park to park and they don't necessarily have
21 vehicles, so they have to walk and etcetera. So
22 I'm just saying this-- I do believe that the trash
23 increases without this influx of seasonal workers,
24 because they are more permanent, with all due
25 respect to the WEP workers.

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2 ADRIAN BENEPE: Well we certainly
3 hope that that's not the case.

4 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Well I
5 think it's a challenge.

6 ADRIAN BENEPE: I agree with you
7 it's a challenge, and we'll have to see. We
8 haven't hit the really warm weather yet. So far
9 we're keeping up, but it will be a challenge and
10 we're just going to do the best we can with what's
11 given to us.

12 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: What was
13 the total number of people whom you will not be
14 able to hire this summer, do you know offhand?

15 ADRIAN BENEPE: It's about 320, 370
16 fewer six-month seasonals, but that's against a
17 seasonal of about 3,000 or so.

18 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: So you will
19 have 3,000.

20 ADRIAN BENEPE: Oh yeah.

21 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: But you
22 won't have 370.

23 ADRIAN BENEPE: We'll have 3,000
24 and change minus the 300-- what's the high number
25 in seasonals?

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[Off Mic]

ADRIAN BENEPE: About 3,500. So instead of 3,500 we'll have about 3,100 or so. So it will be a diminishment, but again--

COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER:

[Interposing] Because unfortunately it's not just the parks, it's the parks in the NYCHA buildings, it's the parks next to the subways, it's the green streets, it's the trash, it's the blowing, it's the wind it's... I mean the seasonals are so important.

ADRIAN BENEPE: I share your concerns. I think we're going to be okay, but we really won't know until the summer is over and hopefully we'll be okay.

COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: The stimulus package, you mentioned a couple of projects. Those are capital. Are there any expense type projects either through competitive or formula that Parks Department gets from stimulus or you don't know yet?

ADRIAN BENEPE: We don't now yet. We're hoping for some workforce development--

COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER:

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[Interposing] That's what I was hoping for you.

ADRIAN BENEPE: Perhaps, and we're talking to HRA about that, and there is a possibility in there.

COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: So in other words, one of the issues that comes up at the HRA hearing is your wonderful workforce program, because it is the model. I know you have a great director who I've spoken with at several of the hearings, so do you think that more workers could be hired through stimulus project dollars?

ADRIAN BENEPE: Well certainly we're trying to do that, and the good thing is that there is--

COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER:
[Interposing] From the WEP program.

ADRIAN BENEPE: --we could take on 1,000 more staff easily. So to the extent that there's federal money for workforce development, and we also have the specialized training that we could do. So if people are looking for successful place for workforce development with a large and varied number of different careers that one can develop and with an infrastructure already in

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2 place, you know, talk about shovel ready, we're
3 administration ready to run a program like this.

4 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: And the
5 stimulus money also includes green jobs. I know
6 you mentioned 30 people whom you're hiring on your
7 own.

8 ADRIAN BENEPE: Right.

9 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: But how
10 does that fit into your projects?

11 ADRIAN BENEPE: What it means is
12 that we have model for doing green jobs training.
13 It's an existing model. It's been going on now
14 for about four months, I'd say. It's a seven-
15 month program. The first group will graduate and
16 we do have some funds-- we hope to have some
17 funding coming up through the federal government,
18 not through stimulus but through another package
19 from the Agriculture Department to keep those
20 people employed for another year or two. So it
21 will be another incremental program to expand our
22 workforce with trained staff coming from a
23 challenging environment who are really-- this is a
24 terrific program. I've met all the people in it
25 firsthand and they're just wonderful.

1
2 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: We just
3 need many more, because we have a lot of young
4 people who are in need.

5 ADRIAN BENEPE: We have the ability
6 to take on more things like this, so if you have
7 some ideas or are able to work with our friends in
8 Washington to get more workforce development money
9 to come here, we have--

10 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER:
11 [Interposing] I would hope that you would work
12 with NYCHA a little bit, because I would like to
13 see more stability, I think we all would. I know
14 Diana Reyna would and others in the NYCHA
15 developments. So as you're targeting young people
16 to participate, I would hope that you would focus
17 on NYCHA.

18 ADRIAN BENEPE: Okay, we'll do
19 that.

20 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Because
21 that stabilizes the apartments, NYCHA is a mess
22 financially and it would help in many different
23 levels.

24 ADRIAN BENEPE: Okay.

25 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: So I would

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say get NYCHA to support your efforts.

ADRIAN BENEPE: To refer people to us, okay.

COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: With some of the young people who need jobs.

ADRIAN BENEPE: We'll try to do that.

COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: That would be my suggestion. The issue of graffiti-- it's my experience that although there's an increase in graffiti going on in the City and that the Police Department, although wonderful officers, they haven't got a clue, most of the precincts, about what to do about graffiti. They're supposed to get the, you know, information from the developer, you know, get a waiver from the developer and then clean it off with the help of a truck or other methods. How actually do you work with the police department getting rid of graffiti, or is it all just based on your workers? I know you mentioned it, but I don't find the police department, this is not their forte.

ADRIAN BENEPE: It tends to go a little bit precinct-by-precinct. We do work with

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the Citywide Graffiti Task Force. And it's--

COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER:

[Interposing] but what do they do?

ADRIAN BENEPE: They will target areas where we know that we have big outbreaks of vandalism and they'll go in and actually do undercover arrests.

COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Okay.

ADRIAN BENEPE: And--

COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER:

[Interposing] But they don't actually clean it, so you actually have to--

ADRIAN BENEPE: [Interposing] No, the cleaning, we do all the cleaning except-- on parks properties. On adjacent properties the Mayor's Community Assistance Unit has at least one or maybe more graffiti trucks and they will go and clean--

COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER:

[Interposing] Don't get into that one.

ADRIAN BENEPE: Okay.

COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: It's slow in the coming around, that truck. All right, so mostly you have to do it with undercover

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assistance in terms of arrest if necessary.

ADRIAN BENEPE: Yes.

COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Okay. In terms of my favorite issue, which is technology in the parks, have you given it over to-- I know you didn't mention that one.

ADRIAN BENEPE: Right.

COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Did you give that over to DoITT? Are they supposed to get us hot spots in the parks? Is that their job now?

ADRIAN BENEPE: DoITT will be looking at the entire sort of spectrum of WiFi in terms of how to do it in the City, if there's going to be future RFPs, it will be under the auspices of DoITT.

COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Okay. Because have you realized now that you're not going to make any money on WiFi and it's just a good thing to have a public service?

ADRIAN BENEPE: I guess we did it and it's done; it didn't work out. We tried the non-profit model, for-profit model. It has worked out in some cases where small providers--

COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER:

1 [Interposing] Where NYC Wireless is involved.
2 Those are the people who know.
3

4 ADRIAN BENEPE: Or other groups,
5 some of the BIDs have provided it in some parks.
6 So where there's been a sort of small local-based
7 application it's worked. And it didn't work, you
8 know, with the other sort of larger for-profit
9 model.

10 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: And finally
11 just in terms of 59th Street, can you give me an
12 update, and also the rotunda, is that something
13 that could be on a stimulus package list at some
14 point? That is a very expensive project at 79th
15 Street and Riverside-- Westside Highway.

16 ADRIAN BENEPE: On the 59th Street
17 Project, Jonna Carmona-Graf, do you know where we
18 are, or Mr. Castro?

19 [Off Mic]

20 ADRIAN BENEPE: The contract is
21 awaiting registration in the Controller's Office.
22 And if all goes well, usually it's registered
23 within 30 days and we'll start construction this
24 summer.

25 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Okay. Now

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2 I know the stimulus package does not include money
3 for swimming pools. Somebody put that in there.
4 But if in fact-- is there any other funding for
5 our outdoor pool, even though you don't want to do
6 the outdoor pool?

7 ADRIAN BENEPE: There's-- I'd love
8 to do an indoor pool.

9 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: I know, but
10 outdoor, indoor pool, something.

11 ADRIAN BENEPE: Okay.

12 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: I know that
13 it's not in the plans now, but is there any--

14 ADRIAN BENEPE: [Interposing] Well
15 we'd love to try to get some funding.

16 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: I saw
17 something about Carran [phonetic] park, or some
18 place?

19 ADRIAN BENEPE: McCarran Park.

20 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: That's in
21 her area.

22 ADRIAN BENEPE: Yeah.

23 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: But I want--
24 - why can she get one and I can't? I'm just
25 saying, put it on your list somewhere.

ADRIAN BENEPE: I'll put it on the list.

COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Okay.

ADRIAN BENEPE: I would say this, Manhattan has disproportionately more pools than the other boroughs.

COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Not in my area.

ADRIAN BENEPE: Not in your area. Okay.

COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: All right--

ADRIAN BENEPE: [Interposing] We'll work on it.

COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: The rotunda, what's the story with the rotunda? It's a very expensive project.

ADRIAN BENEPE: It is a very expensive project. I'm concerned about its physical condition. It's more than 70 years old. It needs a lot of investment. The last I heard, and maybe somebody knows, Congressman Nadler was looking to get some federal funding back into it. There is some funding in the out years for configuration of highway ramps that feed in.

1
2 Anybody have...? So we're trying to assemble
3 additional funding to do it. As you know, it's
4 very important as a maintenance yard for the
5 Riverside Park forces.

6 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Okay. All
7 right. Thank you, Madam Chair.

8 CHAIRPERSON FOSTER: Thank you.
9 Council Member Gerson?

10 COUNCIL MEMBER GERSON: Thank you
11 Madam Chair, Commissioner and I of course want to
12 join in the notes of gratitude and praise for the
13 Manhattan Division headed up by Commissioners
14 Castro and Simon.

15 ADRIAN BENEPE: Congratulations on
16 the promotion.

17 COUNCIL MEMBER GERSON: I figured
18 he deserved that. And the entire Parks team.
19 Madam Chair and Commissioner, I have a little bit
20 of a surprise. I am not going to ask questions
21 about one of my favorite projects, a certain
22 bathhouse on the Lower East Side, because-- I hope
23 I don't disappoint anyone, of course if I'm goaded
24 into it I'll-- and the reason is I believe and I
25 feel confident that progress is now underway. And

1
2 I know Commissioner, you and your team have been a
3 part of that progress, so I'll just acknowledge
4 that. You know, thank you for that, and I look
5 forward to the grand announcement of a multi-year
6 plan to restore the bathhouse with Council Member
7 Brewer's swimming pool. But I do look forward,
8 and I wanted to acknowledge that work is underway
9 from all the relevant agencies, and you've been in
10 the league with them, and thank you very much.
11 But I do have plenty of other questions on other
12 issues. Why don't we start with one of my other
13 favorites, Washington Square Parks. And your
14 absolutely first of all right, Phase I looks like
15 it's coming together wonderfully. It looks
16 beautiful. Do we have any sense as to when we're
17 going to have the grand opening of Phase I of
18 Washington Square Park?

19 ADRIAN BENEPE: I think we're
20 looking for sometime in May, is that right
21 Commissioner? Sometime in May. We need the lawns
22 to grow in so that they're healthy enough for
23 people to cavort on and lie on. And they're--

24 COUNCIL MEMBER GERSON:

25 [Interposing] We know how to cavort in Washington

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Square Park.

ADRIAN BENEPE: Yes, you do.

COUNCIL MEMBER GERSON: And-- well that's great. That will be a nice May opening.

ADRIAN BENEPE: It looks beautiful and people are--

COUNCIL MEMBER GERSON:
[Interposing] It does look beautiful.

ADRIAN BENEPE: People are sort of-- can't wait to get into the park. We can't wait to let them in. As soon as the lawns are strong enough to sustain use.

COUNCIL MEMBER GERSON: I happened to be on one of the upper levels of Kimball Hall of NYU right across the street and I got an aerial view of it and it really does look like it's coming great. And then of course we look forward to a seamless transition of Phase II. I know we're in the middle of a landmarks process. All we have to do is restore a couple, not even all, but at least some of the alcoves so seniors and others can have small, intimate seating areas, which the community and the community board have made clear they desire, and then we can move

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forward.

ADRIAN BENEPE: Well we await with eager anticipation the advice of the Landmarks Commission and we'll move on.

COUNCIL MEMBER GERSON: Well I know the Landmarks Commission and the community would welcome additional, you know, input from the Department in terms of identifying ways consistent with the overall theme and approach of the redesign where we can or how we can restore some of those, you know, intimate seating areas on the periphery of the park for those who, you know, especially seniors, especially others who cannot make their way or do not want to make their way to the hustle and bustle of the center of the park, but they want to enjoy small, social, intimately social chit chats and seating areas. I just implore you, you know, we've come such a long way in this park through the ongoing dialogues. You and your department have been, you know, tremendously responsive, and this is like one final detail. If we could just find a way to come up with a win-win-win situation, we'll have a perfect park. And I strongly-- I mean I feel

1
2 compelled because this process, Madam Chair, is
3 happening as we speak. And I feel that I must
4 implore you to work with us and find a way to
5 accommodate that need.

6 ADRIAN BENEPE: Duly noted and
7 we've been working with you throughout this whole
8 process.

9 COUNCIL MEMBER GERSON: Yes, you
10 have.

11 ADRIAN BENEPE: So we'll all be
12 tremendously relieved when the first part of the
13 park finally opens so we can start constructing
14 the second part.

15 COUNCIL MEMBER GERSON: And by the
16 way, I understand the contract registration
17 deadline for Phase II to stay on schedule is June
18 30th, is that correct?

19 ADRIAN BENEPE: Does that sound
20 right? That sounds right. They're all nodding.

21 COUNCIL MEMBER GERSON: So there's
22 no reason why we're not going to be able to meet
23 that deadline?

24 ADRIAN BENEPE: Should be okay.
25 Sometimes things get held up in various places.

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2 The comptroller's office might hold up a
3 registration, but this has gone on fairly smoothly
4 so far, so we expect it to move along.

5 COUNCIL MEMBER GERSON: And the
6 funding remains in place for everything?

7 ADRIAN BENEPE: Funding remains in
8 place, yes.

9 COUNCIL MEMBER GERSON: Okay. For
10 the entirety of Phase II?

11 ADRIAN BENEPE: And Phase III, I
12 believe, the comfort station, which is desperately
13 needed.

14 COUNCIL MEMBER GERSON: Absolutely,
15 absolutely.

16 ADRIAN BENEPE: So everything's
17 still intact.

18 COUNCIL MEMBER GERSON: Okay. And
19 certainly we have done-- we'll continue to do our
20 part on the Council.

21 ADRIAN BENEPE: Wonderful, thank
22 you.

23 COUNCIL MEMBER GERSON: And
24 especially if we have a couple of alcoves. The
25 Allen Street Malls, you talked about the opening

1
2 of the waterfront. You know that's going to be a
3 Lower East Side avenue, the Immigrants' Champs-
4 Elysées, from Houston Street leading into the
5 river. I'm telling you I'm frequently by the one
6 mall which is done, it's used, it's used
7 appropriately, it's appreciated by the community.
8 When we get the entire strip done, it will really-
9 - it adds to not only the community but the entire
10 City experience leading into the waterfront.
11 Where do we stand on funding for the remaining
12 malls?

13 ADRIAN BENEPE: We'll ask
14 Commissioner Castro, who is the sole line in so
15 many ways to come up. But I do know we are-- the
16 news is that we've been working with DOT to have
17 an eve more ambitious plan for Allen Street and
18 Pike Streets to have not just the malls but
19 adjacent bicycle paths and really make it as you
20 say, like a grand Paris boulevard. So
21 Commissioner?

22 COUNCIL MEMBER GERSON: You know,
23 DOT raises all sorts of issues. If we could get
24 the malls done, that would be such a significant...

25 WILLIAM T. CASTRO: Well thanks to

1
2 you, you've put in half a million dollars to
3 continue--

4 COUNCIL MEMBER GERSON:

5 [Interposing] And we may put in some more.

6 WILLIAM T. CASTRO: We're hoping
7 that you will. We've met with the Borough
8 President on our needs. We'll be meeting with you
9 shortly. The \$5 million that we have, \$5.5
10 million with your money for the Allen Street malls
11 we need an additional amount of about \$4 million
12 and then we should be able to get it done. So we
13 hope that with the conclusion of the budget in
14 this upcoming budget that we will be very close to
15 completing all of them or just 90%, 85% of them.
16 And then the work will begin in '10, 2010.

17 COUNCIL MEMBER GERSON: So when we
18 refer to all of them we're referring to the
19 entirety, not just to--

20 WILLIAM T. CASTRO: [Interposing]
21 From Houston all the way down to the river.

22 COUNCIL MEMBER GERSON: Terrific.
23 And this is certainly shovel ready work, which
24 could qualify for funding from the stimulus.

25 ADRIAN BENEPE: It could and

1
2 perhaps we can, in the next round of stimulus
3 funding, we can see what we can do there.

4 COUNCIL MEMBER GERSON: Okay, as
5 long as the Borough Commissioner is present, the
6 prospects of an ice skating ring in Roosevelt
7 Park, that's something we'll discuss. We've
8 talked about it. We've identified the perfect
9 location. I know you're an avid promoter of ice
10 skating rinks, Commissioner, throughout the City.
11 It certainly would be welcome in that area. This
12 past winter when I walked by one of the underused
13 concrete areas, it was naturally frozen over with
14 a layer of ice from rainwater and it just was like
15 the perfect place for a rink; so I hope that's
16 something we could discuss as we go forward.

17 WILLIAM T. CASTRO: Sure.

18 COUNCIL MEMBER GERSON: And finally
19 on the local capital list, which will have an
20 impact beyond Petrosino Park and the expanded
21 version, will the expansion of the park to the
22 Spring Street crosswalk, will that in any
23 significant way delay the timetable?

24 WILLIAM T. CASTRO: No. It will be
25 open in June, we believe, sometime in June.

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COUNCIL MEMBER GERSON: Now actually that was the park which I had just left this morning and I-- my understanding is that the plan is to expand it so it overlaps or meets the crosswalk on Spring Street, for safety reasons.

WILLIAM T. CASTRO: Right.

COUNCIL MEMBER GERSON: Okay. Now I haven't seen the construction area expanded yet, so is that coming?

WILLIAM T. CASTRO: That's coming.

COUNCIL MEMBER GERSON: Okay.

WILLIAM T. CASTRO: And they've expanded it, as you know, to Lafayette--

COUNCIL MEMBER GERSON:
[Interposing] Right.

WILLIAM T. CASTRO: --and just as you said to lengthen it to the crosswalk at Spring.

COUNCIL MEMBER GERSON: So we're still going to do that?

WILLIAM T. CASTRO: Yes.

COUNCIL MEMBER GERSON: Okay, thank you. Commissioner, swimming-- I'm glad you raised swimming. As a former lifeguard and swim

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2 instructor, I'm sharing the concern about swimming
3 with Helen Foster. We've talked about this in the
4 past and I appreciate that you've identified the
5 importance of swimming from a safety standpoint
6 and swimming from a health standpoint. Is it
7 possible for you and Chancellor Klein or your
8 deputies to sit in the same room and perhaps with
9 our Chair Helen Foster and other, you know,
10 members of the swimming caucus of the Council or
11 not-- and just to once and for all map out a
12 coordinated plan to kind of synergistically use
13 the two resources? You know the Department of
14 Education has swimming pools in need of rehab.
15 They have swimming teachers and coaches which
16 could be, you know, those skills could be applied
17 in Parks areas. Parks has folks who could work in
18 City swimming pools. As one example, I know, you
19 know, my colleague Council Member Dilan has an
20 example in his district and there are others. We
21 have the Seward Park High School, which has a
22 swimming pool which needs repair, which could be a
23 wonderful community resource. Can't we get
24 together and then somehow develop a plan so that
25 by the time every child graduates high school in

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2 this city in the public school system, they have
3 had the opportunity to learn how to swim as part
4 of the physical education curriculum? Could we
5 make that a goal and could we--

6 ADRIAN BENEPE: [Interposing] We'd
7 be happy to if you want to take the lead on that.
8 We'd be happy to participate. We do have some
9 models in place as you know, or you may know. We
10 have worked with Chancellor Klein and with his
11 wonderful staff. We do have a model in place
12 where the Department of Education is paying for
13 children to come to our pools during the middle of
14 the day and at the Rec Centers, when they're not
15 heavily in demand. And we are doing what we call
16 the Swim Safety Program, which was on to 8,000
17 kids a year.

18 [Off Mic]

19 ADRIAN BENEPE: Okay, between 4,000
20 and 5,000 kids a year coming in the middle of the
21 day from their neighborhood schools to our pools.
22 That's in addition to the free Learn to Swim we do
23 in the summer and year round at the pools and the
24 swim teams that we have. I'd say we probably do
25 15 to 20,000 kids a year. 20,000 kids a year

1
2 learn to swim at our pools through those programs.
3 Could we build on that model? Yes we could. I
4 think it's a question-- unfortunately I think it
5 boils down to a question of funding. What are all
6 of the other priorities? It also probably boils
7 down to how much instructional time is there in a
8 given day. Can the students spend that much time,
9 you know, walking or taking a bus to a nearby
10 pool. But the answer is, I think the short answer
11 is, I would be happy to sit down with you, with
12 people from the non-profit community. Kevin used
13 to work at the YMCA and he ran a Y. Between the
14 colleges, the universities, the non-profit
15 organizations, the Board of Ed and the Parks
16 pools, we could in fact-- we do have the space to
17 teach all the kids how to swim. It's a matter of
18 pulling it all together, coordinating it and at
19 the end of the day paying for it.

20 COUNCIL MEMBER GERSON: Couldn't
21 have said it better. So let's do it. And we
22 have, by the way, in our--

23 ADRIAN BENEPE: [Interposing] We're
24 there.

25 COUNCIL MEMBER GERSON: Okay. So

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2 I'll--

3 ADRIAN BENEPE: [Interposing] If
4 you set up the meeting, we're there.

5 COUNCIL MEMBER GERSON: Okay,
6 that's great. You gave me that idea listening to
7 your testimony about the use of the different work
8 training programs. You know, and we have, and
9 here's my question, we have throughout our
10 district a wonderful program under the auspices of
11 ACE, A-C-E, I think it's the Agency for Community
12 Empowerment or something like that. I use the
13 acronym so much I forget what it stands for, but
14 it's the different community partnership
15 organizations where they take individuals, adults,
16 who are homeless and lacking jobs and they give
17 them job training in conjunction with community
18 service. You see them, you know, keeping our
19 sidewalks clean in SoHo and TriBeCa, moving into
20 NoHo and Little Italy-- it's the partnership
21 programs. And they do a great job in the
22 community and the program has them working in the
23 community and then attending job-training
24 programs. Could we-- is there someone in your
25 department, I mean it seems to me it's just

1
2 logical, again, without displacing any other
3 employees, which I would oppose and I think we all
4 would, but where there is a need that is not being
5 met by the current workforce, couldn't a core--
6 could we get together, the Department, ACE, the
7 community and see if there's a way their work
8 could be expanded into neighborhood parks?

9 ADRIAN BENEPE: Absolutely.

10 COUNCIL MEMBER GERSON: Okay. They
11 would benefit from the training and the parks
12 would benefit from the upkeep.

13 ADRIAN BENEPE: Just give us a
14 call, the person, and we'll coordinate. This is
15 Bob Garafola, who runs our-- the nation's finest
16 job training Welfare to Work program, job
17 readiness program. So we'll just-- get together a
18 meeting, we'll be there.

19 COUNCIL MEMBER GERSON: Okay.
20 Thank you very much. Thank you, Madam Chair and I
21 look forward to the bathhouse announcement.

22 CHAIRPERSON FOSTER: Thank you very
23 much. Council Member Reyna?

24 COUNCIL MEMBER REYNA: Thank you,
25 Madam Chair. I just wanted to ask the

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2 Commissioner if the projects listed for PlaNYC
3 2030, the Dreir Park, Offerman Park, Fort
4 Washington Park, Highland Park, McCarran Park,
5 more specific, Ocean Breeze Park, Soundview Park,
6 the Highbridge, Rockaway Park and school yards to
7 playgrounds-- are they projects that are-- who's
8 status are still in the work for completion, its
9 original date of completion?

10 ADRIAN BENEPE: All of them are on
11 schedule. All of them will be projects. As with
12 a lot of our capital program we're in the midst
13 right now of figuring out how to meet-- as you
14 know almost all of the agencies have been asked to
15 take a 30% cut in their capital budgets. It's our
16 intention to keep funding in each of these
17 projects, but all projects across the City may
18 face some tightening of the budget. But as of
19 right now all projects are moving forward. Some
20 of them will go into construction this year,
21 McCarran Pool will go into construction this
22 summer. Ocean Breeze we expect to go into
23 construction this summer. The project at Calvert
24 Vaux Park is already in construction and we're in
25 community consultation and advanced design on

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virtually all the projects.

COUNCIL MEMBER REYNA: Thank you, Commissioner. And as far as McCarran Park, I was hoping you'd remind Council Member Gale Brewer this was shut down during the fiscal crisis or after the fiscal crisis, so that we're getting it back after 30 years of non-use and this is the only pool in all of North Brooklyn.

COUNCIL MEMBER GERSON: It's just like the bathhouse.

[Laughter]

COUNCIL MEMBER REYNA: I just wanted to make sure that, for the record, we've been waiting a long time to see this happen, and I just wanted to thank you for all the work that you've put into making and securing that no delays--

ADRIAN BENEPE: [Interposing] As funding allows, I'd like to restore all the pools and then build some more.

COUNCIL MEMBER REYNA: Absolutely, absolutely.

ADRIAN BENEPE: I think it's important to have swimming pools.

1
2 COUNCIL MEMBER REYNA: And as far
3 as the schoolyards to playgrounds, there are
4 several schools that have been sited through
5 partnerships. Are the partners still on board
6 with their fiscal commitments?

7 ADRIAN BENEPE: Sue, do you want to
8 come up? You may be thinking of the Trust for
9 Public Land, which is a primary partner--

10 COUNCIL MEMBER REYNA:
11 [Interposing] Specifically.

12 ADRIAN BENEPE: And Sue Donoghue is
13 our Assistant Commissioner for PlaNYC and she may
14 have some more insights. Sue?

15 SUE DONOGHUE: Thank you. The
16 schoolyards to playgrounds initiative is rapidly
17 moving forward. We have 13 sites in construction
18 right now. The one partner that we're working
19 directly with, as the Commissioner stated, is the
20 Trust for Public Land. They're actually
21 construction 14 of the Schoolyards to Playgrounds
22 for us.

23 COUNCIL MEMBER REYNA: Aside from
24 the 13 you just mentioned before?

25 SUE DONOGHUE: Yes. Exactly. So

1
2 yes, they are still moving forward on their
3 proposed plans and we are working in conjunction
4 with them on this project. So they are the
5 primary partner that's working with us both on the
6 community outreach and design of these playgrounds
7 and also on active construction on 14 sites, and
8 yes, that is moving forward.

9 COUNCIL MEMBER REYNA: And as far
10 as the design as far as Trust for Public Land is
11 concerned, there's specific schools that have been
12 sited in my district, but I haven't heard any
13 follow up. And I've called to find out. It seems
14 to have evaporated as far as any updates are
15 concerned.

16 SUE DONOGHUE: So did you actually
17 engage in this-- the process of converting the
18 schoolyard to the playground is a three-stage
19 process. We hold three meetings with the school,
20 with the students and then with the larger
21 community where we actually design the schoolyard
22 in conjunction with the school--

23 COUNCIL MEMBER REYNA:
24 [Interposing] I'm very well aware, because I've
25 participated in the past for others in my

1
2 district. I just want to find out-- that was the
3 reason why I wanted to find out if it was on
4 schedule.

5 ADRIAN BENEPE: We'll find out
6 exactly what's going on and get back to you.

7 COUNCIL MEMBER REYNA: I would
8 appreciate that.

9 ADRIAN BENEPE: Because we don't
10 have the answer right now.

11 COUNCIL MEMBER REYNA: Thank you.
12 Thank you. And the issue of any stimulus funding,
13 in particular to projects that have been sited,
14 has that-- how much stimulus money is the Parks
15 Department going to be applying?

16 ADRIAN BENEPE: Well we have
17 provided ideas for many kinds of stimulus funding.
18 The only ones that have worked so far, and you
19 know there are some very tight restrictions placed
20 on them by consent of congress--

21 COUNCIL MEMBER REYNA:
22 [Interposing] Right.

23 ADRIAN BENEPE: And they've really,
24 you know, really put a dagger in my heart when
25 they specifically said, not for parks, which is

1
2 really terrible when they said that, but what can
3 you do? But they do say transportation, so we've
4 been able to get some transportation money. And
5 really right now it's the \$30 million for
6 restoring the boardwalks and \$3 million-- \$3.2
7 million for trees and sidewalks. We're hoping for
8 some workforce development money. But, you know,
9 there are some visionary ideas that are
10 transportation related. And I know the idea of
11 covering over the BQE for example, to me--

12 COUNCIL MEMBER REYNA:

13 [Interposing] I'm so glad you mentioned that.

14 ADRIAN BENEPE: --would be a
15 wonderful use, and building parks would be a
16 wonderful use of stimulus funding. And it's such
17 a big, hefty project unlikely to be done with City
18 funds alone. But even just a pilot project, you
19 know, getting a study completed through stimulus
20 would be a great idea.

21 COUNCIL MEMBER REYNA: Absolutely.

22 I appreciate you reminding me of that project. I
23 want to be very supportive, as much as I can, to
24 help us prioritize that as a project. And I was
25 interested in understanding the federal stimulus

1
2 money that has been applied to perhaps not parks
3 necessarily, but transportation that can assist
4 Parks Department and its capital budget. Was it--
5 were they projects that had already been in the
6 pipeline?

7 ADRIAN BENEPE: In some cases they
8 had been in the pipeline but not funded. They
9 were projects we wanted to do; for example, we had
10 pedestrian bridges that cross over parkways to
11 allow people to get into parks. So some of those
12 are moving forward much faster now because the
13 funding wasn't completely there. The funding for
14 the South Bronx Greenway at this point, that also
15 wasn't ready to move ahead just yet.

16 COUNCIL MEMBER REYNA: So they were
17 pushed into the out years.

18 ADRIAN BENEPE: Yeah, so they were
19 able to move those up further, and also that means
20 some money can be saved for doing other projects.

21 COUNCIL MEMBER REYNA: And that's
22 what I wanted to focus on. You know, how did the
23 federal stimulus money allow you to free up some
24 City levy dollars?

25 ADRIAN BENEPE: See there's where

1
2 I'm out of my depth because it's largely through
3 transportation and I'm Parks Department. So we
4 can try to find out and get back to you on that.

5 COUNCIL MEMBER REYNA: Fabulous.

6 Thank you very much. Thank you, Madam Chair.

7 CHAIRPERSON FOSTER: Thank you.

8 That was going to be my line of questioning. But
9 it's good to know, if you can get back to the
10 Committee on how it will free up money. I just
11 have a few questions. I know that while I wasn't--
12 - while I don't remember firsthand how the parks
13 were in the 70s-- I do, I have heard stories. And
14 I'm concerned that we know that this fiscal crisis
15 is real and that many times in looking at budget
16 items we pin one thing against another, meaning
17 we'll say oh, we need this money for social
18 services or hospitals and I just don't think it's
19 fair because if I had to choose between obviously
20 keeping a hospital open and putting money to a
21 park, you don't always want to do that. So my
22 concern though is, how realistically are we going
23 to be able to maintain what we have been able to
24 do in the parks and the level of spreading the
25 wealth in terms of parks? How are we going to be

1
2 able to maintain that, given these cuts? Because
3 as you've said, you're going to have more and more
4 people staying home. For a district line mine,
5 you know, we were kind of in a fiscal crisis
6 beforehand, so we stayed home anyway. But the
7 parks are heavily utilized. And so I'm just
8 concerned on our ability realistically to maintain
9 the level of cleanliness, the level of, you know,
10 user friendliness, all that.

11 ADRIAN BENEPE: I share your
12 concerns. I think we're going to be challenged.
13 There are some pieces of good news though.
14 Contained within the state budget, which was
15 agreed upon just in the last few days is the so-
16 called Bigger, Better Bottle Bill. Now one of the
17 biggest sources of litter that we've had to pick
18 up over the last years has been water containers.
19 When you go-- it's amazing to me. You go to a
20 ball game at some field some place, I was at
21 Flushing Meadows Corona Park over the last
22 weekend, and there was a garbage can over here and
23 just on the ground to the right there were several
24 dozen water bottles just on the ground. And that
25 won't be the case anymore, because those bottles

1
2 are all going to be worth a nickel. We won't find
3 water bottles on the ground in parks anymore. And
4 that will free up-- now it's not going to happen
5 right away, but that will free up our staff who
6 spend hours raking up and picking up plastic
7 bottles and other soda cans. So I think if you
8 have a deposit on every single bottle that you buy
9 in the store, that will probably reduce by 30% the
10 litter we pick up, by 30%. That means-- that's
11 like having 30% more workers to clean parks. So
12 that's a big deal, and that's-- people who are
13 complaining about that extra nickel should think
14 about the fact that that will mean infinitely
15 cleaner roads and highways and public spaces. In
16 terms of how we're going to do this, you know, we
17 are just a smarter, better, more effective machine
18 than we were 30 years ago in the 1970s. There was
19 absolutely no technology. People didn't have the
20 ability for a supervisor to get on a Nextel and
21 call immediately and say, you know, I'm in this
22 park, you need to bring a packer over because a
23 garbage can's overflowing, or you know the
24 manager-- we have much better communication. We
25 also have, frankly, a bigger workforce than we had

1
2 then. We have, thanks to the job training
3 programs, we have literally in the summer
4 thousands of extra staff that we didn't have
5 before. With a better fleet that's more
6 dependable, we can move staff around more quickly.
7 We have the vehicles that we need to move staff
8 around. So we-- and we have, what we also didn't
9 have in the 70s was some of our major parks are
10 largely funded through private donations, which
11 enables us to take the City funded staff and put
12 them in parks that don't have wealthy and generous
13 neighbors who are willing to pay for the upkeep of
14 that park. So the people who aren't needed to
15 clean Central Park are instead in parks in the
16 Bronx or Queens cleaning neighborhood parks that
17 are depending on solely City services. The other
18 thing that we have that we didn't have in the
19 1970s is an extraordinarily detailed and efficient
20 park inspection program where we are out
21 inspecting parks, our park inspectors, the park
22 supervisors, the crew chiefs, in a very methodical
23 way based on a very solid criteria. And if that
24 park isn't clean, if there's graffiti, if there's
25 broken glass, if there's a swing where the S hook

1
2 is worn down, that's got to-- that's noticed, it's
3 repaired. There's a way to hold accountable the
4 park staff and to measure, to quantitatively
5 measure the park experience that did not exist in
6 the slightest in the 1970s. In the 1970s we were
7 doing everything by guess and by golly, and it's,
8 you know, old chewing gum. We didn't have systems
9 in place. We have much better systems in place,
10 which is why I feel not foolishly confident, but
11 if-- sort of maybe courageously confident we'll be
12 able to do this. We have things in play. We
13 didn't have an army of 55,000 registered
14 volunteers with a staff of people, a full-time
15 staff of people in the partnership program who's
16 sole job it is to work with and engage volunteers.
17 And we'll do a lot more with public relations by
18 reminding people, if you brought it in, bring it
19 out. You know, don't leave your litter behind for
20 us, take it home with you. And I think the great
21 thing, and I hope it's fully approved by the state
22 Senate and the state legislature, this Bigger,
23 Better Bottle Bill is an absolute key and will
24 reduce our workload overnight, because people will
25 not be throwing away those bottles, and if they

1
2 throw them away, someone will scoop them up. So,
3 those are some of the things. I share your
4 concerns, we really won't know if we're able to do
5 this job until the summer is over. But we also
6 have things that where if someone-- the other
7 thing that didn't exist in the 1970s, 311. You
8 couldn't call 311 and say, the park is a mess, the
9 garbage is overflowing. You couldn't get online
10 and tap in a message that comes instantly to the
11 Parks Department and someone is reading it and
12 knowing there's a condition that needs correcting.
13 So we've been able to work better and smarter
14 through technology. And so the combination of all
15 these things, better technology, much better
16 management. The Park inspection program, the non-
17 profit groups who raise \$90 million a year to
18 provide park services, the Welfare to Work
19 Program, and all of the volunteers-- you add up
20 all those things and that gives us something where
21 we feel very confident that not only will we not
22 see a return to the terrible conditions of the
23 1970s, but it's with a lot of hard work by this
24 great management team-- and we do have, I think in
25 New York City I think we have some of the best

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2 government workers anywhere in the world, but I
3 think particularly in the Parks Department. This
4 is a wonderful team. They're very smart. They
5 work very hard. I think all of us working harder
6 and better and smarter with a lot of help from you
7 and the communities, we will get through this.

8 CHAIRPERSON FOSTER: Good. Well
9 I'm encouraged by your enthusiasm. So we'll see.
10 I think that it also requires us in times like
11 this to think outside of the box. So, very much I
12 would use us as resources. You know, I have a
13 Parks Council at my office, people that are
14 willing and able to kind of be park stewards, they
15 just kind of need walking orders, which leads me
16 into lifeguards. We-- it's, you know, ripe, the
17 economy, to get people interested in being
18 lifeguards, maybe more so than before. Are you
19 working with some not-for-profits or-- I'm
20 thinking of programs where working with teens and
21 things like that, that I think this-- it's just an
22 opportunity that they've probably never been
23 exposed to. Clearly we need the ones that can
24 swim.

25 ADRIAN BENEPE: Right.

1
2 CHAIRPERSON FOSTER: But are we
3 looking down that avenue to do partnerships with
4 not-for-profits so we can find more lifeguards for
5 the City?

6 ADRIAN BENEPE: Absolutely. We--
7 as we do the lifeguard recruitment we do have a
8 very extensive outreach network to-- in addition
9 to you, the elected officials, community boards,
10 all the Boys and Girls Clubs, the Ys, the JCCs,
11 swim clubs and health clubs all-- obviously the
12 public and parochial high school swim teams. But
13 we'd like to do more than that. And Commissioner
14 Jeffrey and I have been thinking about doing
15 something we call Advance Swim, which is we'd like
16 to develop ourselves swimmers who are strong
17 enough to pass the lifeguard tests. And we have
18 the swimming pools. We have the teachers. It
19 wouldn't take very much. We might talk to you
20 about maybe some additional small amounts of money
21 where we could hire-- we don't need full time,
22 just part time swimming coaches that take
23 advantage of our excess time in the pools and work
24 to develop non-swimming, but sort of athletic kids
25 into good swimmers through what we call advanced

1 swim. Swimmers who-- learn to swim, then get on a
2 swim team, and if you stay and work with us, if
3 you put in the hours in the pool and it's all-- I
4 was not a very good swimmer in high school, but we
5 had as swimming coach whose name was Harry Cramp,
6 I swear to god, and he had a big sign on his door
7 that said, No Pain, No Gain. And his swimmers
8 used to swim until they were just, you know,
9 crying in pain. And that's what it is. To become
10 a good swimmer you just have to swim, and you have
11 to swim a lot of laps. So we would like to start
12 this advanced swim program to develop, to go
13 beyond the kids swimming, the younger kids
14 swimming on the swim team and go, what can we do
15 to grow in-house? To me it's sort of a crime that
16 there are teenagers in our City who don't have
17 jobs and we can't hire enough lifeguards. We've
18 got to make those two come together.

19
20 CHAIRPERSON FOSTER: Right.

21 Absolutely.

22 ADRIAN BENEPE: And we're doing
23 better, but we shouldn't have to go to Moldavia
24 and East Germany to find lifeguards. They're
25 terrific and we'll do it if we have to, but every

1
2 single lifeguard position should get filled by a
3 New Yorker. And we're not going to wait. We're
4 going to develop this advanced swim program.
5 We'll develop it small if we have to use our own
6 existing resources to the extent you'd like to
7 help us or help us find grants, we'll do that.
8 But I absolutely agree with you. I think you're
9 100% right that we need a sort of grass roots
10 program to develop swimmers beyond even what
11 exists now. Because in addition to our needs for
12 lifeguards, all the health clubs, every time a
13 building opens that has a pool in it, by New York
14 State Health Code, they have to have lifeguards.
15 And all the health clubs have to have lifeguards.
16 So there's almost an elastic need for lifeguards,
17 and we have an elastic supply of kids to take
18 those jobs. And once you learn how to swim, then
19 you know what happens then, then you get on the
20 swim team in high school, it helps motivate you to
21 do your academics, and then the next thing you
22 know you've got a swimming scholarship to a
23 college. So I 100% agree with you--

24 CHAIRPERSON FOSTER: [Interposing]

25 I love that idea. Absolutely.

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2 ADRIAN BENEPE: And maybe we'll
3 pilot it at St. Mary's Rec Center in the Bronx.

4 CHAIRPERSON FOSTER: That would be
5 great. I love that idea, because as you've said,
6 especially now when we know the economy is such
7 that we're going to see, you know, older and
8 younger people unemployed. What is your lifeguard
9 schedule in the sense that you open the beaches
10 Labor Day-- I mean Memorial Day, and the pools?

11 ADRIAN BENEPE: The beaches open
12 Memorial Day and the pools open just after school
13 lets out, usually around, sometime just before or
14 after July 4th. What is it this year? So it's
15 earlier this year, June 27th.

16 CHAIRPERSON FOSTER: And how many
17 do you need-- lifeguards do you need for Memorial
18 Day opening?

19 ADRIAN BENEPE: Well as many as we
20 can get. One of the problems is that people are
21 still in high school, so we don't have very many
22 on weekdays and they can come on weekends. The
23 problem is they're not really fully out of high
24 school until the end of June, and a lot of them
25 are high school students; some of them are college

1
2 students. You know, we hope this year that
3 because of the economy college students who
4 otherwise would be going to office jobs who are on
5 swim teams will come work for us instead this
6 year. So, we expect to do better this year than
7 we've done. I don't want to give any predictions,
8 but each year we've done better. We expect to do
9 even better this year. In some small measure due
10 to the economy, and people seeing these jobs,
11 which pay \$13 and-- what's the starting salary?
12 Around \$13 to start, which isn't bad for a 48-hour
13 week.

14 CHAIRPERSON FOSTER: No, no.

15 ADRIAN BENEPE: That's over \$600 a
16 week.

17 CHAIRPERSON FOSTER: Not bad at
18 all.

19 ADRIAN BENEPE: And then it goes up
20 and there's overtime.

21 CHAIRPERSON FOSTER: You hiring
22 part time?

23 ADRIAN BENEPE: We don't-- 48
24 hours, it's very full time. You work six days.

25 CHAIRPERSON FOSTER: I was trying

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to do a little something on the side.

[Laughter]

ADRIAN BENEPE: You can work part time as a swimming instructor.

[Laughter]

CHAIRPERSON FOSTER: I don't know. I might need the advanced class to..

ADRIAN BENEPE: We do that too. We have adult learn to swim.

CHAIRPERSON FOSTER: I just do leisurely swimming. A quick question, a couple of more questions and then I know that Council Member Gerson has a follow up question. In the preliminary budget we had a reduction of personnel in the recreation program for all the boroughs, but we had an increase of two heads in the central program. Why is that?

ADRIAN BENEPE: Kevin, do you want to come up?

CHAIRPERSON FOSTER: Somebody?

ADRIAN BENEPE: The good news is that our recreation, I was just checking, our recreation staffing numbers have not gone down since last year; they've gone up, just modestly.

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2 So the attrition hasn't hit yet. But there might
3 be some citywide program people?

4 [Off Mic]

5 ADRIAN BENEPE: I mean I think if
6 we talked to Nancy she'd say that it went down.
7 It's gone down. We'll have to figure out what
8 those numbers are. Because it's my knowledge that
9 the central recreation staff has actually gone
10 down. We have at least one person on maternity
11 leave. Other people have resigned, so those may
12 be old numbers.

13 [Crosstalk]

14 CHAIRPERSON FOSTER: When we were
15 looking at the numbers that jumped out. So maybe
16 it is in fact old numbers.

17 ADRIAN BENEPE: I think they're old
18 numbers.

19 CHAIRPERSON FOSTER: Or--

20 ADRIAN BENEPE: [Interposing] But
21 we'll take a look and get back to you.

22 CHAIRPERSON FOSTER: Okay. And
23 just follow up, we have a running joke on the
24 Committee. Alan asks about bathhouse. We know
25 Helen Sears has no parks. So you know where I'm

1
2 going. How are we-- where am I going, Mike?

3 Look, you're flipping.

4 ADRIAN BENEPE: Yankee Replacement
5 Parks.

6 CHAIRPERSON FOSTER: Yes. I
7 noticed it wasn't mentioned in your testimony, so
8 I'm assuming we're on time, all the money's there
9 and you're going to make me happy?

10 ADRIAN BENEPE: Yes. The budget
11 for the Yankee Replacement Parks is intact, even
12 though we've been talking about some cuts, there
13 are certain projects I thought would not be good
14 to cut. And fortunately OMB and our colleagues at
15 City Hall agree that these are priority parks.
16 Everything is currently under construction. We
17 recently did a tour-- some of the press wanted to
18 come see how we're doing, so we did a tour of some
19 of the construction sites, which we'd be happy to
20 do for you. I think we recently had a community
21 update where we provided the up to date. We have
22 a terrific guy, Frank McHugh [phonetic], who is
23 running projects. You know, I completely
24 understand and sympathize with the dislocation
25 that's been caused by having to create these new

1
2 parks and take away some of the old parks. But I
3 feel reasonably certain, and we won't know until
4 opening day, that once these parks are done people
5 will look at them and say, well it was a long wait
6 and it was an inconvenience, but these are pretty
7 nice parks. And the Art Commission has recently
8 approved a last round of designs, I believe,
9 particularly for the Heritage Ball Fields and the
10 surrounding landscape, which will be spectacular
11 with new plantings. We're busy-- I get weekly
12 updates on the construction of the new waterfront
13 parks and all of the parks from this team. So we
14 are fully funded. We fortunately because of
15 another silver lining of the economy is the bids
16 are coming a little bit lower these days so the
17 bid for the stadium demolition is coming in lower.
18 I think the construction fence is already up
19 around the stadium for the demolition. So I don't
20 for a second underestimate the difficulty this has
21 caused in your community for your constituents. I
22 appreciate the patience you and others have shown
23 and I think your reward will be some terrific
24 parks when we're done and 8,000 additional trees.

25 CHAIRPERSON FOSTER: Good. In that

1
2 same line, with these new stadiums, it says-- okay
3 I have here, in fiscal 2010 preliminary budget,
4 the Parks Department will receive \$1 million from
5 the box suites at Yankee Stadium and Citi Field.

6 ADRIAN BENEPE: The City is not
7 having the box seats, so those are going to be
8 sold by the Yankees.

9 CHAIRPERSON FOSTER: Oh.

10 ADRIAN BENEPE: So we gave up
11 having those seats. So it's a revenue.

12 CHAIRPERSON FOSTER: So we're not
13 getting a million dollars?

14 ADRIAN BENEPE: Well we're getting
15 a million dollars by giving up the seats.

16 CHAIRPERSON FOSTER: Oh.

17 ADRIAN BENEPE: An additional
18 million dollars.

19 CHAIRPERSON FOSTER: Oh, I see.
20 Okay. I got you.

21 ADRIAN BENEPE: Yeah. So it helped
22 us meet our budget cut.

23 CHAIRPERSON FOSTER: Oh that's
24 good.

25 ADRIAN BENEPE: Yeah.

1
2 CHAIRPERSON FOSTER: Because, you
3 know, I have a theory that the Yankees won't start
4 winning until all the replacement parks are up and
5 running and the community is happy. It's kind of
6 like The Color Purple, you know? Until you do
7 right-- until they do right by the community--
8 we'll see. A question, how much revenue does the
9 Parks Department, if any at all, specifically
10 receive from the stadiums, Yankee and Citi Field?
11 Does it go to--

12 ADRIAN BENEPE: [Interposing] We're
13 receiving revenue through rental payments. And I
14 don't think we'll be receiving anymore revenue.
15 Starting next year, no more revenue because the
16 construction of the two stadiums were funded
17 privately. So in the past we had paid to build
18 the stadiums and we were paying to maintain and
19 restore them. We won't be doing that anymore, so
20 each year we had to allocate millions of dollars
21 in capital money to upgrade the stadiums and there
22 were some rental payments but the teams in some
23 cases were allowed to deduct their maintenance
24 costs against the rental payments, so we were
25 getting some small amounts of money, but now that

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2 they're a new stadium and they're no longer--
3 there's no City money involved with building them
4 or maintaining them or upgrading them, it ends up
5 being a wash. We don't have to put capital
6 dollars in they're not going to pay us rent.

7 CHAIRPERSON FOSTER: So they're
8 responsible for their upkeep.

9 ADRIAN BENEPE: Absolutely, 100%.
10 We won't have to have staff in there. We've had
11 staff dedicated to the two stadiums over the year.
12 All the staff will be pulled out so they'll be
13 redeployed to doing other parks jobs.

14 CHAIRPERSON FOSTER: And redeployed
15 leads me to my next question, High Line Park. It
16 is my understanding that the City agreed to 24-
17 hour security at High Line Park. Is that new
18 personnel or are we deploying personnel from
19 another park area or how is that working?

20 ADRIAN BENEPE: To the extent that
21 we're able to add new security staff. The deal
22 worked with the High Line Park is that The Friends
23 of the High Line would raise and spend about \$2
24 million a year for maintenance and programming in
25 the park, and the City's contribution would be for

1 security staff, but we will not take from existing
2 staff. That will be new money.
3

4 CHAIRPERSON FOSTER: And that will
5 be new money coming from the Parks Department or
6 new money coming from--

7 ADRIAN BENEPE: It would have to be
8 added to the Parks budget to do that. It's a
9 relatively modest amount compared to the private
10 money that will be going into actually maintaining
11 that park.

12 CHAIRPERSON FOSTER: So it will be
13 a new position as opposed to--

14 ADRIAN BENEPE: [Interposing] Yes.

15 CHAIRPERSON FOSTER: --or new
16 people.

17 ADRIAN BENEPE: We're not going to
18 take away PEP officers from another park to staff
19 that park.

20 CHAIRPERSON FOSTER: Just a few
21 more question about the Million Trees. I notice
22 in your testimony that we're ahead. Does that
23 mean that we're going to-- I have it somewhere
24 here. Does that mean we're going to slow down our
25 planting in order, you know--

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2 ADRIAN BENEPE: [Interposing] To
3 catch up? No. We're going to try to stay ahead.
4 One of the goals was to try to get a quarter
5 million trees into the ground before the current
6 administration was up, and we're still shooting
7 for that. The whole idea is let's plant trees
8 while we have the money. Ten years or eight years
9 from now, who knows what the priorities will be,
10 so let's get as many of these trees into the
11 ground as we can and we have the money in place to
12 hit-- we are going to hit the million tree mark as
13 long as we stay doing what we're doing. And even
14 with some of the budget cuts we've been looking
15 at, they will not materially impact our ability to
16 plant a million trees.

17 CHAIRPERSON FOSTER: So we're going
18 to continue with the pace?

19 ADRIAN BENEPE: We're going to
20 continue with the same accelerated pace.

21 CHAIRPERSON FOSTER: And I believe--
22 -

23 ADRIAN BENEPE: [Interposing] And
24 maybe accelerate it a bit more.

25 CHAIRPERSON FOSTER: And I believe

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2 it was mentioned a 6,000 tree waiting list? Am I
3 correct?

4 ADRIAN BENEPE: We have 6,000
5 requests--

6 CHAIRPERSON FOSTER: [Interposing]
7 Okay.

8 ADRIAN BENEPE: From homeowners or
9 people who live on blocks. And we-- how long will
10 it take us to fulfill those requests in addition
11 to our block planting programs?

12 [Off Mic]

13 ADRIAN BENEPE: So I guess it
14 depends on how many requests are coming from which
15 community boards. So if Mr. Curzner [phonetic]
16 there in Ridgewood has-- wants 3,000 trees for
17 that neighborhood alone, probably he won't get
18 3,000 right away. But, the good news is, all
19 those trees will get planted, it will just take a
20 little bit longer where there's a higher demand.
21 Want we're trying to do, as Commissioner Watt said
22 up front, is really hit those neighborhoods that
23 suffer from not having enough trees, the
24 neighborhoods that have high asthma rates and
25 historically low tree canopy cover and do those

1
2 first, and then other neighborhoods that have a
3 pretty decent population of trees, get to those
4 maybe a little bit later.

5 CHAIRPERSON FOSTER: With I think
6 so many people probably staying in the City, how
7 closely are you or do you work with NYPD in terms
8 of tracking, monitoring and preventing crimes in
9 the park?

10 ADRIAN BENEPE: The work with the
11 police department happens really on three levels.
12 I and my senior staff speak to Commissioner Kelly
13 and the Chief of Patrol or Chief of Department on
14 a very regular basis on some overall strategy.
15 Next, each of the Borough Commissioners meets with
16 the Borough Command Chiefs to talk about local
17 strategies. So you'll have the Manhattan North
18 and Manhattan South Command and Commissioner
19 Castro will meet with them usually early in the
20 operating season to talk about summer plans. And
21 then the Borough Commissioners and their park
22 managers meet on the local level with the precinct
23 commanders to go over very specific things. In
24 some cases, for example, Commissioner Castro
25 convenes an operations meeting where he will sit

1
2 down with the members of the community, community
3 board, parks support group and the local precinct
4 commander and really go down to the fine grain
5 level of detail as to what needs to happen in a
6 specific park. In addition to that, of course,
7 the police department tracks crimes based on the
8 City Council legislation requiring them to track
9 crimes in the largest parks, and they report that
10 back to us. I would say in general that
11 information is useful, but not-- it's somewhat
12 useful just in terms of history, because the
13 crimes are so few. The major crimes in parks are
14 extremely rare, and so for example the crime--
15 largely speaking the crimes in the most recent
16 round reported to us were crimes against property,
17 specifically somebody breaking into a car parked
18 either in a parking lot in a park or next to a
19 park. So, not what you think about when you think
20 about crime in the park. I mean these are very
21 much, they're not victimless crimes, I mean of
22 course you're upset when your car is broken into,
23 but they're not the sort of scary, violent
24 stranger on stranger crimes you think about that
25 would make you not want to go into a park. So the

1
2 good news is the parks are really quite safe
3 across the board, some parks have no serious
4 crimes at all throughout an entire year.
5 Interestingly, even a park with its own police
6 precinct, like Central Park, probably has a few
7 more crimes than maybe Van Cortlandt park. Why?
8 Because many, many more people use it. It's just--
9 - and there are crimes of opportunity where a
10 tourist might leave a camera on a bench and come
11 back and it's not there. So, I think the good
12 news is that there is-- thanks to the tremendous
13 work of Ray Kelly and his men and women, the parks
14 are really quite safe. The other thing that
15 happens is Kevin Jeffrey and his senior staff will
16 work directly with the top staff in the police
17 department to sort of coordinate how the PEP and
18 police work together on specific kinds of
19 programs. And he's also-- we're talking to the
20 sanitation police on this extra effort on the dog
21 waste issue. So we're working on many different
22 levels. And I would have to say that on a more
23 sophisticated way than we used to. Is everything
24 perfect and everything perfectly safe? I can't
25 guarantee that; but it's a lot better than it used

1
2 to be. And if there are specific things that we
3 hear about or that you hear about, just please let
4 us know because we do have the flexibility to try
5 to address those.

6 CHAIRPERSON FOSTER: Great.
7 Council Member Gerson?

8 COUNCIL MEMBER GERSON: Yes. Thank
9 you very much, Madam Chair. Just one item I
10 overlooked. Permits and permit fees for uses of
11 our parks by leagues, I'll bunch it all together,
12 for the upcoming fiscal year-- are they remaining
13 the same or are they going up, are they going
14 down? Are the fees consistent for all parks
15 throughout the City or are they greater in parks
16 of greater demand such as East River or Central,
17 and if they're not, should they be? And are they
18 consistent for all categories of users or is there
19 a differential between for example, corporate
20 leagues which use many of our parks, and not-for-
21 profit youth leagues, which can't really afford
22 fees?

23 ADRIAN BENEPE: I'll try to give a
24 quick answer. We are not raising any of the fees
25 for permits and we haven't for several years. It

1 just didn't seem like the right time to do that.
2 We want people to use the parks and not be pushed
3 out because they can't pay a fee. As you may
4 know, we do not charge youth leagues at all. No
5 youth leagues ever pay to use fields, whether it's
6 a little league, a school, a private school,
7 public, parochial--

8
9 COUNCIL MEMBER GERSON:

10 [Interposing] That's not changing.

11 ADRIAN BENEPE: That's not
12 changing. We, you know, kids play for free. The
13 field permit fees are the same whether you're a
14 semi-pro softball league, as we have some, or a
15 corporate league or amateur league or just a bunch
16 of people from a bar who want to get together to
17 play. It's really quite nominal. What is it for
18 a softball field? \$16? A lit field is \$16 and %8
19 for a regular field. Really quite-- when you
20 divide it up between 18 players, it's pennies. So
21 it's really next to nothing, it's a processing
22 fees. The Tennis fees have not changed in
23 probably four or five years. It's \$100 for an
24 adult for the entire season. Seniors are \$50
25 maybe. And then we have a youth fee. And that's

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pretty much it.

COUNCIL MEMBER GERSON: And the same throughout?

ADRIAN BENEPE: Same throughout. We don't have congestion pricing for parks.

COUNCIL MEMBER GERSON: You might want to think about that. Thank you very much.

CHAIRPERSON FOSTER: Thank you, Alan. That was very good and timely. Thank you, Commissioner. I would recommend, suggest, that you continue to work with the Council as we go down this budget process figuring out, you know, as we may have to prioritize, those of us in the community might be able to assist our Borough Commissioners and what not in trying to figure out what we can do now, maybe what we can do later, but definitely putting you more in contact with people that are ready, willing and able to assist maintain our parks. Because I think what you will find is that now that people have access and they're excited about their parks or their green streets and have this type of playground and parks, they want to keep it that way. And I mean I know that at Malawi [phonetic], that one Sunday

1
2 that it was warm, it was packed. And people are
3 very interested in, you know, maintaining it.
4 You're seeing people-- from simple things, using
5 garbage cans more, to getting out their earlier
6 and earlier to kind of mark their spot, so.

7 ADRIAN BENEPE: That's great.

8 CHAIRPERSON FOSTER: I just thought
9 of one last thing, what involvement does the Parks
10 Department have with the new stadiums opening and
11 if any at all, and throughout the season?

12 ADRIAN BENEPE: Well we will
13 continue, and obviously we won't be doing anything
14 inside, we don't have to worry about that anymore--
15 - we'll continue to make sure that the parks that
16 are outside that might be impacted by people who
17 are coming through, that they're kept clean--
18 we'll have extra cleaning crews on. Our Park
19 Enforcement Patrol, particularly on opening days
20 and the big crowds, we get involved with traffic
21 management and crowd management. We want to make
22 sure that the neighborhood is not unduly impacted
23 by things like cars moving through and that the
24 parks next door look good when the fans leave. So
25 that's a priority that the fans have a good time

1
2 as they come through. So it's that involvement,
3 but we won't be inside the stadium.

4 CHAIRPERSON FOSTER: Great. Thank
5 you very much. And there are just some issues
6 that I will follow up with you, Mike.

7 ADRIAN BENEPE: I like your
8 suggestion about the swimming. We will follow up
9 with you on that.

10 CHAIRPERSON FOSTER: Yes, please
11 do. I think that's a great idea.

12 ADRIAN BENEPE: And I do want to
13 again thank the Council and the Mayor. We've
14 never had better support from the people who run
15 the City than we're enjoying now, and it comes
16 because each of you care about parks. I want to
17 thank you and also the incredible staff of the
18 Parks Department who make me look good every day.

19 CHAIRPERSON FOSTER: Thank you very
20 much. Our next panel, how many chairs do we have
21 up there, three? Cheryl Haber [phonetic]-- or is
22 that a u? You were in med school. Huber. Jane
23 Cook and Lowell Barton.

24 [Off Mic]

25 CHAIRPERSON FOSTER: Yeah. No, I

1 will definitely set up something. Thank you.

2 [Pause]

3 CHAIRPERSON FOSTER: Mike?

4 [Pause]

5 CHAIRPERSON FOSTER: Okay, you can
6 start in whichever order you'd like and just say
7 your-- you guys know what you're doing. Say your
8 name for the record and then you can start.

9 CHERYL HUBER: I'm Cheryl Huber.

10 I'm here from New Yorkers for Parks, I'm the
11 Director for Research and Planning. WE are the
12 only independent watchdog and advocate for New
13 York City's parks, beaches and playgrounds. New
14 Yorkers for Parks is committed to ensuring that
15 every neighborhood in every borough receives
16 green, clean and safe parks. Overall we've seen
17 great improvement in funding for the Parks
18 Department over the last seven years, thanks to
19 strong support from the City Council and the
20 Mayor. Unfortunately, largely due to the dismal
21 economy, we are now observing a reversal of this
22 trend, with cuts to the parks operating budget,
23 particularly affecting maintenance staffing. Last
24 year's adopted expense budget provided \$270
25

1 million in City funds for the Department of Parks,
2 a reduction of \$10 million from the high point the
3 year before. Now in the preliminary budget for FY
4 2010, the Mayor has proposed further cuts to parks
5 with only \$255 million allotted. If the budget is
6 passed as it stands, that's \$25 million cut from
7 Parks in the last two years. Community Boards
8 were recently asked to rate the most important
9 City services for their districts. Similar to
10 last year, parks maintenance came in second, only
11 behind services for the elderly. Clearly park
12 maintenance is consistently considered top
13 priority by many community boards. And as New
14 Yorkers for Parks Report Card on Parks and Beaches
15 have shown, damaged play equipment, weedy lawns
16 and beaches are still too common. Decreases in
17 maintenance funding for the agency will only serve
18 to worsen these conditions. Furthermore on the
19 capital budget side, Governor Patterson is
20 proposing painful budget cuts that will
21 particularly affect the Environmental Protection
22 Fund. This dedicated source of long term funding
23 has helped to reclaim the waterfront for the
24 public, like Hudson River Park, and has protected
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1
2 some of the last vestiges of natural and open
3 spaces. With fewer dollars from New York State,
4 it's essential that the City steps up and funds
5 our parks and open spaces. We ask the City
6 Council to restore the \$15 million in proposed
7 cuts to the parks budget. In particular, we have
8 two major concerns, the tree pruning contracts--
9 the Parks Department plans to reduce their pruning
10 contracts by 53% in FY 2010 and beyond.

11 Considering the City's goal to plant 1 million
12 trees through PlaNYC and the ongoing concern of
13 street tree maintenance, this is a particularly
14 harmful loss. We're grateful that the City
15 Council has historically restored these cuts and
16 we hope that this year will be no different. And
17 in staffing, the Department has proposed to reduce
18 funding for seasonal staffing, as we've heard, by
19 \$5.6 million. This would eliminate 10% of our
20 seasonal staff. These summer positions are vital
21 to providing sufficient maintenance and
22 programming during the busiest season for parks.
23 And furthermore 109 full-time positions or perhaps
24 more will be lost through attrition. As far as
25 recommendations, in February New Yorkers for Parks

1 met with several members of congress and the
2 Senate in Washington DC to secure commitment for
3 parks in the stimulus bill. We continue to
4 encourage our elected officials in Albany to work
5 cooperatively to allocate funds towards priority,
6 shovel-ready park projects, such as Brooklyn
7 Bridge and Hudson River Parks. We also ask for
8 improved accounting. In 2007 we commissioned
9 Citizens Budget Commission Report, Making the Most
10 of Our Parks. The report states a concern that
11 the Department of Parks relies too heavily on
12 capital funding to cover the expense budget,
13 because it's easier to obtain. We encourage DPR
14 to counter this practice by including maintenance
15 costs within their capital budget requests. And
16 finally, we continue to request that the Parks
17 Department be allowed to keep funding from their
18 concessions revenue, allowing the Parks Department
19 to keep a portion of the \$50 million they earn
20 annually from concessions would help to provide a
21 steady stream of revenue particularly important in
22 this type of economy. On behalf of all of the New
23 Yorkers who depend on public parkland, New Yorkers
24 for Parks calls on the City Council to advocate
25

1
2 for these budget restorations and initiatives.

3 Thank you.

4 JANE COOK: My name is Jane Cook.

5 I'm the Executive Director of the New York Chapter
6 of the American Society of Landscape Architects,
7 and I'm here to read a letter drafted by our
8 President, Susanna Drake, on behalf of 450 members
9 from Montauk to Northern Westchester. The New
10 York Chapter of the American Society of Landscape
11 Architects strongly encourages the City Council to
12 both match Mayoral funding for the Department of
13 Parks and Recreation capital budget and also
14 allocate additional resources for maintenance of
15 neighborhood parks in the coming fiscal year.

16 Funding for major open space initiatives,
17 including McCarran Pool and Recreation Center in
18 Greenpoint, Fort Washington Park in Highbridge
19 adjoining Washington Heights, Soundview Park in
20 the South Bronx and Ocean Breeze in Staten Island,
21 among many others, should not be reduced.

22 Historically the City Council has funded PEP
23 officers to make parks safe and recreation staff
24 to coach sports and help kids in needy communities
25 become more active. And we commend you for these

1 actions. The third prong holding the emerald
2 allocated resources for maintaining and replacing
3 plants. Gardening is one of the least expensive
4 means for making a neighborhood look great, be
5 safer and act as a more ecologically productive
6 agent in the ecology of the City. Landscapes are
7 like children, they need to be nurtured and cared
8 for to realize their full potential. The results
9 of this kind of attention is evident in Prospect,
10 Central, Riverside and other parks in the City
11 where trained horticulturists engaged with careful
12 maintenance and regimens have enabled the spaces
13 to become undying landmarks for residents and
14 visitors alike. This attention should extend to
15 the neighborhood level. Continued efforts to
16 enhance, preserve and maintain the 29,000 acres of
17 open space and over 140 miles of waterfront
18 parkland should not be undervalued in the budget.
19 Deferred maintenance can lead to long-term loss of
20 value. In these challenging economic times, it is
21 critical that we do not loose sight of the
22 important visionary thinking that went into
23 PlaNYC. Continuing to fund projects such as the
24 Million Trees Project and the Schoolyards to
25

1
2 Community Park initiative are important aspects of
3 this vision that reach broadly to all corners of
4 our metropolis. Many references have been made
5 lately to WPA public works projects. Perhaps the
6 blueprint that the Mayor's plan provides along
7 with the aligned efforts by DPR to develop new
8 sustainability standards will create the same type
9 of lasting legacy that our grandchildren can look
10 back on as precedent. That generation, our
11 grandchildren, will be forever grateful that we
12 held the line now on budget cuts at this difficult
13 time. Thank you.

14 LOWELL BARTON: Hi. I'm Lowell
15 Barton. I'm with the New York State Laborers
16 Organizing Fund. I'd like to talk about the
17 effects of bad contracting and the budget in New
18 York City in Parks. Thank you Chair Helen Foster
19 and members of the City Council Parks Committee
20 for the opportunity to testify and bring a matter
21 of concern to your attention. Under the current
22 system of contracting in New York Department of
23 Parks and Recreation, most capital sidewalk
24 repair, tree planting projects are separated out
25 into small and medium bid packages ranging from

1
2 under 1 million to 1.9 million bid packages. The
3 budget for these packages in the scope of work
4 contain the same scope of work overall. Yet they
5 are dissected into smaller projects. The City
6 Parks Capital Division claims that this is
7 promoting competition bringing down cost. While
8 the price per foot on concrete construction and
9 landscaping may seem to have done down on the
10 surface, based on the low bid results, the primary
11 reason behind the statistic is the attraction to
12 undercut wages, benefits and the insurance law. T
13 his has become more lucrative. Contractors that
14 cheat have identified Parks projects as the
15 easiest target for reaping ill-gotten tax-free
16 gains. The actual cost to our city and its
17 workers needs to be looked at comprehensively.
18 The cost of labor law investigations and the
19 litigation that follows must be taken into
20 account. The cost of taxpayer-funded projects
21 that goes to off-the-books workers is huge. The
22 cost of workman's compensation and insurance
23 premiums and the payroll tax drains our City.
24 Good contractors costs go up and cannot win the
25 jobs based on the practices of the current system.

1
2 Bad contractors avoid costs as a source of profit.
3 Non-compliance by design has become a factor in
4 bid proposals to secure work. The primary targets
5 of these corrupt contractors are recent immigrants
6 to our country of African, Hispanic and Middle-
7 Eastern descent; they have all recently immigrated
8 to this country. My investigations show that
9 these workers make up 95% of all wage claims
10 brought to the attention of the relevant City
11 agencies by our staff. Many of the contractors
12 are already certified as MBEs or WMBEs with the
13 large overall success of affirmative action in New
14 York City it is a shame that these contractors
15 would exploit the system put in place to promote
16 equal opportunity. It's happening. I
17 respectfully ask the City Council to look into the
18 urgent matter and hold hearings on this issue.
19 Thank you again. I would like to point out a
20 quick solution, a temporary solution besides
21 hiring more investigators and really this is an
22 easy solution. To address this problem in a cost
23 effective manner would be quite simple, combine,
24 bundle the agency bid packages over \$3 million.
25 The bond requirements would weed out by the

1
2 contractors that have no prior bonding and or
3 checkered work histories. Other safeguards and
4 overall cost savings include mandatory
5 apprenticeship language; the reduced cost of
6 consultants, inspectors and engineers; less
7 paperwork, bid documents; less pre-bid and bid
8 meetings; proven better labor law compliance; the
9 cost of litigation in New York City legal system;
10 the elimination of defaulting contractors leaving
11 jobs unfinished; workers' healthcare plans-- this
12 is an overall society savings. Many of these
13 contractors that come in, they don't provide it
14 for the workers, we do, taxpayers. Contract
15 performance, better quality and quantity of work
16 built faster; the unemployment insurance
17 compliance; the safer working conditions, the
18 safety of the public and the cost of lawsuits by
19 bad contracting; the cost of social humanity taken
20 on with the exploitation of immigrant workers.
21 The tree planting and sidewalk repair contracts in
22 DPR are perfect examples of large capital project
23 allowance dissected into small contractors under
24 the premise of overall cost savings. A project
25 labor agreement on these bundled jobs should

1
2 always be considered for additional savings and
3 residency requirements as well. And just as
4 important the WMBE and the MBE goals can be met on
5 these jobs with the added projection of
6 responsible general contractors. That's pretty
7 much it. Again, once more I'd like to
8 respectfully ask the City Council to look into
9 this urgent matter and hold hearings on this
10 issue. Thank you again for your time and
11 consideration on this issue.

12 CHAIRPERSON FOSTER: Thank you very
13 much. Thank you. Our last panelist is Linda--
14 one more time?

15 LINDA ESKANAZ: Eskanaz [phonetic].

16 COUNCIL MEMBER FOSTER: Eskanaz.
17 We were trying to say it phonetically. It didn't
18 quite work out. Thank you.

19 LINDA ESKANAZ: Thank you. Hello?
20 Okay. This is-- I'm here to tell you--

21 CHAIRPERSON FOSTER: Just say your
22 name for the record.

23 LINDA ESKANAZ: Linda Eskanaz, the
24 North Shore Waterfront Greenbelt and West Brighton
25 Restoration and Four Boroughs Neighborhood

1
2 Preservation Alliance. And I'm here to tell you
3 about the North Shore Waterfront Greenbelt on
4 Staten Island. This is a park that we have worked
5 on for 30 years. And we have been designated a
6 New York City park on the Waterfront of the Kill
7 Van Kull. The extraordinary thing about this
8 extraordinary place is that it's crucially
9 important to the economic success of the
10 incredible North Shore Waterfront and its
11 communities. This is an incredible resource that
12 has been untapped. If you know where Sailors Snug
13 Harbor is, it's in the middle, and the Kill Van
14 Kull reaches out on both sides. On one side it
15 goes to the ferry and on the other toward the
16 Bayonne Bridge. This extraordinary resource has
17 been devastated for decades, wasted by polluting
18 uses, which have caused a downward economic spiral
19 to this place. And this should be one of the most
20 thriving places in New York. The greatest
21 resources of waterfront and historic waterfront
22 communities and affordable housing are what
23 everybody wants and we have them. This is where
24 the waterfront is our front yard. It's next to
25 all these historic waterfront communities. It

1
2 would bring people there so that they could build
3 their own lives and their own environment and
4 restore great houses, small and big; bring
5 businesses that people need and want, right now no
6 one gets services; and also environmental
7 businesses, solar energy for homes would be in
8 demand, and there would be so many the price would
9 have to go down, because that prohibits people
10 from getting solar energy in their homes. The
11 restoration of one historic house is an endless
12 need for services and new careers and jobs.

13 Nowhere is there an older and more important and
14 exciting waterfront than here in the West Brighton
15 Waterfront and Village area with its sacred
16 sights, great historic buildings, and this park
17 actually is where the Lenape Indians hunted and
18 fished. They lived and buried their dead on the
19 other side of the footpath where the fresh streams
20 would flow, meeting the Kill Van Kull. These are
21 just a few of the things about that special, that
22 particular place. It's one of the first
23 settlement of human beings on the East Coast, a
24 projectile dating 2100 BC was found there. It was
25 where British Governor Donegan built his manor

1
2 house 1688. It was a Revolutionary War site;
3 Trinity Chapel 1801, the John De Groot purchase,
4 1802, Civil War soldiers are buried here as well
5 as those from 1812. It was a literary enclave.
6 Anna Lia Owens, who was the real Anna and the King
7 of Siam actually lived there and wrote her
8 memoirs. It was an abolitionist enclave.
9 Frederick Douglass spoke at the Fountains Hotel as
10 well as Santillana Garibaldi and Jenny Lind
11 visited. And the Emancipation Proclamation of
12 1826 for New York State was read right there at
13 the Swan Hotel. People came from everywhere, on
14 rafts, on foot, any way they could get there.
15 It's an early African American cemetery. The
16 first YMCA, 1869, first department store, the
17 Neptune Boat Club, People's Ferry 1800s and 1900s.
18 Also it contains a historic footpath to the waters
19 of the Kill. The site of an old boat marina,
20 Richmond Terrace, early Indian footpath, which is
21 what Richmond Terrace used to be. It's one of our
22 earliest roads from the 1700s. This is a natural
23 harbor, so it's an important estuary also where
24 fresh and salt water meet. And we would like to
25 see it natural-- we've already spoken to our

1
2 excellent Parks Commissioner and we have a plan, a
3 very simple park. Horseshoe crabs were seen here.
4 Old pilings act as fish nurseries and birds from
5 Shooters Island Bird Sanctuary come to feed here.
6 This park creates a unique and unparalleled
7 economic, cultural and environmental renaissance
8 in a time of fiscal crisis. It's an extraordinary
9 historic waterfront with historic waterfront
10 communities. It would be like a Hamptons and
11 Martha's Vineyard, Greenwich Village, San
12 Francisco or Williamsburg, next to and part of the
13 greatest city in the world where everybody wants
14 to come. Ironically this is an extraordinary
15 opportunity to have an economically thriving New
16 York City and a resource that has been wasted. It
17 has been called environmental racism, but I guess
18 it's just about everything. It's a healthy-- this
19 would be the healthy circulation of money within
20 an economy, which is the whole idea. It's also
21 importantly sustainable in any market, because
22 everybody is benefiting. It also allows people to
23 come here, restore great, affordable, historic
24 houses and create their own community with
25 waterfront access and a parkland. It's an

1
2 opportunity for people to create the highest
3 sustainable quality of life for and in New York
4 for us and for those that come after us. Thank
5 you.

6 CHAIRPERSON FOSTER: Have you--
7 thank you. Have you reached out to your
8 Congressperson as well as--

9 LINDA ESKANAZ: [Interposing] Yes.

10 CHAIRPERSON FOSTER: Senators?
11 Because this is, from the way you describe it, it
12 will take more than a City effort. It looks like
13 it will be something that will require federal
14 funding.

15 LINDA ESKANAZ: Yes, well
16 particularly the Greenway Trail, which the federal
17 government helps to fund. And I have-- we have
18 spoken to Mike McMahon and they know about--

19 CHAIRPERSON FOSTER: [Interposing]
20 Okay, very good.

21 LINDA ESKANAZ: All of this. But
22 what is incredible is that people want to get off
23 the boat, it's an international icon of course,
24 and we call it walk with the ships, they can just
25 walk to these historic waterfront communities, but

1 particularly this one, which is West Brighton.

2 And it connects-- it would connect with our
3 cultural institutions and with people with their
4 own waterfront, these communities with their own
5 waterfront from which they have been unnaturally
6 severed. And at the same time it would be an
7 economic boon, you know, not just wouldn't this be
8 nice, it would be a huge change, a renaissance.

9
10 CHAIRPERSON FOSTER: Great.

11 LINDA ESKANAZ: So, thank you.

12 CHAIRPERSON FOSTER: Thank you very
13 much.

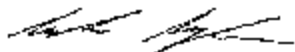
14 LINDA ESKANAZ: Thank you.

15 CHAIRPERSON FOSTER: There being no
16 more testimony, this meeting is adjourned.

17

C E R T I F I C A T E

I, Erika Swyler certify that the foregoing transcript is a true and accurate record of the proceedings. I further certify that I am not related to any of the parties to this action by blood or marriage, and that I am in no way interested in the outcome of this matter.



Signature _____

Date April 23, 2009 _____